**Forum:** Security Council

**Issue:** Addressing the tension in Eastern Europe

**Student Officer:** MinAh Park

**Position:** President

Introduction

Often, the term’ Ukrainian Crisis’ refers to Ukraine’s political and economic crisis, the annexation of Crimea, the war in Donbas, and tensions between the United States/European Union and Russia. However, the phrase is misrepresentative because the causes and consequences of these historical events are not limited to Ukrainian borders. Instead, these events are parts of the broader rise of tension in the Eastern Europe region, mainly caused by the unresolved territorial conflicts in the region following the disintegration of the Soviet Union. The post-Soviet regions in Easter Europe, such as the states in the Balkans, Caucasus region, and Central Asian Republics, have become a place of internal and external conflicts over the last twenty-four years. Unresolved territorial conflicts in Eastern Europe are ‘protracted’ rather than ‘frozen,’ implying a high risk of a resurgence of violence, as occurred in and around Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. These conflicts provide Russia with geopolitical leverage beyond the factual dispute while negatively affecting the affected populations, states, and communities. In addition, the regions are affected by a continued lack of political stability, pervasive human rights violations, and slow economic advancement.

Map

Description automatically generated

***Figure 1: Map of post-Soviet conflict regions in Eastern Europe***

After World War II, Western and Central Europe developed by strengthening ties between neighboring countries and bridging differences, yet, Eastern Europe has evolved into a conflict-prone and unstable region. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the integration mechanisms established by the republics of the former Soviet Union were largely ineffective in resolving regional trade and security issues. Long before the annexation of Crimea and the Donbas war, the region’s situation was highly volatile, as shown by repeated gas and trade wars between Russia and Ukraine, trade conflicts between Belarus and Russia, and the 2008 military conflict between Russia and Georgia. With the current Russo-Ukrainian War showing the threat the unresolved conflict in the Eastern European nations poses to the area, there is a desperate need to resolve the tensions in Eastern Europe.

Definition of Key Terms

Frozen Conflict

Frozen Conflict is a term used to describe areas where fighting has stopped but no overall negotiated settlement, such as a peace treaty, has been reached. They generally occur in areas of a country where the central government no longer has control.

**Separatist**

Separatists are people who want to establish a new country, religion, or other entity that is distinct from the one they currently live in.

**Breakaway group**

A breakaway group is a group of people who have partitioned from a larger group, usually due to a disagreement.

**Warsaw Pact**

The Warsaw Pact was a treaty signed by the Soviet Union and seven Soviet satellite countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Albania (withdrew in 1968), Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

**De Facto States**

De facto states are political entities that exist within the borders of de jure–by law–states.

Background

Dissolution of the Soviet Union

For almost 70 years, the Soviet Union dominated the world stage, establishing a sphere of political influence worldwide. The Soviet Union's protracted and costly war in Afghanistan was critical in influencing the collapse of the Soviet Union. From 1979 through 1989, Soviet troops battled alongside the Afghan Communist Party to seize the Afghan border and acquire oil reserves. However, the tremendous cost of the war wiped out any economic and political gains the Soviet Union planned to gain from the war. Furthermore, a surge of independence movements erupted across the Eastern Bloc countries in the aftermath of Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms and softer approach to dissenters and free speech. The Soviet Union collapsed on December 26, 1991, with the former union's republics achieving independence. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the region became politically, socially, and economically unstable, and the tensions that arose during that period continue to this day.

Unresolved Conflicts in the post-Soviet regions

The five post-Soviet separatist conflicts in Eastern Europe pose the greatest threat to Europe’s stability and security. Four of these frozen conflicts–Abkhazia, South Ossetia in Georgia, Transnistria in Moldova, and Nagorny Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan–date back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The fifth is Ukraine’s Donbas, which has suffered 13,000 deaths since 2014 due to Russia’s support of hybrid warfare in Donetsk and Luhansk. Although referred to as the ‘frozen’ war, the term ‘frozen’ is misleading for these conflicts because there is always the possibility of a resurgence of violence, as was seen in Abkhazia and South Ossetia during the 2008 Russo-Georgian war.

