

The West must outline its own long-term vision for the future of Ukraine

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13/03/2015

According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, violence in eastern Ukraine has eased to some extent in recent weeks, but there remains no lasting solution to the conflict.

Marc P. Berenson writes that while much of the discussion surrounding the Ukraine crisis has focused on Russia's ambitions in the country, there has been no clear vision displayed by the other actors involved. He argues that more dialogue between Russia and NATO, greater dialogue between actors within Ukraine, and policies aimed at restoring the trust of Ukrainians in domestic institutions are all required to reach a sustainable peace.



In the aftermath of Russia's annexation of Crimea and the eruption of war in eastern Ukraine, much has been made as to what Russian President Vladimir Putin's vision of a future Ukraine actually is and how far his aspirations go. But, while Russophiles and Russophobes debate what Putin's true ambitions are, there is a lack of an expressed vision from the other players involved in the current crisis.

Namely, there is a need for a greater dialogue within the West over the vision for a long-term transatlantic peace, incorporating eastern Europe; a need for a larger dialogue within Ukraine itself regarding the long-term nature of its future; and a need for a major effort to be launched to rebuild the enormous, long-standing distrust on the part of Ukrainian society in the state itself.

Russia-NATO cooperation

First, Putin has professed the underlying cause for the current crisis to be the expansion of NATO to the East, beginning in 1999, which in great part has led to the rise of an intensified anti-West – and especially anti-American – outlook among Russians. Some in the West have concurred with Putin's expressed analysis regarding the dynamics of eastern European stability even though NATO has insisted that the expansion to the East was not anti-Russian and even though there once was a more vigorous and sincere debate as to whether Russia should be invited to join the alliance.

At present, what is missing from the current discussion as to whether NATO "surrounded" Russia, though, is a more public discussion on what NATO's intentions really were toward Russia in the 1990s and early 2000s, as well as a more clarified and persistent expression as to how, in the long run, NATO could work together with Russia to establish a greater transatlantic peace. Of course, the prospects of such a vision coming together in the near to mid-term are bleak and should be contingent on several things forthcoming from Russia.

Likewise, the West would be wise to prepare contingency plans for arming Ukraine as deterrence against further aggression, even while simultaneously putting such plans on hold while a relative peace exists in the Donbas. Nevertheless, global leaders' expressing the vision as to what NATO could offer Russia in the long-term would counter the rhetoric coming from Moscow and could make some in-roads with the Russian people who currently view the West as a black-and-white "boogeyman" seeking to undermine their country. The world deserves to hear a greater articulation as to how Russia and NATO could work together for the long haul.

The future of Ukraine

Second, there needs to be an enlarged, spirited intellectual and political debate over the future of Ukraine – not just regarding its independence, but as to what type of state and what type of society should develop there. Admittedly,

most of the conversation recently has been about the war in the East, whether and how the state should be decentralised and the desired return of Crimea.

But, as Tymofei Mylovanov, an Associate Professor of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh, said at a recent LSE event, there has been little intellectual debate among prominent civil society members with respect to where Ukraine is going and how the old regime's void should be filled. Ukraine needs a much more vibrant debate regarding its future direction, what type of democracy should develop and how the society should interact with the state.

The need to build trust within Ukraine

Finally, there has been much – and perhaps, surprising – consensus within Ukraine and its parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*, regarding the need to push further with reforms, as well as lively discussion as to whether the Yanukovych-era elites should be allowed to work for the state. However, both within the parliament as well as within society at large, there has been less of a discussion as to how the state institutions, agencies and bureaucracies – the real guts and heart of the state apparatuses that sit below the elites and interact at the street-level with citizens – should be reformed and made less corrupt. And it is exactly regarding this level of the state that politicians and civil society advocates should express their vision for the future.

At the heart of the governance crisis in Ukraine has been extraordinarily long-term low levels of trust on the part of Ukrainians in their state. In 2005, 2010 and 2012, I surveyed the Ukrainian population together with the Razumkov Centre for Economic and Political Studies. Ukrainians do not believe that they get much from their state. Across these years, only some 9 to 12 per cent of Ukrainians felt that the state fulfils its obligations to its citizens, and similarly only 9 to 10 per cent of Ukrainians agreed that their state can be trusted to do what is right. Hence, as trust in the state involves both a material trust that the state will continue to provide goods and services as well as a moral trust that the state will treat its citizens fairly, Ukrainians have been stating flatly that they cannot trust their state to do either.

This lack of trust as well as a lack of fear in the state has also accounted for far lower support among Ukrainians for paying taxes than their neighbours in either Poland or in Russia. My own research, based on my survey work from 2005 and 2010, has shown not only that the Polish polity is far more willing and compliant in its attitude toward paying taxes than the Russian and Ukrainian polities. I also found that Russians respond to their state with greater fear of deterrence while Ukrainians, showing the lowest levels of support for obeying the law, react to state efforts to increase tax compliance with less fear and little trust.

The country's tax administration, which saw its chief and two of its deputy chiefs suspended by Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk in late February over allegations of financial corruption, was exposed after the EuroMaidan Revolution for its employees' corrupt practices, efforts to obtain bribes especially through VAT refund schemes and, among other things, as shown on CNN, for its glittering and golden spa rooms, salt therapy room and cryonic saunas, as well as its special interrogation facilities hidden deep inside its main Kyiv headquarters.

The public's and the government's desire to reform the tax administration – which lies at the heart of the state's relationship with the public – however, has faded lately in recognition of the need to raise revenue and not to rock the boat with the tax collecting bureaucracy in the face of war, economic downturn, fear of a default and demands made by external actors such as the IMF. All of this is understandable, perhaps. And, yet, if major changes are to take place in how the state bureaucracies approach society, they are more likely to take place during times of war, or in the aftermath of revolution, when a fresh-start approach can lead to real changes in how state and society view each other.

In short, reforming the tax administration now as part of a larger vision to reshape and over-haul the state's relationship with the public would go a long way towards building a healthier state, capable of implementing its goals for the long run.

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About the author

Marc P. Berenson – King's College London

Marc P. Berenson is Senior Lecturer in the King's Russia Institute at King's College London.

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