



## UNDERSTANDING THE NEW WAR IN THE MODERN AGE: AN ASSESSMENT ON THE RUSSIA – UKRAINE WAR

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### ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of war or conflict has existed since the existence of mankind. War can have various reasons such as religious, political and economic. However, with the effect of globalization after the Cold War, even if the conflicts continued throughout the world, the wars between the great states decreased to a large extent. In this context, Russia's intervention in Ukraine is a rather surprising development. Ukraine has always been an important state for Russia due to its historical and cultural ties, especially the establishment of the first Russian state near Kiev, the capital of Ukraine. Even after the collapse of the USSR, Russia continued to make hidden interventions in Ukraine, which it saw as its backyard. However, starting a conventional war between the two states seemed to be a rather risky and unexpected option. But as it is seen, Russia took this risk and started a military intervention in Ukraine. The course of the intervention, the damages suffered by Russia, show that a conventional war is not very effective for the states in today's conditions. The aim of the study is to examine the beginning of Russia's intervention and the first two months of the process. The other aim of the study is to explain not only this crisis, but also the phenomenon of war and the changing elements of war today.

**Keywords:** Russia, Ukraine, Conflict, War, Conventional War.

## MODERN ÇAĞDA YENİ SAVAŞI ANLAMAK: RUSYA – UKRAYNA SAVAŞI ÜZERİNDEN BİR DEĞERLENDİRME

### ÖZ

Savaş ya da çatışma olgusu, insanoğlu var olduğundan beri varlığını sürdürmektedir. Savaşın dini, siyasi ve ekonomik gibi çeşitli sebepleri olabilmektedir. Ancak Soğuk Savaş sonrasında küreselleşmenin de etkisiyle dünya genelinde küçük çatışmalar devam etse bile büyük devletler arasında yaşanan savaşlar büyük oranda azalmıştır. Bu bağlamda Rusya'nın Ukrayna müdahalesi oldukça şaşırtıcı bir gelişme olarak karşımıza çıkmaktadır. Bugün Ukrayna'nın başkenti olan Kiev yakınlarında ilk Rus devletinin kurulması başta olmak üzere tarihi ve kültürel bağları sebebiyle Ukrayna, Rusya için her zaman önemli bir devlet olmuştur. Hatta Rusya, arka bahçesi olarak gördüğü Ukrayna'ya SSCB dağıldıktan sonra bile perde arkasından müdahalelerde bulunmaya devam etmiştir. Ancak iki devlet arasında konvansiyonel bir savaş başlaması oldukça riskli ve beklenmedik bir seçenek olarak görünmekteydi. Fakat görüldüğü üzere Rusya bu riski göze almış ve Ukrayna'ya askeri müdahale başlatmıştır. Müdahalenin seyri, Rusya'nın gördüğü zararlar, günümüz koşullarında konvansiyonel bir savaşın devletler için pek de efektif olmadığını göstermektedir. Çalışmanın amacı, Rusya'nın söz konusu müdahalesinin başlangıcını ve sürecin ilk iki ayını incelemektir. Çalışmanın bir diğer amacı da sadece bu krizin değil, günümüzde savaş olgusunun ve savaşın değişen unsurlarının anlatılması olacaktır.

### Araştırma Makalesi

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**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rusya, Ukrayna, Çatışma, Savaş, Konvansiyonel Savaş.

### **Introduction**

After the Cold War, the perception and practice of war in the international system has changed. In this context, it has recently turned into a relatively multipolar structure, although the system took on a unipolar structure at first, following the collapse of the USSR. The Russian Federation started to prove its authority in world politics again in the term of Vladimir Putin. Russia, one of the five permanent members of the United Nations, tried also to dominate the post-Soviet republics, which it saw as its backyard. Events that even caused conflicts in the region have not been occasional. South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Chechnya can be given as primary examples of those conflicts. As the last case of this situation, the Ukraine Crisis, which started with the Crimea and continued with the Donbas problem, came into fore.

Ukraine is clearly the most important post-Soviet region or country for Russia. Thus, the last state he would like to integrate into the West is also Ukraine. There are different reasons for this perception of Russia. First of all, the first Russian state was established in Ukraine. Besides, the ethnic background of the Ukrainians is very close to the Russians. In addition to these, the most important reason for Russia is that a considerable population of Russian origin live in the Donbas Region in the east of Ukraine. Russia, using these people as an excuse, and also knowing the economic potential of the region, is trying to detach Donbas from Ukraine. For those reasons among others, Russia started to intervene in Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

This study looks for the answers to the questions "what is the expectation of Russia from Ukraine and what does the course of the emerging crisis show?" In fact, Ukraine is a country stuck between the east and the west in every sense. There is a similar jamming within the country as well, on the both administration and people level. The approaches of the people living in the east and west of the country are diametrically opposite. Russia has tried to prevent Ukraine's every attempt to get closer to the West referring to both formal or informal ways. If Ukraine becomes a Western ally, that means Russia will be a neighbour to the EU and NATO. That is what Russia strongly opposes, because it does not want violations in its backyard. The Russian will is to keep Ukraine as a buffer zone with the West; historical memories of the Russians being a catalyser for that view. For that reason, as a reaction to the attempt of Ukraine to enter the Western axis with one-way-ticket, Russia's invasion attempt started in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and continues at full density today. This initiative of Russia will seemingly have different results in the short, medium and long terms. In the short term, the lands of Ukraine were greatly destroyed, its connection with the sea was cut and the capital Kiev was to be blocked. However, Russia faced an unexpected resistance from the Ukrainians and the international community imposed sanctions. The results will appear in the mid and long term according to the development of the occupation.