The South Ossetia and Abkhazia conflict

The origins of Georgia’s two separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, can be traced back to Soviet and pre-Soviet politics in the South Caucasus. Both regions obtained considerable autonomy throughout the Soviet period. The first violent clashes between Ossetians and Georgians occurred in November 1989, and they escalated into larger-scale open hostilities that lasted until the July 1992 cease-fire. Georgian officials initially portrayed the conflict as a one-sided affair, but by mid-summer 2004, the Saakashvili administration had begun to emphasize that the larger cause was a dispute between Georgia and Russia, not between Georgians and Ossetians. The conflict in Abkhazia began on August 14, 1991, but latent conflicts emerged long before the violent clashes. Georgians refer to the conflict as ‘political,’ whereas Abkhazians refer to it as’ self-determination.’ The historical pretext for the current conflict should be found in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when relations between Georgians and Abkhazians vividly began to deteriorate, primarily due to Russian policy toward the entire Caucasian area. Furthermore, a five-day conflict, also known as the South Ossetia conflict, erupted between Georgia and Russia in 2008, which took place in the breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Tbilisi eventually lost control of both areas, which were later recognized as independent states by Russia. Georgia ended diplomatic relations with Russia in response, prompting Switzerland to intervene as a mediator. Nonetheless, both regions are internationally recognized as Georgian territories. The quality of life in Abkhazia and South Ossetia has deteriorated even after the conflict has been ‘frozen,’ fueling uncertainty in both regions and Georgia. Weak local governments cannot provide basic services, and Russia has constructed a new militarized barrier preventing movement to and from Georgian-controlled territory.

***The Transnistria conflict***

Transnistria is separated from the rest of Moldova by a thin, 100-kilometer-long stretch of land.  The region declared its independence from Moldova in 1990 in response to growing Moldovan nationalism and fears among the region’s primarily Russian and Ukrainian residents that ethnic Romanian Moldova would break away from the Soviet Union and join Romania, from which the Soviets had separated it after the Second World War. Small-scale fighting began in 1991 when local militias took control of state institutions, and it escalated in 1992 when the newly formed Moldovan army attempted to retake control by force. Soviet troops stationed in the area intervened and abruptly ended the fighting, solidifying the separatists’ position. While minor clashes have occurred in the Transnistria conflict, and each side continues to control territory claimed by the other, these have not escalated into violence. As Moldova strives for greater European integration, recent developments may lead to a peaceful resolution. However, the situation is always subject to change because frozen conflict zones are always vulnerable to violence and war.

***Nagorno-Karabakh conflict***

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict was the first, longest, and bloodiest of the soviet ethnic and separatist conflicts, with an approximate number of deaths ranging from 15,000 to 30,000. The region’s predominantly Armenian population insisted on unification with Armenia, and the region’s parliament voted to separate from Azerbaijan in 1988, at the start of the USSR’s dissolution period. The Soviet authorities struggled to keep the fighting under control, and when Azerbaijan gained independence with the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991, Nagorno-Karabakh declared its independence. As both sides obtained heavy weapons from Soviet army depots, tensions escalated. By mid-1993, Armenian and Karabakh forces had driven Azeri forces out of Nagorno-Karabakh and all or parts of seven adjacent Azeri districts, establishing a demilitarized zone between the two countries. In 1994, Russia negotiated a cease-fire. So it has held, despite frequent and lethal cease-fire violations by both sides over the years. Attempts to establish long-term peace have been led by the OSCE Minsk Group but have so far failed. Nagorno-Karabakh claims de facto independence, but most ethnic Armenians in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia hope for eventual unification. Early in 2012, there was an increase in deadly cease-fire violations along the “line of contact,” Azerbaijan has spent heavily from its newly discovered energy wealth to enhance its military. Foreign ministers from Armenia and Azerbaijan met again in June 2012 under the auspices of the Minsk Group but only agreed to continue negotiating. The unresolved conflict led to the outbreak of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War on September 27th, 2020. A full-fledged conflict between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces over the disputed area of Nagorny Karabakh broke out. On all sides, up to 7,000 people were killed in action, and around 130,000 people were displaced from their homes, most of whom were Armenians in Nagorny Karabakh. On November 9, a cease-fire agreement negotiated by Russia was agreed upon, authorizing the deployment of 2,000 Russian peacekeepers to the region. Yet, the international community believes that the cease-fire agreement fails to resolve the central issues, and the regional tension continues to pose a threat to Eastern Europe and international security.

