

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF PRESIDENT OF UKRAINE – A PEACEFUL DECLARATION OF WAR?

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***Abstract:** This paper answers the question if the inaugural speech of president of Ukraine is a peaceful declaration of war.*

***Keywords:** inaugural speech; president; Ukraine; peaceful declaration; war*

General remarks

“**H**e who comes with a sword will be defeated by a sword”¹, said Mr. Petro Poroshenko, the new Ukrainian president, during his inaugural speech. His tough words, so well packed in a speech that addresses to all stakeholders in Eastern European settlement, mainly promises the Ukrainians that they will have peace in very few days. But which are the main arguments that make Petro Poroshenko claim that he aims for settlement? Ukraine’s situation has not improved (on the contrary!) since the day the former president Viktor Yanukovych stated that, given the economic constraints he could not, and would not sign the Association Agreement with the EU, back in November 2013.

What exactly then draws the new Kyiv leader to maintain an imaginary sword on the table, claiming that he aims for peace? What backs him up when saying that he will be “seeking peace and the achievement of Ukraine’s unity” – two rather colliding assertions? The answer might be hidden in one of his first media covered decisions, in his new quality as Ukrainian president, that

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¹ BBC news: “Excerpts from Poroshenko’s Speech”, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27746994>

was to create “humanitarian corridors”² that would allow for civilians in the South-Eastern part of Ukraine to flee from the area so that, journalists estimated, his security forces could come and clear the region from the rebel troops that pretend to have taken over the control of it. There is a lot of “maneuver space” in Mr. Poroshenko’s speech, a space that may be provided, surprisingly enough, exactly from his being left only very few options. But from also realizing that, for Russia as well, there are very few options left. And that it is time for Ukraine to start playing best strategy in defence: attack!

In line with the above, a certain note needs to be pointed out: although the situation in the South-Eastern Ukraine seems to get worst, real signs of improvement appear, as the Russian President Vladimir Putin got an invitation from the European Commission’s head Jose Manuel Barroso to attend the EU-Ukraine negotiations on a new trade deal³. And a new venue for peace settlement, given also the war fatigue and the current apparent inability to act of president Putin, seems to be created as this Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement was the spark that actually started the confrontation, which altered, in the most dramatic way, not just Ukraine or Russia, but the whole region, while retaining all the chances of becoming global. “Dear friends, my pen is already in my hands. I am ready now”⁴, said Petro Poroshenko in his inaugural speech, underlining his willingness to sign, on behalf of Ukraine, the documents that enhance cooperation with the EU.

Present study aims to debate upon the possible impact of the inaugural speech of Mr. Poroshenko on regional politics and on his ability of making the best out of current situation. It is our belief that this speech actually marks the beginning of a new era for Ukraine and, hopefully, for the region, just at about time when all seemed lost for the country. Several items will be mainly emphasized, these being: the present status of Ukraine within the wider context of the Black Sea Area, the role of the stakeholders gathered into Mr. Poroshenko’s speech in bringing peace, the main gains out of a fast settlement and which are the most probable ways of getting there. Needless

² BBC news: “Ukraine to create Humanitarian Corridors”, 10 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27776186>

³ BBC news: “Ukraine Crisis: EU Invites Moscow to Talk on Kiev Pact”, 13 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27845306>

⁴ BBC news: “Excerpts from Poroshenko’s Speech”, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27746994>

to say that, given the huge amount of information that was associated with recent events in the area and the interconnections that were built around it, the study does not, by any means, claim that it covers all aspects of present situation. It will, for the sake of the argumentation, only bring to surface those elements that are considered to be worthy.

Ukraine crisis and its impact on the region

The anti-presidential and government protests following the above mentioned decision of cancelling the relations with the EU in favor of those with Russian Federation, made former president Viktor Ianukovici leave the country and occasionally hold press conferences to address ongoing challenges. Several times media reports stated that he is dead (last ones coming from the beginning of March 2014), but irrespective of these, his figure and his party's prominence in Ukraine lose credibility by day.

Following Ianukovici's flee, a number of steps followed of what seemed to be a well written Russian scenario: Crimeea, a region that was mainly populated by Russians and already benefited of autonomy inside the Ukraine Republic, declared independence and later on was annexed to the Russian Federation in a well organized ceremony that hinted at Vladimir Putin's aim of becoming the ruler of the territories once belonging to Russian empires. This image that Putin was creating for himself was supported by vast military exercises, that moved impressive numbers of troops and techniques from northern part of the territory, close to the Baltic states (!), to the southern part, near the mainly Russian populated territories of Ukraine (coincidence or not, former president Viktor Ianukovici came from the Donetsk area, where, following a poor and unfortunate childhood, was able to become the leader of the transport infrastructure before getting the premier position⁵).