The paper, which was written within the scope of the questions mentioned above, consists of three parts: In the first chapter with the title "Historical Background to the Crisis", the importance of Ukraine for Russia first of all, and then the process leading to the crisis will be briefly told. This process will be explained starting from the 2004 Orange Revolution of Ukraine. Thus, it will be an introduction to the main part of the study. In the second part having the title "February 24, 2022: The Beginning of the Ukraine Crisis", the beginning of the crisis and early phases of the war during the first three-month period will be conveyed. Mostly citations from

the media and from the discourses of the leaders will be referred, because the concerning events are still up-to-date.

The third and final chapter, "The Reflections of the Crisis on World Politics and the Approaches of International Actors", discusses the reactions of outstanding states and some important institutions and organizations from all over the world, including Ukraine and Russia, and the actions against these reactions. In this context, the approaches of the leaders of the world's leading countries and international organizations will be quoted and a discourse analysis in this direction will make the study more understandable. Therefore, the analysis will include also to what extent the discourses and actions of the actors are compatible with each other.

### **Historical Background to the Crisis**

The position of Ukraine towards Russia has been more sensitive than that of other ex-Soviet states, since its secession from the USSR. According to the Russian side, the independence of Ukraine was a hasty decision after the collapse of the USSR. This decision will be revised and the lands called Ukraine will come again under the Russian rule, sooner or later, in that view. Being called "Little Russia" during the Tsarist Russia ages, Ukraine has always been seen as a natural part and component of the Russian lands. According to Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, Ukraine was a manifest of the falsely drawn borders during the rule of Vladimir Lenin (Bilener, 2007, p. 119). Russian President Vladimir Putin said even in 2016, "The USSR determined the borders arbitrarily and unfoundedly. For instance, they gave Donbas to Ukraine. Its reason was to increase the proportion of the working class in the country to get social support from Ukraine. This is nonsense. Do you understand? This is not a unique example, there are many more. Kharkov, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson, Nikolayev and Odessa, which were given during the tsarist period, do not belong to Ukraine." (Kurt, 2020, p. 20). A very old Russian saying supports this view: "Moscow is the heart of Russia, St-Petersburg is its head, and Kiev is its mother." (Büyükkıncı, 2004, p. 401).

The importance of Ukraine for Russia is not restricted with the period of the USSR. The first known Russian state in history was established in Kiev in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, and this led Ukraine to have an important and even sacred position on behalf of the Russians. For that reason, Ukraine is indispensable for the Russians (Tecer, 2014, p. 100). On the other hand, Ukraine is important for Russia also because of its strategic location. The largest country in the European continent in terms of land area following Russia, Ukraine functions as a bridge between the Asia and Europe and the Baltic and Black Sea lines. It is a transition or buffer zone with Europe for the Russians. Just as, the word "Ukraina" means in Russian "borderland". Besides, Ukraine is located at the very center of the Russian energy transmission lines and it increases the strategic importance of the country. Since it is the gateway to the Balkans and Central Europe, it has become an important state not only for Russia but also for the USA and West in general in the post-Cold War period. According to former American National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, Ukraine should be a member of both the EU and NATO, and in this way the union and alliance should be neighbour with Russia (Sönmez et al., 2015, p. 659).

The Crimea and the Donbas are the two regions of particular importance within the boundaries of Ukraine. The Donbas region is the eastern borderland of Ukraine with Russia. It

is economically important. The region has the 4<sup>th</sup> largest mining resources in Europe, and alone met some 20 percent of Ukraine's GNP and 25 percent of Ukraine's exports until the internal conflicts that started in 2014. The inscription at the entrance of the city Donetsk reads “Donbas is the heart of Ukraine”. As seen, it is not wrong at all. In addition, Russia recruited some of its defense industry and aviation needs from that region (Seiffert, 2014). As for the population, those with Russian origins constitute about 17 percent of the Ukrainian population. In the Donbas region, the figures become even more striking. The proportion of the Russian population in Donetsk and Luhansk, the two largest cities of the region, is about 39 percent. This makes the Donbas the region with the highest Russian population, leaving the Crimea aside (Cin & Tekin, 2021, pp. 215-232; Anon., 2022). The other region mentioned significantly is Crimea. Having about 60 percent of its population made up of Russians, Crimea was an autonomous republic of Ukraine before 2014. The current position of Crimea is highly controversial. Crimea is geopolitically very important for Russia being located on the energy corridor between Asia and Europe and in the very centre of the Black Sea. Crimea was gifted to Ukraine in 1954 by the then USSR president Nikita Khrushchev, on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Russian domination over Ukraine, and remained in Ukraine after the dissolution of the USSR. However, Russia firstly acquired a military base in the region, and then annexed it after Ukraine got close relations with the West (Baharçiçek & Ađır, 2015, pp. 32-34).

The roots of the Russian intervention in Ukraine goes back to 2013, despite that it was made on February 24, 2022. When Viktor Yanukovich, the President of Ukraine at that time, cancelled the Association Agreement that was planned to be signed with the EU, under the influence of Russia, people started protests in the streets of Ukraine, especially in Kiev. Although Yanukovich tried to solve the negative developments in the country, he had to leave the country on February 22, 2014, as a result of the increasing pressure. The transitional government, which took the administration of the country after Yanukovich, attempted to repeal the Minority Law and to give an end to the right of Russia's fleet in Crimea, and this prompted Russia to act. In this context, Russia started activities among the pro-Russians in the region to organize a referendum on the annexation of Crimea to Russia. Opposing protesters turned Crimean streets into battlefields (Bingöl, 2014, pp. 16-17; Faundes, 2016, pp. 145-147; Özdal, 2015, pp. 70-72). Then, some undefined peoples called “the Green Men” with military uniforms occupied strategic places. The Crimean Parliament announced that there would be a referendum on joining Russia on 6 March 2014, and just 10 days later, the referendum was held and 96 percent of the participants voted to join Russia. The Russian government approved this decision two days later, on 18 March 2014, and Crimea became a part of Russia (Faundes, 2016, pp. 147-148).

