

# The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Lessons for Europeans from a Polish Perspective\*

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## Abstract

*The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict has once again altered the fate of Eastern Europe. Yet, it should be also considered as a game changer for European security. The entire European security architecture has trembled as the eastern flank of the continent has been destabilised. If the conflict cannot act as a unifier for the transatlantic community, it could well spell tougher times down the road. This danger would become particularly acute if the perception takes hold that NATO has lost its credibility to deter threats and the EU has lost its ability to be a normative power which stimulates changes in the international environment. Firstly, this article presents five fundamental lessons-learned that must be drawn from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in order to contain the potential future challenges and threats for Europe. Secondly, it offers four recommendations which constitute a sound basis for a concrete and long-term security policy action plan in response to the conflict.*

## Resumo

**O Conflito Russo-Ucraniano: Lições para os Europeus na Ótica Polaca**

O corrente conflito russo-ucraniano alterou novamente o destino da Europa do Leste. No entanto, esta crise deve também ser considerada como um fator perturbador da segurança Europeia. Toda a arquitetura da segurança Europeia foi afetada com a instabilidade do flanco oriental do continente. Se este conflito não servir como um fator unificador da comunidade transatlântica, poderá ser um prenúncio de difíceis tempos vindouros. Acresce, ainda, que este perigo poder-se-á tornar particularmente grave caso se instale a percepção de que a NATO perdeu a sua credibilidade para dissuadir ameaças e a União Europeia a sua capacidade como potência normativa para estimular mudanças no sistema internacional. Inicialmente, este artigo apresenta cinco lições fundamentais que deverão ser retiradas do conflito russo-ucraniano de forma a conter eventuais desafios e ameaças para a Europa. Posteriormente, serão abordadas quatro recomendações que constituem uma base para um plano de ação de políticas securitárias sólidas e de longo prazo como resposta a este conflito.

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In 2013, Eastern Europe was on its path to fade to oblivion. For some Western countries it has become an “unwanted child” being neither a source of political and economic successes nor a strategic security policy nuisance. It was more convenient to assume that the status quo will prevail. Some have fallen into this strategic trap; others have warned that history in Eastern Europe has not yet ended. “The West’s willingness to consider security issues in Eastern Europe as second-tier is premature. There is one more important factor co-defining the situation in the region: Russia. Unfortunately, its role cannot always be described as constructive. A turning point in Russia’s policy towards Eastern Europe was undoubtedly the 2008 war with Georgia and the recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The conflict confirmed that Russia has set its own ‘red lines’ in Eastern Europe, and recognised the area as lying within its ‘zone of privileged interests’”(Jankowski and Świeżak, 2014).

The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict has once again altered the fate of Eastern Europe. Yet, it should be also considered as a game changer for European security as the forgotten notion of war was restored into the political discourse. The entire European security architecture has trembled as the eastern flank of the continent has been destabilised. If the conflict cannot act as a unifier for the transatlantic community, it could well spell tougher times down the road. This danger would become particularly acute if the perception takes hold that NATO has lost its credibility to deter threats and the EU has lost its ability to be a normative power which stimulates changes in the international environment.

### **Five Lessons-Learned**

From a Polish perspective, five fundamental lessons-learned must be drawn from the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in order to contain the potential future challenges and threats for the Old Continent.

Firstly, this conflict has confirmed that Eastern Europe remains a volatile space. In fact, Europe received its first wake-up call in 2008 during the Russian-Georgian war. As identified by Ronald D. Asmus (2010: 215) “the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008 was a little war that shook the world. It shocked a West that had become complacent in its belief that war in Europe had become a thing of the past and thus ignored the warning signs that conflict was brewing between Moscow and Tbilisi”.

