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THE RUSSO-UKRAINIAN WAR AT A CRITICAL CROSSROADS^{*1} **Towards a new geopolitical and security architecture in Europe**

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*1: This study was based on the findings of a research project of the Center of Strategic Studies titled "Geopolitical repercussions of the war in Ukraine"

AUGUST 2023

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1. IS UKRAINE LOSING THE WAR?

In **8/7/2023**, Sean Bell, in an article titled **"UKRAINE RISKS LOSING INITIATIVE AT WAR'S CRITICAL STAGE - AND TIME MAY NOT BE ON ZELENSKY'S SIDE"^[3]** and published in Sky News, reported the following:

- "Since the start of Ukraine's counteroffensive against Russia, there has been limited good news for Kyiv, but President Volodymyr Zelenskyy will be banking on its success".
- "Mr Zelenskyy has - perhaps inadvertently - created an 'air of expectation' in the West of a swift and decisive victory".
- "Russia has established hundreds of kilometres of layered defences, including anti-tank ditches, 'dragon's teeth' defensive barricades, and mines".
- "Ukrainian offensive will be 'slow, and it will be bloody'".
- "Ukraine must avoid war of attrition. In the battle for Bakhmut, Russian forces on offence were suffering up to 10 times the casualties of the Ukrainian defenders. But even with Western

support, in this initial phase of the counteroffensive Ukraine will expect to suffer three times the casualties of the Russian forces. This will present a huge challenge to Ukrainian morale".

- "And, Ukraine must avoid an enduring war of attrition that will - eventually - favour the larger Russian force. Meanwhile, the enemy also 'has a vote', as former US defence secretary James Mattis likes to say, and Russia will not sit back and let Ukraine seize the initiative".

- "Further, the outcome of the US presidential elections next year might also impact Western support for Ukraine, so Mr Zelenskyy will know this year's counteroffensive could be crucial to the outcome of the war".

In **7/7/2023** the International Crisis Group published a report under the title "**WHY THE WAR IN UKRAINE MAY BE A LONG ONE**"^[6]. Selected parts of this study are given below.

The report underlines the fact that "Sixteen months after Russia's full-scale invasion, its attacks on Ukrainian cities continue, while Ukraine's counteroffensive slowly advances".

Selected parts of this report are given below.

Kyiv's narratives regarding its war pursuits

The dominant narrative regarding the pursuits of Ukraine in its military confrontation with Russia, as it is officially expressed in international and local media, is the following:

"Ukraine regain all of its territory and receive reparations from Moscow for the damage caused, while the Russian leadership stands trial for war crimes and the crime of aggression. No senior Ukrainian official has suggested in public that a compromise over Ukrainian territory, whether that seized by Russia-backed separatists in 2014 or that captured since the full-scale invasion in early 2022, is possible. The logic is clear: to make such a suggestion would undermine both military morale and Ukraine's position in any eventual negotiations".

A second narrative regards the collapse of Russia, as a result of a prolonged war, and a change of government.

Moscow's narratives regarding its war pursuits

According to the report "Russia's intentions in Ukraine can be looked at through the lens of its new foreign policy concept. In that document, Moscow offers a view of the world in which it is embarked upon a long-term campaign of limiting and countering U.S. power and influence

globally and pushing back against a U.S.-led West that is bent, according to the text, on destroying Russia. The Kremlin's long-term plans include aligning with and leading other countries harmed by U.S. hegemony to achieve nothing less than a full reshaping of the global order".

The impact of a prolonged war

The report argues that "many leaders in countries whose economies have suffered the downstream effects of the war apportion at least some blame to the West for the impact of unilaterally imposed sanctions". In particular "parts of sub-Saharan Africa, people recall Soviet support for independence struggles during the Cold War, and despite the many differences between the Soviet Union and today's Russia, credit the Kremlin; many resent the West's colonial predation". As a result "In recent months, some have argued that Kyiv and NATO capitals should start thinking about how to reach, if not a negotiated settlement, at least some sort of ceasefire or armistice to end the bloodshed once the front lines settle".