After the developments in Crimea, Ukraine decided to participate in a military exercise of NATO organized one month later, in accordance with the agreement signed with NATO on March 21, 2014. Russia responded with a large-scale military exercise in the city of Volgograd on April 3, 2014. Three days after that, on April 6, 2014, Russian separatists began to seize strategic points in the cities Donetsk and Luhansk, the two largest cities of the Donbas Region, and thus the internal conflict that started with the Crimea spread also to Donbas (Faundes, 2016, pp. 147-148). Ukrainian citizens did not remain passive in this situation and many people from various parts of Ukraine voluntarily came to the region and started to fight against the separatists. Under the shadow of those conflicts, the Russian separatists held referendums in the cities Donetsk and Luhansk on May 11, 2014, and established the Donetsk People's

Republic (DHC) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LHC). The two people's republics merged to form a confederal structure, Novorossiia, on May 24, 2014. Ukraine declared that it did not recognize those decisions (Uyaniker, 2018, pp. 151-152).

While the process was ongoing, an airplane of the Malaysian Airways was downed on the Donbas skies on July 17, 2014. That event drew the attention of the international community to the region. The rocket that hit the plane was a Russian-made weapon, but Russia rejected the comments that it was involved in the armed conflict (Koçak, 2015, p. 18). Following it, two weeks after that event, the first Minsk Talks started on 31 July 2014. Russia, Ukraine, DHC, LHC and OSCE participated in the talks, and the sides reached an agreement on September 5, according to which Donetsk and Luhansk would get autonomy, displaced people would return home, and the OSCE would observe the ceasefire. But the ceasefire lasted only five days (Uyaniker, 2018, p. 154). Thereupon, the second Minsk Talks started in January 2015, now including also Germany and France. Negotiations ended on February 12, 2015, and a ceasefire was declared again to be broken down within a short time. Therefore, the Minsk Meetings did not lead to a permanent solution for the crisis (Koçak, 2015, pp. 20-21).

Some states and international organizations tried for a ceasefire during 2016, however, failed to reach a concrete conclusion (Uyaniker, 2018, p. 156). The only notable case in 2017 was the exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and the separatists (Higgins, 2017). Russia announced in February 2018 that the passports of the people living in the Donbas Region would be valid in Russia. Following that decision, some 600,000 people from the region received Russian passports, but Ukraine protested that decision and started to apply harsher policies towards Russia (Yavuz, 2021). The leader of the DHC, Aleksandr Zakharchenko died after an assassination on August 31, 2018, and this event further strained the relations between Ukraine and the separatist regions (Troianovski, 2018).

The Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky announced on October 1, 2019, that they agreed on a ceasefire and peace with the separatist regions. According to the approach called the "Steinmeier Formula" by Zelensky, the Donbas Region would get autonomy and thus it would be prevented for the region to separate completely separated from the state. However, Zelensky could not derive enough support from the government and Ukrainian nationalists started protesting, thus the formula was abandoned (Center, 2019). The year 2020 passed with no developments other than the usual declarations of ceasefires and their violations (Vakulina, 2020). Russia started a military build-up on the Ukrainian border in March and April 2021. It was the biggest military action of Russia towards Ukraine since the 2014 Crimean Operation (Roth, 2021; JANES, 2021). Thus, from April 2014 by the end of 2021, more than 14,000 people was killed during the struggle and more than 1,600,000 people were displaced (Temnycky, 2021).

As known well, Ukraine is a very important country for Russia. There are both historical and economic grounds for that view. Referring to the Ukrainian efforts to get closer to the West as a pretext, Russia annexed Crimea firstly and after that attempted to make use of the conflicts in the Donbas Region. Ukraine, in response to it, started to behave more harshly especially in regard to Russia that did not respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and that supported the separatists unofficially during the conflict.

### **February 24, 2022: The Beginning of the Ukrainian Crisis**

The footsteps of the upcoming intervention of Russia in Ukraine were felt in advance. Russia announced on February 21, 2022, that it recognised the DHC and LHC, and the next day the Russian Parliament gave the Russian army the authority to operate abroad. Ukraine declared a nationwide state of emergency on February 23. And one day later, on February 24, 2022, Russia started to attack as expected. Thereupon, the Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky declared a national mobilization. On the other hand, many states and international organizations, primarily the USA, made statements and decided to impose sanctions against Russia after the intervention. In this part of the study, we will mention only the intervention process, and the reactions and sanctions will be discussed in the next part. 50,000 Ukrainians left the country within one day after the intervention, and Russian troops marched to surround Kiev. Thus, a curfew was declared in Kiev on February 26. Zelensky called the people to join the resistance by sharing videos with his ministers on the streets of Kiev. The Russian army increased its military operations specially around the major cities Kiev, Kharkiv and Kherson, but encountered a strong resistance and started to lose personnel and equipment. Besides, Zelensky stated that Russia was targeting Ukrainian civilians as a planned act. The Russian authorities flatly rejected this claim. Representatives of Russia and Ukraine came together for the first time on the Belarusian border, but the negotiations lasting about five hours did not yield any results (Psaropoulos, 2022i).