The surveys in Russian Federation were showing the increase of popularity of the Kremlin leader that seemed more and more worried about the Russian population abroad, hinting that he would go anywhere in order to protect them. The Russian President's charisma and world built image of a true mediator were gained in time and his drafting and oratory abilities

⁵ Jurnalul.ro: "Biografia Necenzurata a stăpânului Ucrainei: Tânăr pușcăriaș, professor la universități inexistente, secerat de un ou", 24 februarie 2014, <http://jurnalul.ro/stiri/externe/viktor-ianukovici-inchisoare-662155.html>

paved his way to gaining momentum. In his favor, he had already published his opinions in acknowledged publications⁶, lent money to a number of European nations during crisis and developed strong, profitable businesses with most of the world's economies. Russia had become a "special" partner for NATO, a member of G8, a real competitor in Africa... All of the above made Vladimir Putin extremely credible when saying that there are "no Russian troops" in Crimea and later on in South Eastern Ukraine, or that he would support Ukrainian choice, no matter what this might be, or that his nation will continue to show empathy for Ukrainian people in negotiating gas prices or in dealing with their national debt⁷.

But, of course, none of the above assertions proved to be true, no matter if some international actors gave President Putin the benefit of a doubt and waited for his actions. Because, it wasn't for the Russian leader to say that: "There are big countries and small countries, rich and poor, those with long democratic traditions and those still finding their way to democracy. Their policies differ, too. We are all different, but when we ask for the Lord's blessings, we must not forget that God created us equal."⁸?

It was this "benefit of a doubt" provided to Vladimir Putin that made the international community delay its immediate answer. Nevertheless, it came. Large scale military drills, high level visits, joint declarations followed in what seemed the escalations of a conventional type conflict that was mainly taken in media coverage. But, of course, that had and still has its real victims in the real world: a UN report in May shows that, since the beginning of the confrontation, 10,000 Ukrainians have been displaced by fighting within Ukraine and several hundred have died. Journalists have fought their own battle on this in gaining the public opinion's "hearts and minds": the data regarding the military and economic relevance of the, as it turned out, two sides of the globe, was provided. The aim to reach for the other states that might make a difference (China, Japan) started and therefore signing

⁶ The New York Times: "A Plea for Caution from Russia: What Putin has to say to America about Syria", 11 September, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0

⁷ ITAR-TASS: "Ukraine's overall debt for Russian gas grows to \$ 3.492 billion", 30 April 2014, <http://en.itar-tass.com/economy/730082>. According to other sources, the debt is significantly lower.

⁸ The New York Times: "A Plea for Caution from Russia: What Putin has to say to America about Syria", 11 September, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/opinion/putin-plea-for-caution-from-russia-on-syria.html?_r=0

a contract with them had the ability to make an impact. The real effects of the economic and political sanctions that, according to Russian media, would hurt more the Western states than the Russian economy were also a stake.

But it did not take that long to see the benefits of economic and political isolation – Russia was eliminated from G8, its voice was terminated within NATO, and attendance to its ceremonies by his former Western allies was drastically reduced. All of these made a difference, no matter if Russian media constantly tried to twist things over: they would make the Russian ruble their reference coin, they would start the Eurasiatic Union⁹, and they would sign some dozens of economic and political agreements with China¹⁰. Once, prime-minister Dmitri Medvedev even mentioned the possibility of turning the Crimean Peninsula, now considered Russian territory, into a “tax free hub”¹¹ (in reality, Crimean Peninsula has no physical connectivity to the Russian territory).

Of course, all of the Russian “show off” revealed a well developed nation (economic, military, political), with significant connections and influence, but most of the above mentioned tactics actually require years to become a reality (the Chinese – Russian gas deal, the Eurasian Union or even the physical connectivity between Russian territory and Crimean Peninsula).

During all this time, the Ukrainian interim authorities have chosen the wisest thing: wait and prepare for the presidential elections scheduled on the 25th May, 2014, try to “isolate” the Russian actions on their territory and at their border, promote, by all means possible and at all forums of cooperation the true dimension of what is going on in order to gain support from all their partners (political, economic, social, etc). And, of course, the support came. Not right from the beginning, but in the end it became solid, consistent, involving not just European Allies, but also US, Canada, Japan.