However, the negative trends stemming from the Middle East and North Africa – being both direct and indirect consequences of the Arab Spring – have led many Western countries to simply forget about Eastern Europe. In reality, the belt of instability stretching from the Caucasus to Transnistria never disappeared. Indeed, the regional security vacuum has triggered more assertiveness. The protracted conflicts render the strategic situation even more fragile. In Georgia, the Russian occupation

of about one-fifth of Georgian territory continues. In reality, Russia has not ceased to further illegally incorporate both Abkhazia and South Ossetia into its own political, economic and security system. On November 24, 2014, a Russian-Abkhazian treaty on alliance and strategic partnership was signed, despite Abkhazia not being recognised as a state by the international community.

Under this treaty, Abkhazia, which still retains a semblance of independence, will be integrated with Russia in the areas of: defence, border control, customs policy, social policy and law and order. A united Russian-Abkhazian grouping of troops, consisting of units from both countries which will be deployed in Abkhazia, is to be formed within one year of signing the treaty. In peacetime, the command will rotate, and in wartime the commander will be appointed by Russia. "The treaty also provides for a gradual unification of military standards, joint protection of Abkhazian borders (in practice, the border with Georgia) and the free movement of people through the Abkhazian-Russian border. A Joint Information and Coordination Centre of the law enforcement agencies dealing with internal affairs will be created in two years' time in order to coordinate actions aimed at combating crime" (Falkowski, 2014). Moreover, Azerbaijan and Armenia have carried on a bloody conflict over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

In July 2014, the killing of fifteen Azerbaijani soldiers along the "line of contact" signified an escalation in hostilities. Casualties from retaliatory action, Azeri multiple-rocket launcher fire and overflights by the Azerbaijani Air Force indicated that the situation might deteriorate. However, the hostilities may not be accidental. In fact, "Armenia is a faithful Russian ally. It rejected an Association Agreement with the European Union it painstakingly negotiated for three years, and signed up for membership in the Moscow-led Customs Union. Russian military bases remain on the Armenian territory through 2043, and Russian troops guard Armenia's borders with Iran and Turkey. Moreover, Armenia voted in support of Russia in the UN General Assembly regarding the annexation of Crimea. It may use Russia's action towards the peninsula as a model for occupation and annexation of Karabakh" (Cohen, 2014). Finally, the illegal stationing of a Russian contingent in Transnistria with neither a United Nations mandate nor Moldovan consent completes the picture. Moldova has already been subject to an extraordinary degree of blackmail and threats by Russia. Just before Moldova signed the EU's Association Agreement in 2013, "Russia launched a vitriolic campaign against the EU inside Moldova. It also threatened to impose several kinds of trade embargoes on a country that has been heavily dependent on Russia for its energy, trade and labour market for migrant workers" (Dempsey, 2014). Recently, Russia has also interfered into the region of Gagauzia in which the Turkic-speaking community has become increasingly pro-Russian and more vocal about a greater autonomy, if not independence from Moldova.

Secondly, Winston Churchill was wrong when he depicted Russia as “a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”. Russia has unfortunately confirmed its predictable status of a revisionist power. Its principal foreign policy goal is to maintain Eastern Europe in Russia’s sphere of influence by stopping, or at least hampering, the political aspirations of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine to strengthen their ties with both the EU and NATO. The other goal is to influence or even intimidate some EU and NATO members and to put into question the Western political system based on democracy and the rule of law. To achieve these ends, Moscow has reached for hybrid warfare. In fact, the tools thus far applied by Russia in its conflict with Ukraine come from different centuries: the use of pure military force: the nineteenth century; breach of international law and the use of propaganda: the twentieth century; and, finally, political and economic pressure, combined with new instruments such as cyber-attacks: twenty-first century.

