

The Case for EU Police Mission Ukraine

Steven Blockmans and Daniel Gros

14 May 2014

The EU appears to be out of its depth in dealing with the crisis in Ukraine. There are endless discussions about the minutiae of level-2 or level-3 sanctions and long statements about the desirability of closing the door on Russia. Instead of trying to be a geopolitical player the EU should concentrate on what really matters: namely, influencing events on the ground.

Neither sanctions nor the granting of trade preferences will impact developments on the ground in the short run. But it is precisely on the ground that the future of Ukraine is being decided. The relatively high participation in the so-called referendum has shown that there is substantial popular resentment with the new government in Kiev, stoked, of course, by relentless propaganda and misinformation, but with a kernel of substance provided by the tragic events in Odessa and incidents in other cities.

The good news is that so far the problems have been restricted to two oblasts (Donetsk and Lugansk) where the proportion of Russian-speakers is particularly high (over 50-60%). The adjacent oblasts (Kharkiv, Dnepropetrovsk, etc.) have so far remained calm. But the local police forces are often unable, and sometimes unwilling, to confront the extremists on both sides. This leaves the risk of a deadly spiral of provocations and attacks which, as the events in Odessa have demonstrated, could easily destabilise the areas that hitherto have been relatively disturbance-free. Attempts to destabilise these areas will escalate around the national election, whose first round is scheduled for May 25th.

The key point is that not all of Eastern Ukraine is pro-Russian, but even where the majority of the local Ukrainian population might harbour little sympathy for Russia, their reaction could turn violent. This, in turn, might fan the separatist flames that have been so successfully stoked in Donetsk and Lugansk and might give Russia a pretext to invade. It is thus crucial to stabilise the areas that have so far remained relatively calm. Hence the need

Steven Blockmans is Senior Research Fellow at CEPS and Head of the EU Foreign Policy research programme. Daniel Gros is Director at CEPS.

CEPS Commentaries offer concise, policy-oriented insights into topical issues in European affairs. The views expressed are attributable only to the author in a personal capacity and not to any institution with which he is associated.

Available for free downloading from the CEPS website (www.ceps.eu) • © CEPS 2014

for a substantial stabilisation force. This would also create the best conditions for the national dialogue to proceed, which has now become a matter of urgency.

EU stabilisation force

An EU Police Mission (EUPM) should be sent in to stabilise the aforementioned critical areas. The Council of the EU could take that decision upon the invitation of the Ukrainian government. The force would have to be large enough to dissuade or control the demonstrations, which in most cases have amounted to fewer than a thousand. It should be possible to prevent a repetition of the events of Odessa (and of Donetsk) if the EU could send a couple of hundred officers to each of the oblasts that are still relatively trouble-free to beef up the local police force. The dispatch of this EUPM Ukraine should give the civilian population the feeling that everybody will be protected and there is no need for arms.

More formally, the objectives of the mission should be to support, including through monitoring, mentoring and advising, as appropriate:

- The consolidation of law and order, including the fight against organised crime, focusing on the sensitive areas,
- The operational transition, and the creation of a border police, as part of the wider EU effort to promote integrated border management,
- The local police in building confidence among the population.

In the areas designated for stabilisation the local police would be put under joint control and the public order functions (not every traffic policeman or crime investigation) would be implemented by joint patrols, consisting of a large element of EUPM personnel. Any further provocation could then be met with the appropriate, measured reaction, limiting the chances of the situation spiralling out of control.

That a stabilisation force can make a difference has been demonstrated by the successful UNPREDEP operation in Macedonia/FYROM, decided upon by the UNSC in 1995. Its mandate was to monitor and report any developments in the border areas that could undermine confidence and stability in the country and threaten its territory. The mission did accomplish this task very well, as long as it was allowed to operate.

The EUPM would be different in composition, i.e. the deployment of non-military officers (and thus less confrontational towards Russia) – which is to be preferred, given the still rather stable situation of the areas in which it would be deployed.¹

The political advantage of doing something practical to defuse the situation on the ground is that it would obviate the need for sanctions; the Council could announce that sanctions are not needed as long as the stabilisation force works on the ground.

If the Kremlin objects to the deployment of EUPM Ukraine, then the EU could suggest to Russia that it place the police mission under the auspices of the OSCE (as happened ultimately in Georgia). Once EUPM Ukraine is on the ground Russia might actually agree to such a proposal, or even better, the more muscular approach proposed by Michael Emerson,

¹Another remotely similar example is constituted by the gendarmerie mission (cf. EUGENDFOR of 300 to Haiti in 2010 to help the aid effort), but this took the form of enhanced cooperation between a number of member states outside the treaty framework.

see (<http://www.ceps.eu/book/can-ukraine-be-saved-11th-hour>). However, agreement by Russia should not be a pre-condition to starting the EU mission. Only a request from the Ukrainian government would be needed.

Is it feasible?

In line with the first Civilian Headline Goal (CHG, set at the Feira European Council Summit of 2000), EU member states collectively provide up to 3,000-5,000 police officers for crisis management operations, with 1,000 officers on high readiness (able to be deployed within 30 days). Moreover, the CHG 2010 created Civilian Response Teams (CRTs), a 100-person strong pool of experts prepared for rapid deployment. It should thus be possible to rapidly muster the required numbers of policemen, perhaps readily provided by Poland and then strengthened by police officers with experience, or drawn from the Balkan countries with similar languages who would be available at short notice, if paid EU salaries.

In addition to EU police experts backing up, monitoring, mentoring and advising Ukraine's police force in the aforementioned oblasts, one should note the following: Ukraine's police force has been underpaid for years, is demotivated and corrupt. This can be seen throughout the country. In the east the police failed to protect buildings and pro-unity demonstrations against attacks by violent mobs. In Odessa the police did not intervene to prevent clashes between opposing demonstrations. A salary increase would help to concentrate minds in the Ukrainian police force; but such an increase is not possible under the IMF programme because the IMF will require a cut in the fiscal deficit. Here, the EU should step in by allocating budgetary support for a (temporary but substantial) salary for the Ukrainian police force. The total cost would be quite limited. An additional payment of around 1,500-2,000 euro per annum per person would have a major impact. Even distributed over 100 thousand police officers it would amount to only about 150-200 million per annum.

Deeds not words

The EU could influence events on the grounds and contain the escalation of the internal conflict within Ukraine. This is what it should concentrate upon – not endless discussion about sanctions and diplomatic initiatives that are likely to be ignored by the extremists on both sides.

Ethno-linguistic map of Ukraine