In **13/6/2023** Al Jazeera, in an article titled "**PUTIN: UKRAINE LOSSES 'CATASTROPHIC'; RUSSIA EYES 'SANITARY ZONE'**"^[2], wrote that responding to Ukrainian officials claim they have captured a handful of villages in the early stages of its counterstrike, President Putin, in an open meeting with military journalists and bloggers, made a detailed account of the War in Ukraine the key points of which are:

- "He could order his troops to try to seize more land in Ukraine to protect Russian territory on the border, while asserting Ukrainian forces have suffered 'catastrophic' losses in a new counteroffensive".

- "He said Russia increased its production of key weapons by 2.7 times over the past year, and he also accused the West of pumping weapons into Ukraine", adding that "Russia was open to peace talks but the only way to stop the conflict was for Western countries to end their arms supplies to Kyiv".

- He also said that "Russia was considering exiting the landmark Black Sea grain deal that has allowed grain from Ukraine to reach the global market, adding that Moscow had been 'cheated' over the implementation of the parts of the accord that concerned its own exports"

and as a consequence:

- "We are now thinking about whether to leave the grain deal" adding that 'he would discuss the future of the grain deal with some African leaders who were expected to visit Russia, adding that Moscow was ready to supply grain for free to the world's poorest countries.' "

In **23/5/2023**, USA Today News published in an article titled "**UKRAINE WON'T WIN WAR, HUNGARIAN LEADER SAYS**"^[5]. Selected parts of this study are given below.

Orban's claims

"Kyiv is doomed to defeat against Russia in a war that has killed thousands of Ukrainians, left Ukraine's cities battered and its economy in shambles, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said Tuesday. Orban, speaking at the Qatar Economic Forum, argued that sending further military aid will only lead to more deaths. "Emotionally it's tragic, all of our hearts are with the Ukrainians," Orban said at the Bloomberg-sponsored event. 'But I'm talking as a politician who should save lives. There's no chance to win this war'".

Kyiv's response

"Ukraine Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman Oleg Nikolenko dismissed Orban's view, saying that before the war began some European politicians argued that Ukraine had no chance to hold out for more than 72 hours. Ukraine has enough weapons to launch its counteroffensive, which 'will start soon,' the country's head of military intelligence, Kyrylo Budanov, said in an interview with NHK, Japan's public media organization".

In **24/3/2023** Maryna Venneri, an Ukrainian freelance writer providing policy analysis and academic research on the Eastern European region, published a report in the Middle East Institute titled "**WAYS FORWARD FOR THE WAR IN UKRAINE**"^[9]. The author argues that "The war in Ukraine marks the end of the post-Cold War era of peace. It demonstrates that U.S. power is not absolute and the threat of nuclear escalation remains as close and implacable as ever. The Russian invasion of Ukraine has become the largest conventional military attack since World War I". The author, next, presents her views to the following three key questions regarding the war.

What does Russia want?

"Russia has been transparent about its demands. It has stated its four requirements of Ukraine to end the war:

- Fully demilitarize, which means that Ukraine should stop any kind of military action; Amend the constitution toward neutrality (which would prevent it from joining NATO);
- Recognize Crimea as Russian territory; and
- Recognize Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states".

What does Ukraine want?

"Ukraine, however, is equally firm in its demands of Russia: It requires peace, immediate ceasefire, immediate withdrawal of all troops, and security guarantees. Ukraine's position regarding territorial sovereignty is unchangeable — it will never recognize Crimea and the Donbas region as part of Russia with it through the establishment of a no-fly zone over the country".

What does the West want?

"The West's priority is to prevent spillover. EU and NATO countries are willing to pay any price to contain the military conflict in Ukraine without deploying their own personnel. However, the EU and NATO are unable to match their military efforts with Ukraine's expectations. Rather, Russia's aim is to secure the territory of Ukraine, which will serve as a buffer between Moscow and NATO expansion".