Hybrid warfare has been an effective and sometimes surprising mix of military and non-military as well as conventional and irregular components. The Russian hybrid approach to conflicts has become even more prominent with an extensive use of their Special Operations Forces (“little green men”), security forces and intelligence agencies, as well as Russian-speaking minorities, as tools. Indeed, “none of the single components is new; it is the combination and orchestration of different actions that achieves a surprising effect and creates ambiguity, making an adequate reaction extremely difficult, especially for international organizations that operate on the principle of consensus” (Golts and Reisinger, 2014: 3). In fact, to the current Russian approach five elements seem key: the actions with an appearance of legality, military show of force and readiness, “little green men”, taking advantage of local tensions and local militias as well as propaganda. Moreover, with hybrid warfare techniques, ones shortfalls can be compensated. At the same time, these instruments allow optimal exploitation of the opponent’s vulnerabilities. Therefore, “Russia’s hybrid warfare in Ukraine demonstrated the new capabilities of the Russian armed forces, following the military reform launched in 2008: enhanced deployability (tactical and strategic airlift), a relatively high level of training and professional forces” (Golts and Reisinger, 2014: 10)

Furthermore, Russia as a revisionist power, seeks to secure its military might and signals its readiness to use conventional forces just as easily as it does other, softer means. In the past decade its military capability significantly rose and its defence budget is to grow even further. The decision to increase military expenditure and its share of GDP dates back to late 2008. After the war with Georgia, it was decided to undertake a far-reaching reform of the armed forces and to accelerate their re-equipment with new armaments. In 2013, Russia’s defence spending increased by 4.8 percent in real terms, and its military burden exceeded that of the US for the first time since 2003. “Russia’s spending has risen as it continues to implement the

State Armaments Plan for 2011–20, under which it plans to spend 20.7 trillion roubles (EUR 574 billion) on new and upgraded armaments. The goal is to replace 70 percent of equipment with ‘modern’ weapons by 2020” (Perlo-Freeman and Solmirano, 2014: 2).

A creeping militarisation of the Kaliningrad Oblast, the Crimean Peninsula and areas near the borders of the Baltic States, as well as forward basing in Belarus, pose a major threat to the stability of the vicinity of the EU and NATO. The redeployment in December 2013 of Russian fighter jets to Belarus has political significance above all. Indeed, “it should be seen as a symbolic counterbalance to the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission which has been in place since 2004 and consists of aircraft from different NATO member countries (mostly Poland) taking turns to guard the airspace of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia” (Wilk, 2013). From a military perspective, the practical dimension will be the training of Russian pilots in terms of potential (future) flights in Belarusian airspace.

Finally, since the Russian annexation of Crimea, the intensity and gravity of incidents involving Russian and Western militaries and security agencies has visibly increased. Compared with the pre-March 2014 period, “the situation has changed both with regards to the number of relevant incidents, and their gravity. Concerning the numbers, NATO officials indicated in late October 2014 that this year NATO states have already conducted over 100 intercepts of Russian aircraft, three times more than in 2013” (Frear, Kearn and Kulesa, 2014: 1).

Thirdly, Russia has five major allies in the Western world: a growing anti-Americanism in Europe, lack of knowledge about Eastern Europe, fear of conflict, economic interests and anti-liberalism. In fact, a dangerous mixture of political, economic and social factors weakens the ability of Western elites to take bold, strategic decisions which go beyond an electoral cycle. Having this in mind, Russia has smartly used its trump card to consolidate its gains in Eastern Ukraine, achieve a growing leverage over the West’s ability to move towards political confrontation again as well as put the blame on the West. In this context, some Western experts even claim that “the United States and its European allies share most of the responsibility for the crisis. The taproot of the trouble is NATO enlargement, the central element of a larger strategy to move Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit and integrate into the West. Putin’s pushback should have come as no surprise. After all, the West had been moving into Russia’s backyard and threatening its core strategic interests, a point that Putin made emphatically and repeatedly. [...] There is a solution to the crisis in Ukraine, however – although it would require the West to think about the country in a fundamentally new way. The United States and its allies should abandon their plan to westernize Ukraine and instead aim to make it a neutral buffer between NATO and Russia, akin to Austria’s position during the Cold War. Western leaders should acknowledge

that Ukraine matters so much to Putin that they cannot support an anti-Russian regime there” (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Fourthly, defence still matters. Until very recently, one of the best deterrents for small- and medium-sized states – provided they could not join NATO, the EU, or both – was embedded in international law and diplomatic tools. However, the erosion or even the blatant breach of international legal commitments (the 1987 Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the 1990 Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act, the 1999 adapted CFE Treaty) has severely undermined their deterrent character.

