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UKRAINE CRISIS: LINKING REGIONAL (DIS)ORDER TO GLOBAL ORDER

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The news of the Ukrainian crisis have ebbed and flowed with other issues high on the agenda of the Western leaders, such as the stagflation nightmare hanging over the Union and the primitive violence of the decapitations operated by the ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Clearly, this is not one of the best moments in history we have been through. All three emergencies point right to the core of the Western liberal system in an unprecedented way, challenging its very fundamentals. And yet, while the gloomy economic expectations of the Continent have been around for some time now and while the confused plethora of terrorist groups has been shaking the interpretative categories and schemes of traditional politics since the end of the Cold War, the Ukrainian crisis outbreak took most of the Western European states by surprise. The reason is quite intuitive: although ‘new troubles’ featured prominently in the crisis, such as ethnic and never resolved tensions and energy security arguments, the narrative accompanying the events reminded that of a not distant but too rapidly shelved history. Which makes one wonder: is past as prologue? Are we still deeply ‘mired in history’ to use the words of Francis Fukuyama to assert he was completely wrong?

We could make use of a parachute and have a soft landing by saying that the security scenario we are living in is astonishingly complicated, fluid, ever changing and mined by both traditional and new challenges that intermittently come to play a prominent role. The reality is that we play it by ear and that hence we have to get prepared to multiple possible security scenarios contemporarily. In this sense, for all the tragedy the Ukrainian crisis brought with itself we cannot deny that in fact it has helped us adding a card to the messy puzzle.

Amid the never-ending debate about the likelihood, the tendency to and the actual shape of the ‘global order’, the Ukrainian crisis has, together with other events, rendered clear that security games are eminently played at the regional level. The security interests of most powers seem to be structured around those states that are closer and for most of them the regional one is the level at which a certain influence can be exerted on security matters. Hence, this level of analysis has been given great prominence. This brings us to wonder what a region is in security terms. The most convincing argument is that a region is a cluster formed by referent objects for security, main threats to them and actors likely to positively and negatively handle



that specific security threat. In this sense, the Ukrainian crisis has not only highlighted the borders of Europe as a region but has also provided a taste of what stability could look like in this geographical area. For the first time since the end of the Cold War we have a clear answer to the question that has driven the academic and the political debate over the last years: how far can the Western security system be pushed into the post-Soviet space? Not far away from the adjustments triggered by the end of the bipolar confrontation.

If that is so, why has NATO taken a first role, at least rhetorically speaking in the crisis? The question has perhaps passed unnoticed to the general public which probably ignores the fact that Ukraine is not a member of NATO and that therefore Article 5 of the Alliance Charter could not have been raised. Would have we risked so much teasing Moscow? With the Syrian and the Iranian tables open? Let's not be so naïve. The reason is more subtle and relates to one of the most important and yet often overlooked dynamics in alliances politics: that of the reassurance of some of the member states. Yes, this time we are ready to die for Danzig has implicitly intended NATO.

The overt celebration of the security community reached by the Western world (and of the values underpinning it) has often overshadowed the fact that many security dilemmas have kept persisting at its borders, a fact that instead has troubled the lives of states at the Eastern border of this same community. The picture that has repeatedly been painted by Poland, for example, has been that of an area of stability at the center of Europe and of instability at its periphery, where the western 'order' is challenged. For Warsaw NATO, the main security pillar of the Western

world, has to strike a balance between its defence tasks and out-of-area operations. Preserving the traditional and core aim of the Alliance, that is, its 'collective defence' commitment is essential. The concrete possibility to extend the western security system to the East and thus to water down potential sources of tensions has (until now) remained open to investigation (at least publicly). The crisis seems to have brought it to an end for good, with the consent of all the actors in the region (even of Ukraine who has certainly paid an onerous toll for the sake of regional security and stability.

And yet, when appreciating the role of NATO in the crisis one cannot overlook the stance of the only global actor in the international landscape. The only actor that, playing at many regional security tables, can perhaps tell us something about global order. With the Ukrainian crisis- has been the argument of many scholars- the United States have operated a u-turn with reference to their 'pivot to Asia' policy, the 'alarming' realignment of the US's security interests towards the Pacific and away from Europe. And yet, the 'either...or' argument is totally misplaced. The same year that Obama modified the plan for the missile defence system in Poland and loudly spoke out the 'Asia agenda' he committed to improved cooperation between the Polish and US Air Forces through periodic joint training exercises and the set up of a US air detachment to support regular rotation of the country military aircraft. Rather than disengaging from Europe Obama has restated its commitment to the Asia-pacific region, visibly dismissed by the Bush's administration. Thus, global order and security is about regional orders and security, but that is neither EU's nor Russia's affair.