The author concludes that the current West's strategy won't work stressing at the same time the fact that "the loss of Ukraine would damage the existing security framework and regional order beyond repair and it would put the West in a weak position and open the floodgates for more dictatorships and authoritarian regimes to use military force in pursuit of their interests — and go unpunished for their crimes".

In **6/3/2023** Asia Times published an article of Brandon Weicher titled "**UKRAINE IS GOING TO LOSE. THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR A SETTLEMENT HAS CLOSED**"^[7]. The author argues that since "Ukrainian military is drained, the Western supply chains are strained, and the NATO stockpiles of critical weapons and ammunition are depleted the war is transitionin into a conflict in which the Russian side will enjoy several critical advantages" adding that "the beginning of the

end is likely happening right now in Bakhmut, a city in Ukraine's far east (closest to the Russian border)". He concludes that "the Russians' strategy of attrition is working and their ultimate goal is, at the very least, to hold on to the eastern Russian-speaking portions of Ukraine as well as Crimea in the south".

In **20/2/2023** Simon Smith, in a study titled "**ONE YEAR ON, HOW CAN THE WAR ON UKRAINE END?**"^[1] and published by Chatham House, argued that "The impulse to find ways of stopping the war is understandable. It deserves respect. But it can produce ideas that could – either soon or over time – prolong or renew the conflict rather than solve it".

He has also expressed the following views on a number of key propositions and questions regarding the Russo-Ukrainian War.

- *"The present war, which part of Vladimir Putin's mission to crush Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, and identity has reasonable grounds for compromise?"*

- *"Ukraine will (eventually) need to be ready to relinquish territory.*

This proposition anticipates the demands a Russian delegation might bring to a negotiation starting tomorrow or next week. It is the kind of demand that states that are winning wars might make. But Russia is losing its war on Ukraine."

- *"Let's reheat the Minsk agreements.*

Let's not. Negotiated in haste, full of ambiguities (some intended, some not) and under extreme pressure of events on the battlefield, these 2014 and 2015 agreements were essentially quick-fix temporary ceasefires. They also included well-intentioned, but flimsily drafted, attempts to apply an already existing concept of 'decentralization' of the government to the conflicts which Russia had incited from 2014 onwards in the Donbas region."

- *"One year on, how can the war on Ukraine end?"*

The first anniversary of Russia's launching of its most recent invasion of Ukraine is a timely stimulus to think ahead. But among those countries actively supporting Ukraine's defence against Russian aggression, an essential and substantial part of that thinking needs to focus on how to contribute to an effective and lasting containment and deterrence of Russia. We need fully convincing answers to the question: 'What post-war arrangements will ensure that Russia will not attack Ukraine's territory again and cease to pursue its preposterous claims on Ukraine's sovereignty and independence?'"

In **20/2/2023** Hannah Ward-Glenton published an article in CNBC under the title "**UKRAINE CAN STILL LOSE THE WAR — BUT RUSSIA CAN'T WIN, IAN BREMMER SAYS**"^[8]. Ward-Glenton reported that "Ian Bremmer, an American political scientist, speaking at the Munich Security Conference said: The NATO support for Ukraine had been 'extraordinary' and 'well beyond what anyone thought possible', with Germany reducing its dependency on Russian energy supplies and the U.S. taking the lead in sending military supplies to Ukraine. But he questioned whether this assistance would continue" adding that "The answer is Ukraine can lose. Everyone here needs to understand that Ukraine can lose this war".

In **17/2/2023** Eugene Rumer published a study in Carnegie Endowment for International Peace under the title "**PUTIN'S WAR AGAINST UKRAINE: THE END OF THE BEGINNING**"^[4]. Selected parts of this study are given below.