A large Russian military convoy was seen 65 km outside the city centre of Kiev on March 1. This was actually to be a message to Ukraine and Europe by Russia. After the news about the convoy, Ukrainian civilians started to set up barricades around Kiev with sandbags. The Russian army entered the coastal city Kherson in the south of Ukraine on March 2, and the strategic port city Mariupol was surrounded by the Russian army. The next day, the second serial of the talks between the warring sides started in the Belarussian border city Brest. The only concrete and positive result of the talks was the decision to open a humanitarian corridor for the evacuation of civilians. The Russian army captured on March 4 the Zaporizhia Nuclear Power Plant, the largest nuclear power plant in Europe, and the city Enerhodar. In spite of some fear and anxiety due to the conflict, there happened no problem in the nuclear context. In the following days, Russia created problems during the evacuation of civilians, especially in the city Mariupol, and the evacuation process was delayed. The Red Cross explained that the humanitarian situation in the city was terrible. On the other hand, Zelensky demanded from the international community that Ukraine be declared a "no-fly zone" to stop the Russian air attacks, but did not receive a positive result. Russia stated on March 7 that it would permit the civilians wishing to abandon Ukraine only if they transit through Belarus or Russia. On the same day, the Ukrainian representative Mykhailo Podolyak announced that no conclusion could be reached in the 3rd round of negotiations, which started likewise in Brest, as in the second. As of March 8, more than two million Ukrainians left the country. On March 9, some images were shared showing that the Russian army bombed a children hospital in Mariupol, and it further increased the international public's reaction against Russia (Psaropoulos, 2022; Aliyev, 2022).

Russia and Ukraine came together in Antalya on March 10, 2022, now under the mediation of Turkey, but this meeting also did not yield any results. The Ukrainian side accused Russia of not agreeing to an agreement (BBC, 2022a). In the next day, Russian President Vladimir Putin explained that he had approved the coming of approximately 16,000 people from the Middle East wishing voluntarily to Ukraine to fight (Euronews, 2022b). As of March 13, Russia

expanded its attacks towards the Polish border of Ukraine. Thus, a military base in the city Yavoriv and the airport in the city Ivano-Frankivsk were bombed. Zelensky described this day as a "black day" and repeated his call for the issue of the no-fly zone. The Chechen leader Ramazan Kadyrov announced on March 14 that they were involved in the war on the Russian side (Psaropoulos, 2022k). The Russian army struck an aircraft repairing facility near the Lviv Airport on March 18 to harm the route to Poland for people leaving Ukraine. According to the UN, 10 million Ukrainians were displaced and approximately 3.5 million people left the country as of 22 March. According to NATO, approximately 15,000 Russian soldiers were killed in the region as of March 24 (Bloomberg, 2022a).

The Russian Ministry of Defense stated on March 25 that their priority targets were the cities Donetsk and Luhansk, and that they had then controlled half of Donetsk and almost all of Luhansk. Zelensky explained in his first speech to the Russian media on March 27 that they could make some concessions from the Donbas Region for the sake of peace. On the other hand, in his statements to the Ukrainian people he contradicted himself, because he said no concessions would be made on the territory of Ukraine. The Mariupol Municipality stated on 28 March that 90 percent of the city was damaged and 40 percent was destroyed due to Russian attacks. Russian and Ukrainian representatives met again in Türkiye, this time in Istanbul, on March 29. Russia agreed during the meeting that it would greatly reduce its operations around Kiev and Chernihiv, and as a gesture, Ukraine stated that it would abandon its EU and NATO membership and remain neutral. However, the Russian army continued bombing around Kiev and Chernihiv on the next day, proving that the promises in the negotiations were in vain (Psaropoulos, 2022g). On March 31, two Ukrainian warplanes attacked the oil depot in the Russian border city Belgorod (UAV, 2022). The same day, the Ukrainian army seized the control of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, which was in the hands of the Russian army (BBC, 2022e).

Some war crimes of the Russian side were recorded in the succeeding days. Hundreds of bodies in civil clothes were found in the town of Bucha to the northwest of Kiev in April 2. It was recorded as a massacre by the Russian army against Ukrainian civilians. The event was described as "genocide" in the world press; the possibility of execution was great because many of the victims were tied (Hürriyet, 2022a). On April 3, Human Rights Watch explained more of them with documents stating that the Russian army committed war crimes in the cities Kiev, Kharkiv and Chernihiv. Reuters reporters also found a 15-metre-long ditch near St. Andrew's Church in the town Bucha that was allegedly used as a mass grave. Another mass grave full of corpses was found in another place in the same town. On April 5, Al Jazeera published interviews with Bucha residents telling about their torture and persecution by Russian soldiers (Psaropoulos, 2022j). The Russian rockets targeted the train station of the Kramatorsk city on April 7, 2022. According to the Ukrainian State Railways Company, more than 30 people were killed and more than 100 people were injured (Haber, 2022). Therefore, international support to Ukraine increased. The British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Austrian Prime Minister Karl Nehammer visited Zelensky in Kiev on April 9 and expressed their support for the country (Star, 2022) (Sözcü, 2022).

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov told on 13 April that the US and NATO convoys taking weapons to Ukraine were "legitimate military targets" for them and increased the tension (Chirciu, 2022). On the same day, the presidents of Poland, Latvia, Estonia and

Lithuania were visiting Zelensky in Kiev to express their support for Ukraine (Abdulkerimov, 2022b). The next day, Ukrainian authorities announced that they had sunk the cruiser ship "Moscow" of the Russian navy. Russia responded it by claiming that the ammunition in the ship exploded as a result of the fire and the ship was heavily damaged for that reason (Cura, 2022b). A cargo plane carrying military ammunition to Ukraine was shot down in the air by the Russians on April 16, 2022, according to the spokesperson of the Russian Ministry of Defense Igor Konashenkov (Hürriyet, 2022b). The Russian army launched two days later the largest attack since the beginning of the crisis to take full control of Donbas. According to Ukrainian sources, the Russian army did not succeed, except for capturing a few towns (Psaropoulos, 2022f).

