

## **Ukrainian-Russian Conflict. a Threat or an Opportunity for the Central Asian Countries to Rethink the Contours of Sovereignty and Progress?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

In the article the author gives a critical analysis of the ongoing processes related to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, provides some data on the reaction of regional and international subjects of international law, including international organizations.

Particularly emphasizes the consequences of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict on the Central Asian countries, gives an interpretation of the main possible scenarios for the development of the situation, which may arise as a result of further escalation and aggravation of contradictions on the above ground.

**KEYWORDS:** conflict, unpredictability, consequences, leadership, military command, ammunition, potential threat, military service, diversification, integration processes.

### **Introduction**

The Ukrainian-Russian conflict has noticeably changed the palette of the political situation in the world, provoking additional hotbeds of tension, creating an atmosphere of bewilderment and unpredictability for the subjects of international law, including the states of Central Asia.

In recent years, the main vector of Ukraine's foreign policy activity has been accession to the European Union and NATO. In this regard, appropriate amendments have also been made to the Constitution of the country.

The Russian Federation categorically opposes almost any pro-European political ambitions with the participation of Ukraine. Such an approach is motivated by unimaginable negative consequences in its direction on this basis. The situation escalated sharply after V. Zelensky's statements on February 19, 2022 at the Munich Conference about Ukraine's possible withdrawal from the Budapest Memorandum agreements, which were perceived by the Russian Federation as an intention to acquire nuclear weapons.

### **Main part**

Consequently, on February 24, 2022, referring to Article 51 of the UN Charter and the sanction of the Federation Council, the Russian Federation recognized the independence of the DPR and LPR. A "special military operation" was initiated in the direction of Ukraine. Russian troops entered Ukraine, both from their own territory and from the Republic of Belarus. Units of the DPR and LPR joined the fighting.

Under these conditions, President V. Zelensky declared martial law and general mobilization in the country, signed a decree on the International Defense Legion. Combat units have been formed in the regions. The leadership of the Russian military command allowed foreign volunteers to fight on the side of the DPR and LPR.

A few days later, the Russian Federation noted that it had taken control of the islands of Zmeiny, Genichesk, Novaya Kakhovka, the Kakhovskaya hydroelectric power station, the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, the resumption of water supply to the North Crimean Canal and others. Control over 93% of the Lugansk region, 54% of the Donetsk region, as well as over the Kherson region, blocking the cities of Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, Nikolaev and others was announced. Intensive missile strikes on Ukrainian infrastructure facilities continued.

The noted special military operation of the Russian Federation was negatively perceived by most Western countries and international organizations. The UN General Assembly adopted a Resolution (voted by 141 countries), according to which, the Russian Federation was recognized as an aggressor, and accordingly called for an immediate withdrawal of troops. It is noteworthy that according to the UNHCR, more than 10 million people left Ukraine during the clashes.

European experts in international law regard the reference of the Russian Federation to Article 51 of the UN Charter as incorrect. They stressed that it is intended for self-defense against direct aggression and protection of other member countries of this international organization. LPR and DPR are not members of the UN. This interpretation is shared by representatives of the OSCE, the UN Secretary General.

Along with various kinds of anti-Russian sanctions, Western countries represented by the UK, the EU, the USA and others, Ukraine is fueled by the necessary military equipment and ammunition, which is the most motivated for further confrontation with the Russian Federation. On May 9, 2022, the United States adopted a lend-lease law for Ukraine in order to optimize the supply of military equipment to this country, if necessary, to other states of Eastern Europe.

Due to disagreements over its special military operation in the direction of Ukraine, the State Duma of the Russian Federation initiated the process of reviewing and possibly adopting bills to cancel the decisions of the USSR State Council regarding the recognition of the independence of NATO members Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. According to the explanations of the Russian deputy E. Fedorov, these measures will be applied to countries that are prone to conflict and pose a threat to the security of the Russian Federation.

In terms of enhancing the achievement of the set goals, on September 21, 2022, President of the Russian Federation V. Putin signed a decree on partial mobilization in the country. Privates and sergeants are subject to conscription - up to 35 years old, junior officers - up to 50 years old, senior officers - up to 55 years old. There is also the option of conscription for military service for almost any category of foreigners in Russia, in exchange for optimizing the acquisition of Russian citizenship.

These measures of the leadership of the Russian Federation caused a wave of discontent in certain subjects of the federation, became the reason for a sharp outflow from the country of a certain part of the draft age abroad, including to the countries of Central Asia.

One of the prominent philosophers, N. Taleb (USA), noted that in order to neutralize dependence, the EU countries are considering the issue of abandoning Russian oil in the next few months. These measures are capable of excessively reducing state revenues in the Russian Federation, thereby causing a wave of separatist sentiments among Russians,

actualizing the mood in the Russian regions to secede from the unified state.

It should be noted that the current conditions and related problems contribute to minimizing the volume of international trade, rising food and energy prices, and causing economic stagnation. An atmosphere of geopolitical, geostrategic unpredictability is being created in the countries of the Central Asian region.

In the Central Asian countries, members of the EAEU (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan), since the beginning of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, a collapse of the national currency has been observed to a certain extent, as well as a fall in the stock market. Due to interconnectedness, the situation also affects other regional subjects of international law.

In terms of foreign trade turnover, the Russian Federation occupies the first place for Tajikistan. In 2021, the trade turnover between the two countries exceeded \$1.352 billion. Accordingly, the current situation or the imposition of sanctions against the Russian Federation, where there are more than a million Tajik migrants, will have a significant impact on the economy of Tajikistan.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are considered significant economic and political partners of Russia. Uzbek exports to Russia amount to 2.05 billion dollars (12% of the total), imports - about 5.45 billion dollars (21%). About 2.2 million Uzbek labor migrants work in the Russian Federation, remittances are carried out in the amount of more than 7-8 billion dollars a year.

Due to the deterioration of the economic and other situation due to sanctions, most enterprises in the Russian Federation may close, which will require a change in the approach to migration policy. The policy of the Russian Federation to expand its geopolitical hegemony by available means also poses a potential threat to the sovereignty of the Central Asian states. In this regard, V. Putin's statements about the absence of the state history of Kazakhstan and his statement about the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose members allegedly got "Russian historical territories", cause concern.

The commonality of the state-political conditions of the Central Asian countries to a certain extent has an integrating moment, which is expressed in mutual understanding in solving interstate problems. Historical closeness, similar prerequisites for the functioning, preservation and maintenance of territorial integrity pose problems of a single order for them.

### **Conclusion**

At the same time, in the current conditions, despite the currently favorable relations between the Central Asian countries, there are certain issues that, against the backdrop of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, can be used by external forces to destabilize the situation in the region in a favorable perspective.

By stating the available facts, various international experts give a diversified interpretation of the process and consequences of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, as well as its impact on regional security in Central Asia.

It is possible that the precedent on the basis of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict will lead to a certain diversification of the existing trends in the integration processes in Central Asia, in order to strengthen the regional security system. On the basis of existing associations, the most mutually beneficial regional projects may arise.

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