The impact on the Russian economy

"After contracting by about 2–4 percent in 2022, the Russian economy is projected to resume growing, albeit slowly, in 2023. Successive waves of unprecedented sanctions have hurt the Russian economy and damaged its prospects for growth in the long run. But countries adapt, as Russia is doing already, with alternative supply chains, lower-tech replacements, and jerry-rigged substitutes for components it can no longer get. It is selling record volumes of oil to India and China, and it has found other buyers and acquired a fleet of tankers to bypass Western sanctions".

The impact on the Ukrainian economy

"Ukraine's GDP is estimated to have declined by one-third in 2022. Its reconstruction costs are projected to exceed \$1 trillion. Millions of its citizens have been displaced, many of them probably permanently".

The impact on Ukraine's military effort

"The next phase of the war promises to be very difficult for Ukraine. Offensive operations are an inherently more difficult form of warfare than defense. Recent reports that Ukraine is experiencing shortages of artillery shells to defend against the latest Russian offensive are

indicative of the likely challenges it will face once it launches its own offensive operation in the south of the country and, by extension, needs to expend ammunition at a much higher rate to press the attack. Even if a Ukrainian offensive is successful, notwithstanding these likely obstacles and heavy losses the Ukrainian army may suffer in the course of it, the war will not come to an end".

Russia' red lines

"A hostile Ukraine entrenched in the Western camp and in effect turned into its militarized outpost on Russia's doorstep, jeopardizing Russia's access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, is not something any future Russian leader is even remotely likely to tolerate".

West's options

However, Russia's losses do not translate directly into gains for the United States and its allies. It is tempting to conclude that the war presently being waged on the territory of Ukraine actually benefits the United States and Europe—their major adversary is being weakened while the West only expends treasure (and not too much of it at that); But no matter how appealing this cold-blooded rationality may be to some, it ignores the reality of a long war in Europe and the moral aspect of pretending to wage a war against Russia at arm's length, with only Ukrainian lives at stake. It ignores the risk of escalation, even if not nuclear, and the possibility of NATO joining the fight directly. The idea that the West can just give Kyiv the tools to "finish the job," despite its Churchillian ring, is not grounded either in history or in reality: Great Britain could not finish the job alone when Churchill, in February of 1941, pleaded for the United States to send arms. That leaves the United States and its allies without any good options as the war enters its second year, except to ramp up military support and hope for the best. It is not morally right to fight Russia to the last Ukrainian, but it is not right either to dictate to Ukrainians what they should settle for in their just war. A land-for-peace compromise is not an option for them, especially since it is unlikely to bring them the kind of stable, durable peace they need and deserve. They would live under a constant threat of renewed Russian aggression".

Scenarios regarding the future of war

"The war can continue along three possible scenarios: a stalemate; Ukraine wins; or Russia wins. The first scenario in effect becomes a forever war, perhaps something similar to the permanent standoff on the Korean Peninsula. The second scenario carries with it the risk of a dramatic escalation by Russia, which in turn could prompt NATO to become directly involved in combat.

The third scenario too carries with it the danger of a direct NATO-Russia confrontation as the prospect of Russia prevailing on the battlefield will lead to calls for NATO to become involved in order to save Ukraine".

2. DESIGNS ON THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE

In 28/7/2023 Andrew Korybko's Newsletter published an article under the title "**HERE'S HOW POLAND IS SLYLY TAKING CONTROL OF WESTERN UKRAINE**"^[10]. The author at the beginning focuses on Warsaw's great efforts to help Ukraine in the military and the economic front paying special attention to the Polish-Ukrainian development cooperation and reconstruction plans. In the above context the author writes following:

"Poland's Plenipotentiary for Polish-Ukrainian Development Cooperation Jadwiga Emilewicz opened Warsaw's first 'Ukraine Reconstruction Service' (URS) office in Lvov on 17 July in an event that attracted scant international media attention outside of those two countries. URS' activities in these parts of Western Ukraine that most Poles still consider to be an inextricable part of their millennium-old civilization are the natural outgrowth of two interconnected developments from May 2022. Polish President Andrzej Duda visited Kiev and spoke at the Rada (Supreme Council of Ukraine) on the 22nd of that month, during which time he and his Ukrainian counterpart Vladimir Zelensky pledged to accelerate their countries' comprehensive integration".