***Russia-Ukraine conflict***

The complex relationship between Russia and Ukraine began when Ukraine declared independence in 1918 during a conflict taken part by numerous countries and armies over several years. However, from 1939 to 1944, the Soviet Union annexed Western Ukraine. Following that, during World War II, Nazi Germany and the Axis powers occupied the region, causing Ukraine to suffer from devastation. In 1991, the Soviet Union was terminated via a treaty, so Ukraine became independent and transitioned to a market economy. A turning point of the event was in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea. Protesters in Ukraine ousted from power President Viktor Yanukovych in February 2014 because he was friendly to Russia’s interests. Russian President Vladimir Putin emphasized the importance of safeguarding the rights of Russian citizens and Russian-speaking people in Crimea and southeast Ukraine. After a contentious local referendum, Crimeans voted to join the Russian Federation, and Russia formally annexed the peninsula. The crisis exacerbated ethnic tensions, and pro-Russian separatists in the eastern Ukrainian areas of Donetsk and Luhansk held their autonomy referendums two months later. After, Russia, Ukraine, France, and Germany signed a cease-fire agreement known as the Minsk Accords. On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale expansion of Ukraine from Belarus to the North, the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula to the South, and its territory to the East. The conflict has disrupted US-Russia relations and raised the prospect of a larger European conflict. Due to Alliance security commitments, tensions between Russia and neighboring NATO member countries are likely to rise, potentially involving the United States. The conflict will also have far-reaching consequences for future collaboration on critical issues such as arms control, nuclear nonproliferation, global economic stability, and energy security.

**Unprotected Human Rights**

Because of the restrictions and difficulties in accessing the frozen conflict regions, there is little official information on human rights circumstances. However, accusations of human rights violations persist. Because of the difficulties imposed by de facto border controls, the authoritarian nature of the governments, the limited access provided to international human rights monitoring mechanisms, and the isolation of these regions, the reliability of human rights evaluations in these regions is very weak. For instance, the ethnic Georgians living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have suffered the most from the South Caucasus’ instability. These people face discrimination and lack basic protections and rights from de facto authorities: schools do not teach in their native Georgian language, they do not have the right to participate in local elections, and they are barred from many jobs, including the police.

**Economic and Political Instability**

The primary reason for economic instability in the post-Soviet regions is the countries’ high dependence on Russia. In the aftermath of the 2008 battle, for instance, Moscow poured money into Abkhazia and South Ossetia for restoration and development. However, the local governing elite lacked the technical skills to effectively allocate and spend these funds, so much of the funds ended up in the hands of a small group of local de facto officials with ties to Moscow, as well as Russian officials working in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The inability to manage the economic system within the government independently, despite the help of Russia, shows the countries’ vulnerability to external conflicts that may occur and end the ‘frozen’ conflict. Besides, Eastern European countries are highly dependent on Russia’s natural gas and financial support coming from its economic profit from the natural gas. Hence, the decrease in global oil prices could immensely impact the Eastern European nations’ economies. Besides, the emergence of frozen conflicts and the entrenchment of de facto nations in the larger Black Sea region contributes to regional instability while assuring Moscow's continued hegemony in its immediate surroundings. Many issues pertaining to these de facto governments remain unresolved, and the region's frozen conflicts are exacerbated by unique historical conditions, demographics, and international law, all of which hinder effective conflict settlement and peace.

Major Parties Involved

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO is a defensive military alliance formed in 1949 by twelve countries, including the US, the UK, Canada, and France. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, many of the Eastern European countries that had previously been Russia’s Warsaw Pact allies were granted NATO membership. However, Russia vehemently opposed Ukraine’s request to join the alliance, fearing it would encroach too closely on its territory. The situation puts NATO in an ambiguous position in terms of sending troops for Ukraine in the Russo-Ukrainian War because Article 5 of NATO’s charter requires countries to defend a fellow NATO member if attacked. Still, because Ukraine is not a member of NATO, its member countries have refrained from sending troops onto its territory.