In its latest annual report on arms control compliance, the US State Department formally accused Russia of having violated the INF Treaty. The basic allegation is that Russia breached its obligations not to possess, produce, or flight-test a ground-launched cruise missile (GLCM) with a range of between 500 km and 5,500 km (the “Prohibited Range”) or to possess or produce associated launchers (United States of America State Department, 2014: 12). “The primary reason that Russia would seek to deploy a new GLCM is to enhance its war-fighting capabilities in the European theater. Russia’s 2010 Military Doctrine continues to identify NATO (especially the prospect for further NATO enlargement) as a continuing source of potential military danger for the Russian Federation. In addressing this challenge, a new intermediate-range GLCM would provide Russia with important additional capabilities” (Schwarz, 2014). In fact, the new GLCM could also give Russia the means of delivering nuclear attacks in vital parts of Europe. Russian doctrine has long envisioned use of nuclear weapons as an integral part of Russia’s war-fighting strategy in Europe, as they are viewed as a means to compensate for a weaker position of Russia’s conventional military.

Taking into consideration the erosion or violation of international legal commitments, military instruments still remain valid in Europe in the twenty-first century and the effective diplomatic tools that European countries have had at their disposal need to be strengthened by necessary military potential. Europe should once again be able to negotiate out of a position of strength. The well-known phrase “trust but verify” needs to apply again.

Finally, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict created a pivotal moment for European security. Russia’s challenge to a rules-based order reached its highest point since the end of the Cold War with the seizure and annexation of Crimea in March 2014. The security conditions in Central and Eastern Europe have considerably worsened. The European security architecture, which was inclusive and in fact co-created by Russia, has been changed. Therefore, a revisionist Russia can hardly be treated as a “strategic partner” anymore, at least for the foreseeable future. This privilege should be reserved only for those countries which do not put at risk the health of

the liberal international order based on democracy, self-determination, the rule of law, market economy, free trade, respect for human rights and effectively on mutual trust. The existence of this order must not be taken for granted and needs to be protected and defended. In recent years, Russia has constantly challenged the West's global geopolitical interests by establishing a close cooperation with other authoritarian regimes (especially Belarus, China, Iran, Sudan and Syria) and therefore further destabilising the world order (*e.g.* by fuelling the war in Syria).

At least for now "Russia has made clear that it intends to be a rule-breaker, nor a rule-maker, casting doubt on its readiness to play a helpful role in forging a new normative consensus between established and emerging powers" (Kupchan, 2014: 163-164). In fact, over the next months and years the West's unity will likely be tested and undermined by Russia. If successfully, other rising powers – especially Brazil, China, India and Iran – might see Western inaction as an incentive to foster their own alternative visions of world order.

#### **Four Policies**

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict cannot be solved by tactical, ad hoc measures which for the West seem more convenient as they are less costly from a political and economic perspective. However, it would not be sensible if European policymakers decided to resolve the tensions between sustainable economic policy and security policy exclusively in favour of the former. Therefore, Europe needs to forge a concrete, united and long-term action plan in response to the current conflict. Four recommendations for Europeans come to the fore.