Regarding **joint integration plans** the author reports the following:

"Meanwhile, Zelensky said that they'll create a joint border and customs control. He also declared that Kiev will give Poles practically the same rights in his country as Ukrainians have. Additionally, Duda's remarks about how 'The Polish-Ukrainian border should unite, not divide' and Zelensky's about how 'there should be no borders or barriers between us' strongly suggested the intent to eventually merge into a de facto confederation as was assessed in this analysis at the time here".

Regarding Poland's **military aid and security guarantee demands** for Ukraine the author gives the following information:

- "The security aspect of these plans is also moving forward. The Polish Finance Minister announced in March of this year that Warsaw gave Ukraine around €6.2 billion worth of military aid in 2022, which made Poland the third-largest state-level financier of the NATO-Russian proxy war there. Reports about Polish mercenaries fighting for Kiev have also circulated since the start of Russia's special operation, and the 'Polish Volunteer Corps' even took credit for a raid into Russia's Belgorod Region in May".
- "Poland's repeated calls for 'security guarantees' for Ukraine could serve as the tripwire for it to formally deploy its conventional forces there in the event that such are extended, whether multilaterally via Warsaw's participation in this scheme or bilaterally with Kiev, even if the latter is reached in secret. Politico's report last November about Poland's unprecedented military buildup suggests that it's planning to have the excess capacity required for a large-scale foreign deployment sometime in the future".

Regarding **Poland's defense plans and military buildup** the author writes:

- "Of pertinence, its defense spending will be raised to 5% of GDP, it'll have 300,000 active troops by 2035, and it's buying billions in modern equipment from the US and South Korea. Russian Foreign Intelligence Service chief Sergey Naryshkin warned about Poland's military buildup near the Ukrainian border on 21 July during a Security Council meeting whose English-language transcript can be read in full at the official Kremlin website here. 'Putin Exposed Poland's Regional Plans In An Attempt To Deter Them', but he also said that 'If [Kiev] want[s] to relinquish or sell off something (to Poland) in order to pay their bosses, as traitors usually do, that's their business. We will not interfere'".

Finally the author makes the following concluding remarks:

- "As it presently stands, Poland has already slyly taken control of Western Ukraine without having to fire a shot. Its political power was cemented last summer after the Rada granted Poles practically the same rights as Ukrainians in accordance with the promise that Zelensky made to Duda in May 2022, while the economic aspect was advanced through mid-July's opening of the first URA office in Lvov. With these concerns in mind, which have very serious political and even latent security implications, the scenario of one day formalizing the currently de facto Polish-Ukrainian confederation is much more realistic than Warsaw biting off the western part of that former Soviet Republic".

In 12/7/2023 Al Jazeera published an article titled **"TOP RUSSIAN OFFICIAL SAYS POLAND WANTS TO SEIZE PARTS OF UKRAINE"**^[13].

The article reports among other the following:

- "In an interview with Al Jazeera on Tuesday, Russian foreign ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said: 'There is now an obvious desire of Poland to invade the western part of Ukraine. This is why Ukraine is not invited to NATO' ".
- "NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg has promised the alliance will send a 'clear, united and positive message' on Ukraine's potential membership, but those comments were not strong enough to satisfy Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who said it was "absurd" that a timeline for joining the alliance was not set".
- "While most members back Ukrainian membership in the long term, some countries, such as the United States and Germany, have said Kyiv's application can only be seriously considered after the war ends because any moves before that would risk a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia".

In 24/2/2023 Fact Check, a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania, published a study of Vanessa Nikolova, a Bulgarian writer and journalist, titled **"THE DISINFORMATION ABOUT THE PARTITION OF UKRAINE"**^[17].

