

Russia is where the Russians are ... wrong.

As wrong as Serbia is where the Serbians are; together with most of the rest of the world, Russia included, Slovenia, Croatia and Bosnia did not agree in the nineties of last century and that resulted in close to almost ten years of armed conflict and tens of thousands of people killed. The International Community, UN, EU, NATO got involved and should have learned. From the failure of the UN – NATO double key over the half success of NATO IFOR/SFOR over the, eventually regime changing, thousand aircraft Kosovo air offensive "Allied Force" to an armistice and an uneasy but, till now, lasting peace with EU involvement.

Or Russia is where Russian speaking people are ... even more wrong.

More wrong, yet not totally uncommon.

Some French speaking Belgians would proclaim that French speaking Belgium is where, in Belgium, French speaking Belgians live: decades of discussions, six institutional reforms, ongoing Violence? Send in the Military? You must be joking, let us have another beer and another discussion.

Some Hungarians think that they have a Hungarian speaking minority in Slovakia and they think they should take care of them ... wrong. Slovakia has a Hungarian speaking minority in Slovakia and takes care, as in taking care, of them.

There are many examples of minorities living abroad. Some nations are totally composed of a collection of minorities, with respect for the specificity of those minorities and without limiting the quality of their citizenship and without outside involvement.

A distinction has to be made between minorities that are the result of voluntary immigration (emigration) of people seeking, and often finding, a better live abroad and forced emigration (immigration), the result of a xenophobic egoism committed by a political regime claiming to be

supported by a majority seeking security. An example of such a forced emigration is the deportation of the Crimean Tartars in 1944 by their Soviet Union. It was only with the advent of the perestroika in the mid nineteen eighties that the survivors were allowed to return. Now a quarter of a million of them live in the Crimea and again they could be at risk.

Machiavelli would advise Russia to evolve from "more wrong" to "simply wrong" in providing Russian passports to Russian speaking foreigners. Russian speaking Georgians in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia were given, without asking, Russian passports, they were then declared an oppressed minority and that excuse was given as reason for the Russian military to invade both Abkhazia and South Ossetia resulting in their secession from Georgia. It must be said that the Georgian government of in 2008 was not very diplomatically skilful in handling that crisis, albe it that Abkhazia had to live through a mass expulsion of thousands of ethnic Georgians by those Russian speakers there at the end of last century.ÂÂÂ

It is the same Machiavelli who is in favour of promoting and organizing referenda abroad. This, wrongly considered most democratic event because so easily falsified, is internally to be avoided. Russia never considered organizing a referendum in Chechnya or in Ingushetia twenty years ago when secession organizations there were up in arms.

After Russia's annexation, another destiny for the Crimea can only be decided in an independent, coercion free, total Ukrainian environment with respect for the Ukrainian constitution and for the international law. A thousand aircraft, generated by NATO, in some "Allied Force" type of operation is unlikely to yield the same result as against Serbia. The geography and the size of those involved is totally different and NATO won't show the same relative unity and determination as in 1999.

A diplomatic/economic approach to the crisis now laying wasted to the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine cannot be meaningful without a major role for the European Union and its Member States. The only pressure tool, other than the Military, that the International Community has is economic and in particular the trade in Liquefied Natural Gas.

In the gas trade three valves can be involved and can be used in a coercive way: the valve in the hands of the provider (here Russia), the valve in the hands of the acquirer (here the European Union its Member States) and the valve in the hands of the transit Nation(s) (here partially the Ukraine). Taking the initiative provides the perception of a position of strength. The European Union is to prepare, in a visible way, for another source of the LNG it needs, this may

well be at a higher cost, eventually also for the consumer public at large. Several options and combinations of options are available: Norway, Algeria, Qatar, Iran, USA, own gas by hydraulic fracturing. And while LNG from Russia is probably the cheapest and most ecological solution it has become unacceptable because it means helping in the financing of aggression against an independent state by that same Russia.

Energy is not the only economic sector where action against the aggressor is possible; also in the financial world, in industrial production, in agriculture and in most fields of human activity there is an interdependence European Union – Russia. Again the European Union should, by its actions, take the initiative and accept a cost of a few percent of its GDP in order to bring Russia to the negotiating table with an acceptable attitude.

And time is pressing: Georgia (Abkhazia, South Ossetia), Ukraine (Crimea) ... Ukraine (Donbass), Moldova (Transnistria?), the Baltic States (members of EU and NATO),

If the diplomatic/economic approach does not lead to the desired result unfortunately the military comes into the equation.

The first military strategy to be considered should be: "dissuasion" ; a combination of political credibility and military capability. The Cold War can be considered as a successful dissuasion strategy that lasted more than forty years. Political credibility is best served by a NATO involvement rather than solely the EU. Military capability is what it is and it takes years to build even when sufficient financial assets are made available, so the available capability will have to do.

Surely a seven hundred kilometre dash by a Russian mechanised unit through Southern Ukraine towards Moldova can be stopped by the Ukrainian Armed Forces supported, on their request, by NATO air assets. NATO Nations will have to make those air assets and their support available and will have to be prepared to pay for the cost. If this message is brought convincingly the dash will never take place.

The military occupation of Eastern Ukraine by the Russian Armed Forces is another challenge; recently lost military capability will have to be reinstated, and that takes time.

On the other hand what is the operational value of the Russian Army and Air Force units when confronted with a dedicated opponent? If a Western military pilot needs about 180 flying hours a year to become and remain operational so does a Russian one; how many flying hours per year do they get?

For the time being the Crimea, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria are lost to Russia or to total Russian control. There is no stomach for a military Reconquista: no will in the International Community and no capacity in the states concerned. A solution would be to support economically the Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova so that the quality of life there becomes markedly higher than in the lost provinces, this will also require a firm commitment from those States, particularly in the fight against corruption. At the same time a credible message must be sent to Russia by NATO and by the EU that the next military aggression will meet also military opposition.

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