First, Europeans must embrace a "Ukraine first" policy which should be translated into a more proactive, balanced and sustainable approach to the neighbourhood policy in general. The stabilisation of eastern and southern Ukraine, based among others on the fifteen-point plan for the peaceful settlement of the crisis presented by President Petro Poroshenko as well as the Minsk Protocol, remains a prerequisite for any further steps. Russia must stop fuelling the conflict by withdrawing its forces from Ukraine and from the Russian-Ukrainian border, as well as by stopping financial and military support to the separatists. Simultaneously, the EU and the United States, along with the International Monetary Fund, should continue to support Ukraine economically, which could constitute the best incentive for Kyiv to implement the necessary reforms (monetary and fiscal policy, energy market, financial and security sectors). In fact, Ukraine has untapped growth potential: "Ukraine has fertile agricultural land, an attractive geographical location in Europe, bordering the European Union (the largest market in the world), and a large domestic market of almost 46 million consumers. It also has abundant natural resources, relatively well-developed infrastructure, high quality human capital, and a significant industrial base. However, Ukraine's

potential has yet to be adequately harnessed. Defying expectations at the time of the collapse of the Soviet Union, when hopes that the newly found independence would spur Ukraine's development loomed large, the country's GDP per capita still lingers below 1989 levels and at a mere 10 percent of the European Union average after twenty years of transition. Incomes have increased much more slowly in Ukraine than in the Europe and Central Asia region as a whole. Ukraine has also been under-performing relative to regional peers, such as Poland, Romania, Russia and Belarus, especially during the recent global crisis, registering a decline in GDP by 15 percent in 2009" (World Bank, 2014: 10). Furthermore, the Association Agreement with the EU could provide an important anchor for the reform process. Implementation of the Association Agreement, together with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement, could provide considerable benefits for Ukraine. EU accession had such an effect earlier for the new EU members in Central and East Europe, which took advantage of the intimate engagement with the EU to increase exports, attract FDI, enhance competition, minimize the negative influence of vested interests, and ultimately make an unprecedented step towards catching up with the West. The entrance of the EU agreements into full force would create legally binding obligations for the harmonization of Ukraine's laws with the regulatory architecture of the EU's single market.

Moreover, the importance of the driving force that could change the long-term fate of Ukraine – its politically conscious and proactive civil society – should not be overlooked. Democracy promoters and local activists need to focus on society itself. "Good NGO work is crucial for the quality of public space. It defines the culture of public debate and holds governments accountable. The defining principle of their work should be to ensure a two-way relationship with society. Whatever choice civil society leaders make, it is crucial that they remain independent. NGOs would benefit from shifting their outlook from one limited to the issues of the Helsinki Declaration and human rights to one that encompasses economic justice, access to services and consumer protection" (Lutsevych, 2013: 17).

Finally, Crimea needs to be returned to Ukraine. Some may argue that this geographic peninsula is practically gone, but not by international legal standards. In fact, "the unlawfulness of acts committed by the Russian Federation in Crimea leading to Ukraine's loss of effective territorial control over the Peninsula gives rise to conclusion that, under international law, Crimea remains an integral part of Ukraine's territory under Russian occupation" (Republic of Poland, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2014: 7). If it is not returned, the Ukrainian government – with the necessary support from the West – should prepare a detailed account of what property has been seized and present this case at an international court (e.g. the International Court of Justice or the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea).



Individual Ukrainians, who lost their property in Crimea, should also go to the court. In fact, a creation of a special tribunal – based on the experiences gathered by the still existing Iran-United States Claims Tribunal – should also not be excluded.

Second, Europeans must understand that there can be “no business as usual” with Russia. Should this lesson already have not been learnt following the Russia-Georgia war in 2008? Russia has become an unreliable, irresponsible and a revisionist power. Indeed, “Russia today is more autocratic internally and more aggressive toward its neighbours than at any time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Official propaganda paints the West as an enemy and actively tries to undermine unity in the EU and coherence in the transatlantic alliance” (Speck, 2014). Therefore, the Western community should be ready to impose additional political and economic sanctions if further destabilisation occurs. The sanctions signal the West’s readiness to confront Russia and show that the West is ready to pay a price in terms of the partial interruption of its economic interaction with Russia.