At the beginning of the study the author presented the following main contradictory and even mutually exclusive claims that are propagated insistently and simultaneously by the Kremlin:

"Poland, Hungary and Romania want to divide the territory of Ukraine. NATO supports these demands, and Russia is the sole guarantee of Ukraine's survival. At the same time, Ukraine has no historical right to exist as a state and has not even 'registered' its borders with the UN".

The author, next, reported that former Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, in an interview with Politico magazine, claimed that "as early as 2008-2009, Russian President Vladimir Putin raised the topic of dividing Ukraine in meetings" . She also reported that in 2014 "The then deputy speaker of the State Duma and leader of the Liberal Democratic Party to Poland, Romania and Hungary with a proposal to divide the Ukrainian territories. Zhirinovskyy's offer was not taken seriously by any of those countries". Nikolova revealed also that "Russian sites and Russian social media profiles are actively sharing various maps depicting the possible partition of

Ukrainian lands. Poland is the most accused of such plans, whereas Hungary and Romania are being pointed out to a lesser extent".

The author presented the following disinformation incidents regarding partition of Ukraine:

- February 2022: "When Putin recognized the independence of the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics, he referred to Ukraine's post-1939 borders as the historical' territories of its neighboring countries. In fact, we are talking about lands acquired by the mentioned countries only after the end of the First World War. The process of redrawing the borders ended partially with the end of World War II [17a].
- May 2022: "Medvedev 'warned' of Warsaw's aim to reclaim historical lands from Ukraine".
- July 2022: "Medvedev shared a map on his Telegram channel, which he said was made by Western experts and presented the prepared future territorial division of Ukraine".
- March 2022: "Just a month after the start of the war, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko talked about the "plans" of Poland and NATO to return Ukraine's borders to their pre-1939 form"^[17b].
- March 23, 2022: "According to an article Polish politician and leader of the right-wing conservative party 'Law and Justice' Jaroslaw Kaczynski stated that it is necessary to send a NATO peacekeeping mission to Ukraine. And this, according to the article, proves the existence of the plan and the Alliance's support for its implementation. In the same article, it is claimed that military equipment has been accumulated along the Romanian-Ukrainian border, with which Romania intends to invade Ukraine and take its 'share'".
- January 2023: "Laszlo Toroczkai, founder of the movement 'Our Homeland', defined by Hungarian media as far-right, congratulated Poland on its independence day with the following message on Twitter: 'God bless Poland! Let's meet again at the Polish-Hungarian border!' The congratulation was accompanied by a black-and-white photo of Polish and Hungarian border guards shaking hands at the Uzhok pass"^[17c].

According to the autor there is also a Bulgarian contribution to the repertoire of claims against Ukraine – for example, that there are originally Bulgarian lands in Ukraine that should become autonomous regions or belong to Bulgaria, or that Ukrainians are Bulgarians.

- February 2022: "Two days after the Russian attack on Ukraine, on February 26,2022, in the program 'Benovska pita', the chairman of 'Vazrazhdane' Kostadin Kostadinov expresses the opinion that there should be a Bulgarian autonomous region in Ukraine:

'We have two territories that are densely populated with Bulgarians, the greater part is in the southern part of Odesa region, Bessarabia, or Southern Bessarabia. And the smaller part are the Bulgarians in Tavriya, the Azov region, around Mariupol. Will we have our own Bulgarian autonomous region there? Or it, because together with the Bulgarians an overwhelming majority of Russians live there, it will be included in one part, let's say, of Novorussia, which will be created in the belt from Odessa to Kharkiv, that will depend only and only on us. But will we have statesmen to ask this question? I'm telling you now – no. And this will be another act of national treason.' "

Finally, Vanessa Nikolova reports at this point the following:

"According to the 2001 census in Ukraine, in the mentioned Odesa region, Ukrainians are 1.5 million people or 62.8% of the entire population of the region. Russians reach 508 thousand or 20.7%, and Bulgarians – 150 thousand or 6.1%. Although some settlements in the region are densely populated with Bulgarians, their number is nevertheless insignificant against the background of the ethnic distribution in the entire Odesa region. Another 50,000 ethnic Bulgarians live in the rest of Ukraine, according to the 2001 census".