⁹ The Agreement was signed at the end of May 2014 and would enter into force in January 2015. Interesting enough, Armenia, that was also “convinced” not to strengthen relations with the EU by initiating the Association Agreement, was left out. “A decision on Armenia's membership will have to be made by July 2014, Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazabayev said”. – RT news: “Russia, Belarus Kazakhstan, sign ‘epoch’ Eurasian Economic Union – 29 May, 2014, <http://rt.com/business/162200-russia-belarus-kazakhstan-union/>

¹⁰ Among which, the most relevant was the \$400 billion gas deal signed at the end of May for a period of 30 years – NY Times: “China and Russia Reach 30 Year Gas Deal” – 21 May, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/22/world/asia/china-russia-gas-deal.html>

¹¹ RT news: “Crimea to Become Russian Special Economic Zone: Medvedev” – 24 Marc 2014, <http://rt.com/business/crimea-russia-economic-zone-793/>

Interesting to note is the “spillover effect” of Ukrainian evolutions: benefiting, no doubt, of Russian support, the secessionist movements in Moldovan Republic re-emerged, challenging Kishinev’s aspirations of signing the Association Agreement with the EU at the end of June, 2014. On the 2nd February, Gagauzia Autonomy within Moldova has held a similar referendum to that in Crimea, claiming that it would follow the same pattern. Even more, the Transnistrian authorities said that they would reorganize a referendum (the previous one took place in 2006) and officially sent a request to Moscow for annexation to the Russian Federation. The initial answer was that Kremlin received no such request, followed by the explanation that Russian authorities need to ponder it and, later on, by an official visit, against all odds, by vice-premier Dmitri Rogozin. All these aiming at the reality that Moscow is not interested at all in getting the two territories, but that their real utility reside in threatening with such an action the Moldovan authority.

For the Caucasus region, the situation is not simpler. Georgia holds, on its territories, two protracted conflicts, one in Abkhazia and the other one in South Ossetia, the two regions having already declared independence back in 2008 and having got the Russian Federation’s recognition. Another protracted conflict in the region, the Nagorno-Karabakh one, involves the two other states, Armenia and Azerbaijan. The three hot spots, also known as “frozen conflicts”, reside on reminiscent from the Cold War era and constitute, along with other elements (such as regional competitiveness or other player’s say in the area – such as Turkey) a means of maintaining the Russian influence in the region.

All of these “regional files” have reopened and international formats of negotiations on them have been challenged following Russian military actions in Ukraine.

Inaugural speech of the new Ukrainian president

Following the 25th May, 2014 Presidential elections, the newly elected leader of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko is taking over his new responsibilities by trying to get the confidence of all his people¹². He realizes that, in order to be credible, he has to be strong and his strength is provided not just by him gaining the elections or manifesting an anticipated independence from Russian Federation, but also from reaching to those that live in the South Eastern

¹² BBC news: “Poroshenko, Ukraine’s rescuer”, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27815441>

regions, mainly populated by Russian speaking people. However, “despite the recent show of strength from pro-Soviet protesters in Ukraine’s East, the Kremlin’s recent aggressions in Ukraine have actually united the country in its opposition to Putin and his worldview”¹³. So, Petro Poroshenko knows that he can count on many Ukrainians, only that his speech should be tailored in accordance with and encompass their actual needs.

“Chocolate mogul, government minister, opposition leader – Ukraine’s new leader, Petro Poroshenko, has worked in a number of capacities, and has at one point or another been associated with a various political movements, including that of his deposed predecessor, Viktor Yanukovich. But the role he assumed on Saturday, when he took the oath of office for the presidency, is the most serious so far: rescuer of Ukraine”, states BBC¹⁴.

His speech encompasses all: the imperative of Ukraine’s unity, the need for an “elite” army, the willingness to sign the Agreement with the EU, and, most of all, the urge for peace settlement. By all means. Otherwise, all is at stake. There is a sort of an ultimatum in Mr Poroshenko’s speech, a message that says that now it is time to assume all costs for maintaining “Ukrainian integrity and sovereignty”. “‘Russia occupied Crimea, which was, is and will be Ukrainian,’ was one of his top applause lines. ‘This is what I told [Russian] President [Vladimir] Putin yesterday in Normandy.’”¹⁵ This is what the Ukrainian leader mentioned, without saying a word about what he discussed with the American leader, Barack Obama, prior to his meeting with the Russian counter-part.