Furthermore, the European countries should stop all transfer of military technology to Russia, including those ongoing or suspended, as well as reduce Russian dominance over European energy markets. Moreover, the West must strategically reassess its relations with Russia. In 1967, the “Harmel Report” reasserted NATO’s basic principles and introduced a two-track strategy of deterrence and dialogue. Under the current circumstances, the West – especially NATO – needs a similar intellectual exercise to build consensus on the relationship with Russia which has been fundamentally altered. Agreeing to establish a high-level commission tasked with developing recommendations on how to re-engage Moscow diplomatically will prevent NATO, and more broadly the West, from reaching premature conclusions (one of them being Russia’s willingness to return to the currently undermined international legal framework) (Bunde, Jankowski and Michelot, 2014). Finally, as in the Ukrainian case, the prime mover of the necessary transformation of Russia might stem from its civil society. Therefore, its strength could be reinvigorated by promoting an independent Russian-speaking media.

Third, NATO is back. Following the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, there exists a unique opportunity for the Alliance to demonstrate its full and continued commitment to Article 5. The NATO summit in Wales addressed a new security reality. The Alliance has started to refocus on its core mission: securing peace through defence and deterrence. Indeed, NATO must be strategically enhanced, especially its eastern flank. Therefore, “in order to ensure that our Alliance is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges, today we have approved the NATO Readiness Action Plan. It provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO’s

borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications. It also responds to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood, the Middle East and North Africa. The Plan strengthens NATO's collective defence. It also strengthens our crisis management capability. The Plan will contribute to ensuring that NATO remains a strong, ready, robust, and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise" (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2014). Consequently, the strengthening of the eastern flank will be reached by conducting regular military exercises in Central and Eastern Europe which actual forces participate, and which encompass all potential scenarios, including Article 5 ones. Moreover, the NATO Response Force will be transformed into a more accessible and agile instrument with a robust delivery capability which will enhance its responsiveness. This rapid response capability (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force) will focus on speed, providing NATO leaders with a credible and easily deployable asset to match sudden threats along NATO's periphery. This force should consist of a land component with appropriate air, maritime and special operations forces available. Readiness of elements of the VJTF will be tested through short-notice exercises. NATO will also establish an appropriate command and control presence and some in-place force enablers on the territories of eastern Allies. Furthermore, a strategic enhancement of the eastern flank will cover both infrastructure – including a proper high readiness command on the basis of the Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin and equipment storage sites prepositioned for arrival of major forces in the case of conflict – as well as 'boots on the ground'. In addition, NATO could in the future introduce the standing defence plans which would be a more precise extension of the contingency plans. Finally, Europeans should be more responsive to the ongoing US requests to reverse the negative trends in military spending (2 percent of GDP needs to remain not only a rule of thumb, but stricter roadmaps to reach that should be developed). In fact, in Wales the allies agreed to halt any decline in defence expenditure, increase defence spending in real terms as GDP grows as well as aim to move towards the 2 percent guideline within a decade.

Fourth, "if you want peace, prepare for war". Europeans need to consider rearmament. And luckily there seem to be a few good harbingers on the horizon with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania or Norway, to name a few, where military expenditures are set to grow. Particularly Poland, being a responsible ally, has recently given a constructive example. Based on a solid financial foundation, *i.e.* a legal obligation to spend 1.95 percent of GDP on defence, Poland has paved the way towards a robust modernisation programme (with particular emphasis on air and missile defence, land forces, naval forces, information technology and helicopters). Indeed, with an objective to spend at least twenty percent of its growing

budget on procurements, and thanks to the recent announcement of its military budget increase to at least 2 percent of GDP in 2016, Poland is fast becoming one of the frontrunners of European military strength.