In 24/1/2023 First Post published an article under the title **"POLAND CONSIDERED PARTITIONING UKRAINE, SAYS FORMER POLISH FOREIGN MINISTER"**^[14].

The article reported the following:

- "Former Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski has said that the government in Warsaw considered partitioning Ukraine in the first weeks of the military conflict between Kiev and Moscow....His comments drew a strong retort from the Poland Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki who accused Sikorski of behaving 'like a Russian propagandist' "
- "In April last year, Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) chief Sergei Naryshkin said that the US and Poland were plotting to gain a sphere of influence in Ukraine, insinuating that the war could end with the forced partition of Ukraine between the West and Russia".
- "The US was discussing with Poland a plan under which Polish 'peacekeeping' forces without a NATO mandate would enter parts of western Ukraine where the chance of confronting Russian forces was low, the statement added".

In 19/9/2022, Andrei Chirilease published an article in Romania Insider titled **"FORMER ROMANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER MAKES CONTROVERSIAL STATEMENT ON UKRAINE'S 'ARTIFICIAL' BORDERS"**^[16].

The author of the article reported the following:

- "Andrei Marga, former minister of foreign affairs and education, also head of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca (but with no political involvement at this moment), made striking statements apparently in support of Russia's rhetoric against Ukraine on the occasion of the launch of his book 'The Fate of Democracy' at the Alba Transilvana Book Fair. He spoke about the 'artificial' borders of Ukraine, which should cede more territories to Russia, Hungary, Poland and Romania. 'It must cede territories: Transcarpathia to Hungary, Galicia to Poland, Bucovina to Romania and Donbas and Crimea to Russia. They are the territories of other countries,' he stated, according to Hotnews.ro^[16a]".
- "Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a statement that such comments are unacceptable and breach Romania's official position^[16b]".
- "Russia accuses Romania of secretly shipping weapons to Ukraine^[16c]".

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

"Poland Up, Germany Down and Russia By"

Ukraine is excruciatingly and steadily losing the war in Donbas. In our opinion, one of the main reasons for this development is the endemic massive corruption that plagues Ukraine and which both the Russophile and the Western-friendly governments of the Country have not been able to deal with. This corruption was magnified by the unprecedented concentration of power in the hands of a small group of oligarchs, one of whom, Ihor Kolomoyskyi (once the most powerful of all who fled Ukraine and was banned from entering the US) promoted Zelensky on the cultural and political stage of the Country.

In the context of this widespread corruption that paralyzes everything, Zelensky's much-publicized great counter-offensive, finally aiming at the utopian pursuit of liberating Crimea, has

dangerously stalled without any worthwhile success, thus undermining the political and not only future of the Ukrainian President.

It is characteristic of the panic prevailing in Kiev that the Ukrainian officials, in order to justify all their failed counter-attacks, christen them as secondary, each time regurgitating the phrase that the main counter-attack has not yet started. Western governments, and especially the American one, see with increasing concern and the inability of Kiev to wage a victorious war.

In particular, Washington, being deeply aware of Ukraine's internal problems, is, in our opinion, the one that is pressuring Zelensky to take drastic measures to fight corruption. Under these pressures, and unfortunately too late, the Ukrainian president ordered the dismissal of all the commanders of the regional military offices of the country, a move that in our opinion will not have any substantial effect on the course of the war. Washington is well aware of the inability of the Zelensky regime to achieve its maximalist and ethereal goals regarding the Russian-Ukrainian war. Yet it continues to build it up militarily in a trench warfare showdown that is clearly steadily draining Kiev's reserves and leading inevitably to humiliating defeat.