Starting his work “by proposing a peace plan”, Petro Poroshenko is keeping, as earlier mentioned, all his cards on the table. And the peace plan he is proposing encompasses three steps: first the laying down of the arms (including the guarantee, for those that were not involved in the killings that they would get out free), second the insurance of controlled corridors for Russian mercenaries that would return home and third, the starting of “peaceful negotiations”. Maybe as a response to this, several Russian tanks

¹³ New Republic: “Despite pro-Russian Protests, Majority of Ukrainians Lean Toward Europe”, 14 April 2014, <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/117357/despite-pro-soviet-protests-majority-ukrainians-lean-toward-europe>

¹⁴ BBC news: “Poroshenko, Ukraine’s rescuer”, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27815441>

¹⁵ ¹⁵ BBC news: “Poroshenko, Ukraine’s rescuer”, 7 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27815441>

(of course with the Russians pretending they are not theirs) crossed the Ukraine border and marched on its territory¹⁶. Only a day later, the Ukrainian sword replied: “a violent protest outside Russian Embassy in Ukraine, which saw windows smashed, the Russian flag torn down and cars overturned”¹⁷.

Another action promised by President Poroshenko in his inaugural speech refers to using all his diplomatic experience to ensure the “signing of an international treaty that would replace the Budapest memorandum. Such a treaty should provide reliable guarantees of peace and security, up to military support in case of a threat to [Ukraine's] territorial integrity.”

And, in a special address to Russian speaking Ukrainian population, Petro Poroshenko said that he will be guided by the art 10 of the Constitution that “defines Ukrainian as the only state language and guarantees the unhindered development of Russian and all other languages”.

Also worth being remembered is that new Ukrainian president is able to identify and separate from his adversaries, his assumed responsibilities allowing him to promote a blunt, clear message. He clearly condemns the “ousted Ukrainian president’s clan which betrayed Donbass and robbed it even worse than the rest of the country. Now he is funding terrorists. He bears full responsibility for the political and social situation which the region ended up in.”

Conclusions

At the dawn of the XXIst century, mass media seems to be drawn into the art of spectacle, of futile, of social networking and of lack of concreteness. With the exception of rather few, specific, mainly belonging to a “classic” era of journalism, all current media products are addressed to a public that has no time for research or reflection. The mass media consumers need and look for already “digested information” that is reduced to several items carefully chosen to create an impact on their mind. Therefore, the makers of the media products search for the easiest way to emit the message in its simplest form but packed into the most appealing

¹⁶ BBC news: “Russia and Ukraine Mystery Tanks”, 14 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27849437>

¹⁷ BBC news: “Ukraine Crisis: Russia Condemns Attack on Kiev Embassy”, 14 June 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27853698>

encasement, so that the recipient would be tempted to accept it. The classical scheme of communication, applied to current world's necessities.

Considering the above, the current study takes note that there are various sources of information, that address a huge audience and that are finding their ways to make each of the consumers feel that the message was personally designed for him. This is the "finesse" taught by all communicators. Cause all the media producers understand and know that that the surrounding reality can be altered so that it reflects their own interests.

The Russian military actions that came as a response to Ukraine's rightful choice of leaning towards the West in hope of providing a sustainable development to the country (not one that is rapidly changed according to Moscow's mood) and all the developments that followed are a proof that conventional threats (a state and its army) are still very much alive. The already fragile security environment in the Wider Black Sea Area was drastically hit by Moscow's belief that it can inoculate fear by its military means and also by propaganda. Ukraine's decision of banning Russian TV channels (otherwise criticized by OSCE) was quickly adopted in Latvia and Lithuania, countries that also realized the same menace.

Nevertheless, the Western community was right in saying that the Cold War was over, as its techniques and deterrent means cannot lead to the same results. Now people are more awake, despite their poor economic conditions and are able to make a difference. Even state authorities tend to have (and in some cases succeed) a louder voice in reaching what they think is in their state's best interest. The effort paid by Vladimir Putin to maintain weak satellites, vulnerable and fragile, unable to make a choice on their own and fully depending on Russian commercial benevolence has not entirely reached its purpose. One such example is the Moldovan Republic, where the Communist Party is facing dissolution and the signing of the Association Agreement is due in very few days.

It is exactly this message that President Poroshenko is bringing. That he is willing to wait for the Russians to choose their "type of weapon" but, even if he would opt for a peace negotiation, he is ready to assume, at all costs (maybe including his own future as a President), the same "weapon" and fight back. His aim is the unity and sovereignty of Ukraine. And he might just have a good shot at it, creating yet another shift in the Wider Black Sea Area paradigm: that Russian Federation is not unbeatable.



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