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), more than seven million Ukrainians had been displaced and more than five million Ukrainians had become refugees after two months passed since the beginning of the crisis. On April 21 the American satellite company Maxar announced the identification of a mass grave in the city Mariupol containing about 200 graves. Russia did not respond to the claims of the Ukrainian authorities accusing Russia of burying the civilians killed in the region in such mass graves (Cumhuriyet, 2022; Psaropoulos, 2022h). Rustam Minnekayev, Deputy Commander of Russia's Central Military District, told that Russia's then aim was to take complete control of the Donbas region and the south of Ukraine, and thus to set up a land connection between Russia and the Transnistria region, an autonomous region of Moldova (BBC in Turkish, 2022b).

Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Oleksiy Arestovych claimed on May 1 that the Russian Chief of General Staff Valeri Gerasimov might have died after a rocket attack of the Ukrainian army in the Donbas city Iziium. According to the American press, Gerasimov escaped from the attack narrowly, which later proved to be true (Psaropoulos, 2022b). The Ukrainian army advanced in the northern part of Kharkiv and expelled the Russian army from that part on May 4 (CNN, 2022b). In the next day, Reuters explained the identity of some of those responsible for the massacre in Bucha committed against the civilians. It was the most striking thing that the 76th Air Assault Division under the personal command of the Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu was also an actor in the events. Ukrainian forces took back a further part of Kharkiv on May 6, 2022. After the successes on the battlefield, Ukraine put the conditions the withdrawal of Russian forces to the borders before February 24, the return of refugees and acceptance of its EU membership, in order to negotiate with the Russians (Psaropoulos, 2022c).

Ukraine announced that 750 saboteurs were arrested as of 12 May, and the cost of the war reached 8.3 billion dollars. A Russian was killed for the first time in Russian territory after an Ukrainian attack near the village of Solokhi in Belgorod on May 12 (Psaropoulos, 2022d). On 16 May, the Ukrainian army expelled the Russian army totally from Kharkiv and reached the Russian border about 50 km distant from the city (BBC in Turkish, 2022a). The Russian army replied it by heavily bombing the cities Kharkiv, Sumy and Chernigiv on 19 May and 20 May. On the other hand, the Russians captured the Azovstal factory in Mariupol, which was under blockade for a long time, and thus the entire city Mariupol fell into the control of the Russians. The next day, the Russian army started an attack to seize the parts of the Luhansk region that were under Ukrainian control, but the operation was not successful (Cura, 2022a; Psaropoulos, 2022e). In any case, Russian sources announced on 23 May that the Russian army controlled 95 percent of the city. However, atmosphere at the negotiation table started to change, and Russia became more willing to meet. Ukraine, on the other hand, declared that it would not



agree to a ceasefire or any concession over territories. It was the same day, when the Polish President Andrzej Duda became the first foreign leader to visit Ukraine and to address the Ukrainian Parliament since the beginning of the crisis. Zelensky awarded also the southeast Polish city Rzeszów with the title "Saviour City" for the assistance and hospitality there to Ukrainian refugees (Al Jazeera, 2022j). Another 'first' development that happened on the same day was the first trial of war crimes in Ukraine since the beginning of the intervention. The court judged the Russian soldier Vadim Shimarin for killing a 62-year-old Ukrainian called Aleksandr Shepilov in Sumi and sentenced him to life imprisonment (Abdulkerimov, 2022a).

A Russian representative from Zaporizhia, another important city in the east of Ukraine, announced on 26 May that the access of Ukraine to the Sea of Azov was cut off completely by the Russian army. Vladimir Putin announced on the same day that he had signed a decree easing the formal procedures to obtain Russian citizenship and passports for the people living in the Ukrainian cities Kherson and Zaporizhia. Ukraine reacted severely for the main purpose of this decree as it was thought was to Russify the region (Al Jazeera, 2022k). Oleksandr Stryuk, the Mayor of Severodonetsk, an important city of the Donbas region, said that more than 60 percent of the buildings in the city were destroyed, 1,500 people died and 13,000 people were stranded (Al Jazeera, 2022l).

### **Reflections of the Crisis on the World Politics and International Reactions**

There were naturally various reactions to the crisis, which started with Russia's intervention in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, from various countries and organisations. The US-controlled VEB and PSB banks and their 42 affiliates were blocked two days before the onset of the crisis, on February 22, 2022, aiming at reducing financial capability of Russia. Besides, the US assets of the oligarchs known to be close to the Russian President Putin were confiscated. Preparations of Russia for a military intervention against Ukraine were the reason for these measures, and the USA was justified within a few days (NBC News, 2022a). Germany suspended on the same day the certification process of the Nord Stream 2 Pipeline, which was to transport natural gas to Germany from Russia (Marsh & Chambers, 2022). The UN was also aware of the developments and the UN Secretary General Antonio Gutierrez stated one day before the intervention began, that is, on February 23, 2022, at the UN General Assembly that the world was facing a serious danger due to the upcoming crisis (UN, 2022a; European Commission, 2022a).

It seems the US was ready for the Russian intervention, and removed five more Russian banks from its financial system. Of them, all assets of the four were frozen. Among those five banks, only SBERBANK's assets were excluded (US. Dep. of Treasury, 2022b). The next day, the EU decided to impose sanctions, which included also freezing of assets of all Russian parliament members, including Putin and Lavrov (European Council, 2022a). Ursula von der Leyen, the President of the European Commission, announced on February 27, 2022, that the EU airspace would be closed to Russian planes and some Russian media institutions would be prohibited working in the EU borders. In addition, Russian banks would be removed from the SWIFT system. BP, one of the world's largest oil companies, declared on the same day that it would sell its shares, approximately 20 percent, in Rosneft, one of the Russian oil companies (European Commission, 2022c; Reuters, 2022a). Another great oil company Shell, one of the world's largest oil companies, joined the process on the next day by withdrawing from the joint projects

with GAZPROM. It was the same day that Ukraine officially applied to join the EU (Times of Israel, 2022a; Reuters, 2022i; Journal, 2022).