In the light of the above factors, it is our view that the continued military support of the Zelensky regime has the following possible goals, individually or in combination:

- The prolongation of the war so that during an Israeli attack against Iran, expected by many authoritative analysts worldwide to take place sooner than later, Russia, having committed huge military forces on the Ukrainian front, will not be able to intervene militarily in Afghanistan and Iran. At this point we underline Russia's intense and intertemporal geopolitical interest in the Middle East and in particular in Iran and Afghanistan. Actually, during WWI and following the Anglo-Soviet invasion of Iran the Soviets occupied for almost five years the northern provinces of Iran. Again in the 1980s the Soviets intervened militarily in Afghanistan and occupied it for almost ten years (1979-1989).
- The military and diplomatic weakening of the Zelensky regime to such an extent that the creation of military zones in Ukraine will emerge as the only remaining course of action capable of securing the Country's survival. These military zones will most probably follow the model of similar zones in post-war Germany, legitimizing the involvement of military forces mainly from Poland and other NATO states neighboring Ukraine but without a NATO mandate. There are already messages from the Russian president, which should be carefully decoded, in which he

appears to understand and acknowledge Polish aspirations for Galicia in Western Ukraine. In the long run, de facto annexations could also emerge out from these military zones.

- To satisfy Moscow's aspirations in Ukraine to an acceptable degree with the ultimate strategic goal of weakening its relations with China and the other assertive powers ^[19].

-To create in the long term a new status quo in Europe that will consolidate American hegemony in the Old Continent, with the strengthening of Poland and the Baltic states, the weakening of Germany and the satisfaction of certain geopolitical goals of Russia regarding Ukraine.

Washington, as the dominant guarantor of security in Europe and the NATO zone, realizing the inability of the Ukrainian regime to face Russia's expansionist ambitions, will not wait for the total destruction of the country to react more decisively. Washington has obviously prepared b-plans which, in our opinion, will be based on the change of the failed Ukrainian leadership and the creation of military zones (mainly in the north of the country) whose defense will probably be undertaken by neighboring NATO countries (Poland, Lithuania etc).

At this point we ask with reflection about the following:

- What did the great powers of Western Europe (Germany and France) do for so many years to deal with the Ukrainian problem in a sustainable way?

- What did they do about the huge and endemic problem of corruption in Ukraine that sooner or later would undermine any attempt to solve it sustainably? Did this widespread corruption not facilitate, on the other hand, the economic penetration of the Country by many Western powers?

- Wasn't the false sense of consolidation of security in Europe resulting from the German-Russian strategic rapprochement (of Merkel and Putin) the root cause of the failed Franco-German Minsk II attempt for an agreement characterized by ambiguities and lack of effective control and compliance tools?

It is obvious that without the decisive involvement of the USA in this new Eastern Question, Europe would face a critical existential problem in the long run by relying on the illusions of the German-Russian rapprochement that yielded only temporary fruits 150 years ago when the geopolitical power structure in Europe was completely different from today. But also Willy Brandt's much-publicized Ost Politik, through agreements with the budding communist regimes of Eastern Europe (already in the 1970s there were plenty of indications that these regimes, and especially the Soviet Union, had entered the process of collapse) hid the security problems of

Europe under the carpet offering no viable prospects except for the unprecedented economic penetration of W. Germany and later of reunified Germany into Russia.

The course of affairs so far proves that the security of Europe can be guaranteed neither by Germany nor by the weakening Franco-German axis, but only by the USA, assisted by Britain, which is rebounding, once again aspiring at a strong global geopolitical role. The emergence of a new geopolitical and security architecture in the Old Continent is already visible on the horizon. It is our firm belief that this new architecture will be realized with a "Mini Yalta Agreement" that will take place in the not-too-distant future with the USA as guarantor and Russia back into the European "Concert". In our view Turkey, with its geo-economic dynamics^[20] and its multi-polar diplomacy, is the *par excellence* Eurasian power that is geopolitically well-positioned to facilitate East-West dialogue.

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No sane participant or observer of this war wants it prolonged unnecessarily. But now is not the time to be advocating an urgent 'solution'.

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