**European Union (EU)**

The EU is an international organization composed of twenty-seven European countries that govern shared economic, social, and security policies. EU was initially established out of conflict and with the primary objective of preventing regional violence. For security in Eastern Europe, the EU provides measures, such as sanctions, military assistance, and financial and supplies aid, and addresses energy dependence. As of December 2022, the EU has imposed equity and debt constraints on certain banks and companies, frozen the assets of 171 entities and 1,386 individuals (mainly Russian officials and elites) and expanded export restrictions on dual-use commodities and technologies. Besides, the European Peace Facility (EPF) is a non-budgetary funding instrument for EU operations with military or defense implications in conflict areas, including the ‘frozen conflict’ regions.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The OSCE monitors the 2015 Minsk II agreement, which laid out steps to end Ukraine’s conflict through negotiations. The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) monitors cease-fire violations and heavy weapon withdrawal in eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region daily. The OSCE also participates in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG), a forum for Minsk agreement implementation issues that includes Russia and Ukraine. Although the majority of Council members have strongly supported the OSCE’s work, it has proven challenging to reach a consensus on Council recommendations regarding the United Nations (UN)-OSCE cooperation due to members’ sharply divergent views on issues under the OSCE’s purview, most prominently Ukraine, and the larger European security architecture.

Russian Federation

The Russian Federation is a major player in Eastern European tensions because the conflicts are frequently the result of Russian Foreign Policy interests since the breakdown of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Russian Federation has always been in the best position to aid in peaceful conflict resolution. However, some criticize the Russian Federation for supporting and encouraging separatists for geopolitical benefit, particularly in Georgia and Moldova. In several conflicts, they took steps toward peacemaking only after ensuring complete control of both the separatist region and the state with which it was formally affiliated. For example, in the conflict between Moldova and Transnistria, the Russian Federation army backed the region’s citizens to protect Moldova’s Russian-speaking population. However, when Georgia’s war with Abkhazia and South Ossetia peaked in August 2008, Moscow launched a military offensive to safeguard the two regions’ sovereignty while recognizing both separatist territories as fully independent.

Timeline of Events

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| Date | Description of event |
| March 12, 1947 | The beginning of the Cold War |
| April 4, 1949 | The founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) |
| August 1, 1975 | The founding of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) |
| September 2, 1990 | Transnistria declared formal sovereignty from Moldova |
| September 20, 1990 | South Ossetian nationalists proclaimed their independence from Georgia |
| December 12, 1990 | Georgians and South Ossetians clashed in Tskhinvali |
| December 26, 1991 | Dissolution of the Soviet Union (The end of the Cold War) |
| July 23, 1992 | The Abkhazian separatist government declared the region’s independence, but the independence was not recognized internationally |
| September 3, 1992 | A cease-fire was negotiated in Moscow |
| August 1-6, 2008 | Georgian troops clashed with South Ossetian military forces |
| August 26, 2008 | Russia recognized the independence of South Ossetia |
| February 20, 2014 | Beginning of Russia’s annexation of Crimea |
| February 24, 2022 | Russia launched a full-scale expansion of Ukraine from Belarus to the North, the Russian-annexed Crimean Peninsula to the South, and its territory to the East |

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

NATO has played a significant role in resolving tensions in Eastern Europe since the organization’s founding. Allies have enhanced NATO’s forward presence by establishing multinational battlegroups in Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia. In September 2014, the allies agreed at the NATO Summit in Wales to implement the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) to respond quickly to the basic changes in the security circumstances on NATO’s borders. At the 2016 NATO Summit in Warsaw, the allies strengthened the organization’s deterrence and defense posture and contributed to stabilizing security outside Alliance territory. After Russia’s unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the allies sent more ships, planes, and troops to eastern and south-eastern Europe to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense. NATO provided thousands of soldiers to NATO’s battlegroups, fighter jets to assist NATO air policing missions, strengthened naval forces in the Baltic and Mediterranean Seas, and increased troop readiness.