If one could name one unique novel element in the Polish strategy, it would be the recurrence of deterrence. Once a backbone of many national security strategies, with time it has almost vanished from the vocabulary of strategic debate. Yet, from a Polish perspective this concept has not become obsolete, as it provides a viable solution to the current strategic problems. Indeed, deterrence is a strategy for addressing two competing goals: countering a potential enemy or threat, and avoiding war. Poland must act as “the expectations of behaviour that undergirded the pre-Ukraine war status quo have already been altered: Russia has demonstrated its will and capability to use force to redraw the map of the region. The credibility of the West has also been altered, and to be precise, diminished” (Grygiel and Mitchell, 2014).

The goal of the “Polish Fangs” initiative, announced in 2013, is to develop the essential military capabilities necessary to implement a deterrence strategy. In practice, “Polish Fangs” will be comprised of cruise missiles for both the F-16 fleet and potentially the conventional submarines, combat drones, special operations forces, as well as the Polish Navy Coastal Defense Missile Battalion system. Moreover, it is likely that this project will be supplemented by both defensive and offensive cyber-weapons, as cyber-defence capabilities will become a priority in the next strategic planning cycle.

Currently, only two pillars of the deterrence strategy are operational. First, the special operations forces, which have become an undisputable flagship of the Polish Armed Forces and their professionalization. Second, the Coastal Defense Missile Battalion that became operational in June 2013. Ultimately, it will be equipped with 48 Norwegian Naval Strike Missiles, which can serve both as an anti-ship and a land-attack weapon. Another particularly noteworthy undertaking is the acquisition of the cruise missiles for the F-16 fleet. Following the example of Finland, Poland in December 2014 signed a deal to purchase 40 advanced Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM) from the United States. The deal also includes associated equipment, training and logistical support needed to make them operational. Delivery is to take place in 2015 and 2016, and the missiles are scheduled to be operational in 2017. The combination of F-16 fighters and semi-stealthy missiles will provide a new and important capability for the Polish deterrence strategy. In fact, the transaction will be much more than an arms deal – it will have, as was the case in Finland, significant political and regional military implications.

The “Polish Fangs” initiative, along with the air and missile defense system, will provide Poland with game-changing capabilities. They should be perceived as a good example of the leading edge of so-called anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) systems, which are raising the costs for potential adversaries to project power and pursue their objectives (Jankowski, 2013).

## Conclusion

Establishing a rules-based order for the 21<sup>st</sup> century depends on the West's ability to recover its economic and political strength, enabling to continue serving as the world's anchor of liberal values and practices. However, it does not mean that the military aspect should be overlooked.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has confirmed that most Europeans have been proven wrong in their assessments as they have become intellectually and emotionally dependent on wishful thinking, namely that they no longer had to worry about their own security and Moscow's actions, even if Russia fell far short of European democratic standards. The real difficulty in finding Russia a place and role within Europe's security architecture is Moscow's continuing preoccupation with its great power status and its pursuit of hegemony in the post-Soviet space. The European integration process has been designed in order to constrain and contain the influence of major powers within supranational organizations.

Moreover, the world will neither be safer nor more just if Europe disarms. On the contrary, future generations of European citizens would likely face an international environment less amenable to both their socio-economic and security needs.

As Ulrich Speck rightly underlines "the easiest way for the EU to get out of the confrontation with Russia would be to disengage from the post-Soviet space and seal NATO's external border. But that would be short-sighted. In such a scenario, there would likely be permanent, low-level conflict and warfare in Eastern Europe, as the countries in the region are not ready to accept full submission to Moscow. They have developed their own identity and aspirations since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Russia, for its part, would likely turn into an even more revisionist, imperialist-minded, aggressive, and militarized power. It would be an illusion to think that the EU could be safe and prosperous in such a neighbourhood" (Speck, 2014). Only by stepping up engagement, by helping countries such as Ukraine, to stabilize, and by enlarging the sphere of liberal democracy and market economy can the West bring the post-Soviet space closer to the postmodern multilateral order.

In 2014, Europe received a second wake-up call – a chance that must not be missed. Anyone who fails to see this is strategically blind.

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