US President Joe Biden said on the first day of March that the US airspace had been closed to Russian aircrafts (AA, 2022a). The UN General Assembly declared a decision on March 2, 2022, to condemn Russia for its intervention in Ukraine. On the other hand, the US established a task force called "Klepto Capture" in order to implement the sanctions against Russia in a better way (UN News, 2022a; Al Jazeera, 2022p). The French President Emmanuel Macron spoke with the Russian President Putin on the phone on March 3, during which Putin expressed that Russia would resolutely continue operation. After the phone meeting, Macron said that the goal of Russia was to invade Ukraine completely. The International Energy Agency explained on the same day a 10-item plan to save the European continent from dependence on Russian natural gas (AA, 2022c; IEA, 2022). Many international broadcasting companies, especially CNN and BBC, terminated their activities in Russia as for March 4, 2022, (News, 2022). Zelensky addressed the US Congress in the next day and stated that the sanctions against Russia should continue and increase in many areas. The Russian airline company Aeroflot decided to cancel all international flights, except Belarus, as of 8 March, fearing from seizure of their aircraft (BBC, 2022f; Al Jazeera, 2022a). Russian replied to those implementations by warning that, in the words of the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Alexander Novak, the oil prices per barrel could rise up to 300 USD, if the sanctions against Russia increase (AA, 2022b).

The US replied to it by officially stopping oil, natural gas and coal imports from Russia on March 10, and the US Congress approved on the same day a decision to send 13.6 Billion USD Ukraine (Al Jazeera, 2022o; CNN, 2022a). The EU reached a consensus on the crisis and published the Versailles Declaration on the next day. All member states supported it, and they agreed that common measures would be taken as long as the crisis continues (European Council, 2022b). A few days later, the EU explained, under the leadership of term president France, a new sanctions package against Russia (Reuters, 2022b). On March 15, 2022, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala and Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa went to Ukraine by train. They met with Zelensky and expressed their support for Ukraine (Al Jazeera, 2022f). Meanwhile, there were many opposing voices in Russia criticising the intervention. Putin targeted in a speech of him those people who objected and opposed the intervention, and said they people should be purged on behalf of Russia. It was a heavy warning. The US President Biden warned the Chinese President Xi Jinping on March 18, 2022 not to support Russia, and clearly threatened by saying that bad results could occur for China (Psaropoulos, 2022a).

Representatives of the NATO members gathered in Brussels on March 24 and declared that the support for Ukraine would continue so that it can defend itself. The UN General Assembly called Russia on the same day to help open a humanitarian corridor in Ukraine and to permit that humanitarian aid should be delivered to the surrounded regions of Ukraine (NATO, 2022; UN, 2022b). The White House claimed in a statement on March 31 that Putin was misled by his advisers. The advisers were afraid to tell Putin about the truth, as alleged. On the other hand, Putin took a step forward on the same day, and conditioned that the states imposing sanctions on Russia would pay at least one-third of the natural gas payments to Russia would be taken Roubles (BBC, 2022b; Al Jazeera, 2022m; Race, 2022).

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The president of the European Council Charles Michel and the president of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen met with the Chinese prime minister Li Keqiang at the virtual summit held on April 1, 2022. There, the European authorities warned China not to violate the sanctions against Russia. Keqiang explained, on the other hand, that they would support the solutions for the crisis, but in their own way. While the European-Chinese negotiations were going on, on the same day, the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an interesting statement that invites Russian diplomats to seek asylum. In that document, diplomats were requested to leave Russia for the sake of humanitarian values (Europe R.F., 2022a; DW, 2022a). The US President Joe Biden stated on the next day, on April 4, 2022, that Putin should be judged as a war criminal for the civilian deaths in the Ukrainian town Bucha. The Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov rejected the war crime allegations, saying that the evidence of the events in Bucha was false (NBC News, 2022b; CBC, 2022).

The US President Joe Biden announced on April 6 that a new package of sanctions was brought due to the continuation of the Russian intervention in Ukraine. Even the daughters of Putin were affected by this package that prohibited US citizens from making investment and import into Russia (U.S. Dep. of Treasury, 2022a; Reuters, 2022e). On those days, while Hungary was becoming the first EU country to accept the payment in rubles for Russian gas, the Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg announced that Sweden and Finland were willing to join NATO (NDTV, 2022; AP News, 2022a). Foreign ministers of the NATO member countries met in Brussels on April 7, 2022. The Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was also invited to the meeting, where he said that Ukraine needed more weapons "within days, not weeks" to resist Russia. The UN General Assembly Human Rights Council voted to suspend Russia's membership on the same day (Bloomberg, 2022b; UN News, 2022b). On the next day, the EU banned the import of Russian coal referring to the events in the town of Bucha. This meant for Russia a loss of approximately 4 Billion Euros per annum (Al Jazeera, 2022c).

European governments continued to show their support for Ukraine with utmost level diplomatic visits. The British Prime Minister Boris Johnson and Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer went to Ukraine on April 9, 2022. Johnson explained there that they would help Ukraine in military means by sending anti-ship missiles and armored vehicles. A donation campaign organized by Canada and the EU ended in the collection of 11 Billion USD. That money would be used for the Ukrainians leaving their country (BBC, 2022d; Website, 2022; Azernews, 2022). The sequences of support for military issues continued with the American explanation on April 13, according to which the USA would provide 800 million USD worth of new military equipment to Ukraine (Europe R.F., 2022b). From tither on, the Russian diplomacy started to use a harsher language, and Dmitry Medvedev, the former Russian President and one of Vladimir Putin's close allies, threatened Europe on April 14, 2022 by saying that if Sweden and Finland joined NATO, Russia could deploy nuclear missiles in Kaliningrad, a Russian enclave in the south of the Baltic (Guardian, 2022).