The EU, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has responded in accordance with its international weight and might. In an effort to deter Russia and support Ukraine and the Ukrainian people, the heads of state and government have made significant decisions, including sanctions of unprecedented scope and complexity against Russia and Belarus and welcoming of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia into the European family, with the possibility of admitting their entry of EU. Setting aside its breaking of peace and order in Eastern European regions following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine, Russia has made apparent attempts to resolve the tensions. For instance, Russia showed leadership in the organizations such as the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to maintain stability in the region. EAEU intends to promote economic integrity within the post-Soviet region by coordinating economic policies, reducing non-tariff trade barriers, aligning regulations, and modernizing member states' economies. In 2009, CSTO notably created a Collective Operational Reaction Force, loosely modeled after NATO’s Response Force. The force’s primary purpose is to mobilize against transnational threats while preserving a peacekeeping capability. However, when it comes to protecting the security of its members, the CSTO has proven unsuccessful. Some passed resolutions regarding this issue include:

* A/HRC/RES/49/1–The Human Rights Council adopted the resolution to establish an independent international Commission of Inquiry to scrutinize potential violations and abuses of human rights committed during Russia’s aggression against Ukraine.
* A/RES/ES-11/5–The resolution’s title is “Furtherance of remedy and reparation for aggression against Ukraine.”
* S/RES/2623– The resolution requested that the General Assembly hold an “emergency special session” (ESS) to recognize and suggest joint action on the situation in Ukraine.
* S/RES/822–The resolution demands that all occupying forces withdraw from the Kelbajar district and other lately occupied regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan. It declares its support for the peace process to be carried out within the structure of the OSCE.
* A/75/891–The resolution’s title is “Status of internally displaced persons and refugees from Abkhazia, Georgia, and the Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia, Georgia.” Published on June 2021, the resolution concentrates on safeguarding the right of return of refugees and internally displaced persons and their descendants, prohibiting forced demographic changes and humanitarian accesses, preserving private property, and developing a timetable to ensure the immediate voluntary return of all refugees and IDPs to their residences.
* A/RES/72/282–The resolution’s title is “Complete and unconditional withdrawal of foreign military forces from the territory of the Republic of Moldova: resolution.”

Possible Solutions

* The countries and regions involved in the conflict within Eastern Europe could promote economic and social reform in their country. When tensions exist within and across countries, the less economically prosperous and underdeveloped countries are more vulnerable to the consequences. The over-dependency on other countries’ trade and diplomatic relationships complexes the tension and thus leads to instability in the face of conflicts.
* The mediating powers could work with the OSCE in Vienna to send more observers to the Line of Control in Azerbaijan and move them to strategic locations. The structured group of observers could report on military buildups like artillery, drones, and troop deployments in the locations, reporting who fired first. Since both sides have predictably accused the other of being the aggressor, the system that monitors the military buildups would help determine the aggressor and the sign of conflict breaking up. In other conflict regions in Eastern Europe, a similarly structured group of observers can be organized and sent to the regions to gather evidence for war crimes, sanctions, and investigations, preventing and alarming possible development of armed conflicts.
* To prevent military conflicts from arising in ‘frozen conflict’ regions, an international organization can be established with the negotiation of the involved nations and relevant UNOs to monitor arms sales and to reach an agreement among main suppliers on restricting arms deliveries to obvious combatants, particularly of the most offensive technologies, to promote peace between the two parties before the sign of danger.
* The primary reason for continued tensions and instability in Eastern Europe is that only a ‘temporary’ cease-fire has been achieved between the parties. Therefore, peace plans developed by the international community should be clear with concrete steps and timelines and by whom it would be negotiated and mediated so that the parties can achieve a final negotiation.
* The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 highlighted the importance of preserving the security of the Black Sea region–Russia’s gateway to other parts of the world. Russia has continuously presented its willingness to control and exploit the region. As the Romanian Foreign Minister, Bogdan Aurescu has continuously stressed, it is necessary to develop a long-term strategy for the Black Sea region by possible measures, such as promoting economic development opportunities, establishing strategic transport infrastructures to enhance European interconnectivity, and strengthening security cooperation by developing EU and NATO’s defense position.

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