

The EU Can Take a Number of Concrete Steps in Crimea

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Introduction

As Edward Lucas has noted in his blog, when the people who run the Western world go on holiday, bad things happen in Eastern Europe. Last August, Russia invaded Georgia. Over Christmas, a gas conflict broke out between Russia and Ukraine. Easter brought violent protests against election results in Moldova. It can only be guessed what kind of trouble this summer will bring. A new war in Georgia is always a possibility. Crimea remains a dangerous mixture of incompatible military and ethnic interests.

Europe must invest in its security. NATO and the EU have come up with some new approaches to the Black Sea security. How successful have they been?

NATO

At fifty, NATO was an alliance in renewal. At sixty, NATO is overextended and overburdened. Today, it is unclear whether currently ongoing debates will produce policies that can revive NATO. The implications for Ukraine are equally uncertain. Yet, not for the first time, NATO-Ukraine relations will depend very much on what Ukraine does and does not do.

Current NATO-Ukraine relations will be further developed on the basis of Ukraine's 2009 Annual National Programme (ANP) – a decision of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs from December 2008. This adds a concrete dimension of practical cooperation to the ongoing NATO-Ukraine dialogue. Ukraine has the opportunity to use its ANP to advance practical actions and reforms that will take it closer to Euro-Atlantic standards.

NATO needs to refresh the agenda for a new Ukrainian president who will be elected soon, in January 2010. What issues will be set as priorities for the new President of Ukraine in the NATO-Ukraine dialogue? This agenda could have no better framework than the one set out in the latest report of the Kyiv Razumkov Centre for the NATO-Ukraine Partnership Network (May-June 2009).

NATO should not close the door on Ukrainian membership, but equally it should not close its eyes and pretend nothing has changed in the region. At the moment, the best course would be to work on the details of the military reform and integration, whilst avoiding the making of any distinct declarations on future status. The ANP provides the best means for doing so.

The Ukrainian public has fragmented information on NATO. There are strong political and economic divides in society. As there is no popular pro-NATO movement in Crimea, it would be counterproductive to try to push it through.

The European Union

Since the Orange Revolution in 2004, the EU has become a much more visible external actor in Ukraine.

Currently, two European initiatives are relevant to Black Sea security. *The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)* was launched in 2003. The ENP offered economic integration, financial assistance and political dialogue to 'neighbourhood countries' in exchange for reforms and democratisation. So far, the ENP has received much more criticism than praise.

The EU's Eastern Partnership (EaP) was launched in May 2009 in response to criticism levelled at the ENP. The EaP seeks to complement the ENP by deepening bilateral relations between the EU and six 'eastern neighbourhood' countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan.

There are a number of concrete steps that the EU can take in Crimea.

- In the framework of the EaP, the *EU is currently considering the establishment of a Commission representation in the region*. This is a good initiative, as *more visibility for the EU in Crimea* would offer local people an alternative 'European' perspective on looking at things. On their part, EU member state presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers should make more of an effort to visit the region. One of the first projects of the EU representation should focus on how to support the diversification of local economy, particularly in the Sevastopol area.
- In addition, the EU representation could significantly increase its efforts to *award more scholarships to Crimean students and grants to academics*. Communication and cooperation between NGO leaders, journalists and academics and their EU counterparts should also be stepped up.
- *The EU should give direct aid to NGOs supporting European integration* and other civil society organisations in order to build the capacity of civil society groups and to broaden their influence and reach. The EU should provide assistance to projects aimed at building the administrative capacity of local governments in Crimea.
- *In the Crimean media sector*, Russia clearly outperforms the EU. Few people in Crimea read the EU press or watch the EU media, although Ukraine has a free media market. In fact, Crimea is largely excluded from the general Ukrainian media environment. The Russian media has taken an active role in local politics in Crimea, shaping the way citizens see domestic and international events. What can be done about this? The best way for the EU to increase its popularity in the region would be to help Ukraine build up its independence and to resist Russia's attempts to infringe on its sovereignty.

- In accordance with the EaP's civil society dimension, the *EU should help create a regional network of free media foundations and new media schools to encourage bloggers and Internet start-ups* to promote stronger web networks and exchange of ideas.
- *The EU should support websites that translate Western media content and those that translate local Crimean news into English.* It should also be considered whether to offer financial assistance to provide wireless Internet access in some areas in Crimea.
- *The EU could finance and support dialogue across communal divides in Crimea.* On their part, local civil society organisations should monitor and linguistically analyse the use of hate language in the Crimean media. For example, the launching of high-quality Russian-language media channels and newspapers should be facilitated and supported by the EU. The EU needs to think imaginatively about how to find new ways of supporting media freedom in the neighbourhood, for example, by helping to build a lively and diverse media, by promoting a web environment that strengthens networks and exchange of ideas and by supporting websites that translate local and international media content.

Conclusion

Europe should also work with the government of Ukraine to provide more assistance – education opportunities, investments and balanced media information – to further integrate Crimea with the rest of Ukraine. Democratic Ukraine is an integral pillar of the European security architecture. The Black Sea region is among the most unstable and the most contested areas that lie under Russia's 'sphere of influence.' It therefore remains the greatest security risk and also offers the greatest opportunities. If there is no stability in the Black Sea region, there will be no stability in Central and Eastern Europe.