The German Chancellor Olaf Scholz explained his hesitance about military aid in an interview with Der Spiegel newspaper on 22 April, underlining that in the case of a possible NATO intervention in Ukraine, such a result as that could even lead to a nuclear war was possible. The US continued, however, its military aid, and the Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced that a new military aid of 322 million USD would be sent to Ukraine (International, 2022; Al Jazeera, 2022b). Vladimir Putin declared that

he would end gas transfers to Poland and Bulgaria, because they rejected pay in Rubles for the Russian gas (BBC, 2022c). The Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, on the other hand, said in an interview with the Chinese official news agency Xinhua on April 30 that weapon transfers to Ukraine should be stopped immediately, targeting the USA and NATO (Al Jazeera, 2022h).

The Ukrainian crisis has affected the NATO and EU processes as well. The Swedish Foreign Minister Ann Linde said on the first day of May that their neighbor Finland would apply to the NATO membership in the near future, and that they would do the same procedure in the case of membership (DW, 2022b; Reuters, 2022d). On the EU front, there were problems. The Hungarian Secretary General for International Communication Zoltán Kovács said on May 2 that they could not support the EU sanctions against Russia, because they were largely dependent on the Russian oil and gas (Today, 2022). The Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi replied to him in his speech at the European Parliament on May 3, 2022, and targeted Hungary. He suggested that decisions about sanctions should be taken in accordance with a majority-based system that would override the veto. Besides, Draghi said that not only the newly applying Ukraine, but also Albania and North Macedonia, which had previously applied but which were rejected, should be taken into the EU (Al Jazeera, 2022n). The European Commission President von der Leyen stated on May 4, 2022, that Sberbank, Credit Bank of Moscow and the Russian Agricultural Bank, being of the largest banks in Russia, should be removed from SWIFT, and that this would have a heavier economic impact on Russia compared to the previous measures (European Commission, 2022b).

Hungary was warned, together with Slovakia and Czechia, by the European Commission on May 6, 2022, over that they should give an end purchasing Russian oil by the end of 2024 (Reuters, 2022h). Meanwhile the EU continued financial aid to Ukraine. On May 13, 2022, the EU High Representative Josep Borrell explained that an additional 500 million Euros of military aid would be given to Ukraine to be spent for weapons and ammunition (Reuters, 2022c). The Russian President Putin, on the other hand, continued his threats. He said on May 9, in his Victory Day speech, that the Russian intervention in Ukraine was inevitable and that it was to be considered as a preventive war strategy. According to Putin, Russia would face a similar intervention of the West under the leadership of NATO, if Russia had not acted quickly in Ukraine (Post, 2022). A few days later, Putin implicitly threatened Finland, its northwest neighbor, underlining that a possible participation of that country in NATO would be a great mistake and mutual relations would be damaged (Reuters, 2022f). However, two days later, on May 16, Putin softened the heavy language he utilised and said that they would not object to the membership of Finland and Sweden in NATO as long as they did not open their territories to NATO (Times, 2022).

The former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder resigned from the Russian oil company Rosneft as a result of pressures. Besides, he announced that he had rejected the proposal of a board position from Gazprom, another Russian oil company, for the same reasons (Euronews, 2022a). The Ukrainian President Zelensky interactively participated at the World Economic Forum in Davos on May 23, and said that the sanctions against Russia should be tougher (Times, 2022). One day after it, he explained the priority of the Ukrainian government as the rescue of Ukrainian prisoners of war. As if replying to Zelensky, the President of South Africa Cyril Ramaphosa complained in the same day at the press conference held together with

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the German Chancellor, who visited him, that the sanctions against Russia harmed also the third countries (AA, 2022d; VOA, 2022). It was interesting that the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban declared a state of emergency in his country on May 25, 2022, and explained its reason clearly as that Russia was a constant threat (DW, 2022c; UATV, 2022).

The idea pronounced in the West under the leadership of Henry Kissinger that some parts of the lands of Ukraine should be left to Russia, if necessary, was severely rejected by Zelensky on May 26, 2022. Zelensky added that visa-free travels to Ukraine of Russian citizens should be restricted, because of the border security concerns (CNBC, 2022; Reuters, 2022g). Again, Zelensky openly stated on May 28 that their resistance would continue and the Donbas region would remain within Ukraine. The US continued blaming Russia on diplomatic means. Biden claimed that the Russian army was destroying Ukrainian culture by bombing schools, hospitals and museums in Ukrainian territories (DW, 2022d; AP News, 2022b). International support to Ukraine continued with the visit of the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin on May 27. It was significant since Finland has become almost a part of the Ukrainian crisis in overall sense. On the same day Putin said that it was unrealistic to isolate Russia by means of sanctions, and the states and organizations implementing the sanctions would harm firstly themselves and then the world (Al Jazeera, 2022g; The Times of Israel, 2022b; Interest, 2022).

Olga Stefanishnaya, the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine, claimed on May 29, 2022, that the Western camp did not behave as a single body during the crisis and did not support Ukraine enough (Review, 2022). The French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz came together on the same day to negotiate the Ukrainian crisis. They had a phone call with the Russian President Vladimir Putin, and wanted the release of the Ukrainians captured by the Russian army at the Azovstal Factory in Mariupol. Putin replied to them stating that the military aid to Ukraine should be stopped, otherwise the crisis would turn to be more dangerous (Al Jazeera, 2022d; Al Jazeera, 2022i). The French government, however, was keen to show its support to Ukraine; it was only the next day, on May 30, that the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Catherine Colonna visited Ukraine (AA, 2022e). Likewise, the President of the European Council Charles Michel stated on May 31, 2022, that the EU countries would cut 90 percent of their oil exports from Russia by the end of 2022, and this situation would make a great impact on Russia. The EU member countries collected and donated 9 Billion Euros to Ukraine on the same day in order to spend for salaries etc. (Business, 2022; News, 2022). Again, the same day, Lithuanian citizens collected about five million USD and sent it to Ukraine to show their support. It was to spend in the military field (Al Jazeera, 2022e).

