

3. The Ukraine conflict and its implications

Overview

Europe has invested heavily over several decades in developing a framework of rules, procedures and institutions for conflict prevention and crisis management. In 2014 the rapid downward spiral from political crisis to armed conflict in Ukraine was evidence that the arrangements remain inadequate to the challenge. The incorporation of Crimea into Russia without the consent of the Ukrainian authorities was a major challenge to the European security order.

By the end of 2014, conservative estimates suggested that at least 4364 people had been killed in the conflict, and that there were approximately 500 000 internally displaced persons in Ukraine. By the beginning of 2015, there were still no prospects of a lasting settlement to the conflict.

Diplomatic efforts facilitated face-to-face contact between key parties, including talks between Russia and Ukraine, and between the Ukrainian Government and representatives of armed groups active in the eastern part of the country. The priority for diplomatic efforts was to bring about a ceasefire and create the conditions for a more sustainable resolution to the conflict.

Confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) played a role in improving the amount and quality of information about events on the ground. However, CSBMs did not significantly reduce levels of tension in the eastern part of Ukraine, raising questions about their applicability in situations of crisis and conflict.

External reaction to the conflict included the coordinated use of sanctions by the Group of Seven industrialized countries and the European Union (EU), supported by countries such as Australia and Switzerland.

European security institutions—the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)—agreed measures to help Ukraine better provide for its security. However, in 2014 the common assistance packages stopped short of providing direct support to the Ukrainian armed forces in their mission to restore control over the eastern part of the country. Individual states did nevertheless provide such support on a national basis and internal deliberations over the nature of future support continued at the end of the year.

The conflict in Ukraine may be the catalyst for an increase in military spending in Europe. Russia has been increasing military spending in real terms for several years, and plans to continue to do so. The impact of the conflict is already apparent in Ukraine, which is increasing its military spending significantly. While military spending levels for 2015 were set before NATO

heads of state and government met at their 2014 summit in Newport, Wales, the defence investment pledge made at that meeting could translate into increases after 2016.

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