### **Conclusion**

Ukraine, being a bridge between Russia and the West, is a state facing dilemmas in many fields since its independence. It acted closely and together with Russia especially in the first years of the separation from the USSR, but then started to turn its face gradually towards the West after the 2000s. Russia reacted to this situation at certain levels at the beginning of the process, however, increased the dose of its reaction as the severity of the situation increased in the course of time. For Russia, Ukraine is a country that cannot be accepted to join the Western camp. It has a vital significance for Russia in terms of history and economy. The establishment of the first Rus' state on the territory of modern Ukraine, the Russian domination over the Ukrainian lands for many centuries, the fact that Ukrainians and Russians descends from the

same race, and that it is valuable for Russia today in political and economic sense, has made Ukraine indispensable for Russia. This is indeed the answer to some of the hypothesis created in this study in response to the research question.

Russia seriously warned Ukraine about the movement to get closer to the West, which started with the Orange Revolution, but the Ukrainians did not take them into account. Subsequently, internal turmoil broke out in Crimea in 2014, and then a disputed election was held in the region, according to which the electoral majority decided to join Russia. Russia immediately approved this decision and annexed Crimea. Just after that, the events spread to the Donbas region. The turmoil in the region continued until February 22, 2022. From then on, the events evolved to a different point, since Russia started an invasion movement in the territories of Ukraine. It is still ongoing. Russia has been abundantly condemned and subjected to some sanctions throughout the process, while Ukraine has received support from around the world. However, the support given due to the Russian threat has not gone beyond a certain level, because Russia declared that it considers military aid to Ukraine as a threat. For that reason, Ukraine has often repeated that it was grateful for the international support, but it was not enough. As for today, the crisis continues without a solution, albeit there are ceasefire and peace talks. It would not be appropriate to hope for a solution in the short run due to the attitudes of the parties. The only reality that appeared in the short term remains still as the destruction and losses suffered by the parties, mostly Ukraine. The course of the development of the Russian occupation will show, it seems, different results in the mid and long term. This situation constitutes the other part of the hypothesis formed in this study in response to the research question.

Russia as the patron did not leave the Eurasian geography to its own fate, and established close relations with almost all ex-Soviet states. Ukraine is the most critical of them for Russia. Russia has never wanted Ukraine to get out of its area of influence and has acted always in that direction. The attempt of invasion is indeed the latest example of this behaviour. On the other hand, it should be seriously questioned on behalf of the world public opinion that a sovereign state faces such an intervention in the 21st century. Whatever the case and situation, it is necessary to take measures so that no reason should result in extending to an invasion attempt. Otherwise, it is clear that it is by no means possible to warrant that what happened to Ukraine will not happen to another country in the future.

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#### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Ukraine has always been an important state for Russia, as the first Russian state was established near Kyiv, the capital city of Ukraine today. Russia's ties with Ukraine continued to exist even after the USSR collapsed. Russia thought that it had the right to speak on Ukraine and showed this in some areas. For example, even the governments that came to power as a result of the elections in Ukraine came to the agenda with their closeness to Russia and generally followed Russia-oriented policies. President Viktor Yanukovich, who came to power in 2010, could not get out of Russia's axis and gave up on signing the Association Agreement, which would bring his country closer to the EU. This situation caused a great disappointment in the eyes of the public and people started to show their reactions by protesting in the streets. Yanukovich resigned in February 2014 as a result of increasing protests. However, the policies followed by the transitional government that replaced it did not please Russia.

Increasing protests across Ukraine and the government's inability to control this situation caused Russia to harden its attitude towards Ukraine. We see that this process first started in Crimea. As a result of the protests that started in the aforementioned region and received the support of Russia, Crimea declared that it was connected to Russia with the referendum held in the region. In the Donbas region, east of Ukraine, on the border with Russia, conflicts started right after this incident. The separatists in the region have started to express their desire to join Russia. However, the process in Donbass did not progress as fast as in Crimea and the region was shaken by civil war until February 2022. Although Russia has denied its influence in the Donbas from the very beginning, the fact that it started a military operation against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, revealed the existence of the opposite situation. Russia, which started the military operation very quickly, could not advance as fast as it wanted and encountered resistance from the other side. While the intervention was continuing, Russia faced the reaction of the world public opinion and the world states introduced some sanctions against Russia. While these sanctions put Russia in economic difficulties, the image of the state in question began to be shaken. While Russia was struggling with economic and social reactions, Ukraine

started to receive material and moral support from almost the whole world. Many world leaders have visited Ukraine, both showing their support to Ukraine and in a sense intimidating Russia.

In the process to these days, the intervention has left behind four months and is still continuing. Russia asked Ukraine to guarantee that it would not join the EU and NATO during the peace talks. This situation actually reveals Russia's view of Ukraine and the West, as explained in the study. No matter what happens, Russia does not want the Western powers to come to its borders and is even willing to fight to prevent this. Ukraine, on the other hand, wants Russia to withdraw completely from its territory and to be independent in every sense. As can be seen, the demands and interests of the two sides conflict. Russia, which is a stronger state, does not seem to make any concessions on its demands with the effect of this power. However, how long Ukraine, which has more limited resources and power compared to Russia, can resist will determine whether the intervention will continue. The continuation of international aid to Ukraine and Ukraine's active resistance show that the intervention is unlikely to stop in the short term.