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Ukraine Needs an International Intervention

By Igor Ivanov

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One of the most vivid images found in old Slavic epic tales is that of a knight at a crossroads facing the difficult choice of which road to follow. The right choice leads to glory and honor — the wrong choice to defeat and death.

This image involuntarily comes to mind when I view the tragic events in Ukraine with feelings of pain and alarm. Sooner or later — but hopefully sooner — hostilities will end there. And yet, history has shown that all wars, and especially civil wars in which brother kills brother, leave deep scars on the body of society. Healing those scars, if they heal at all, is a long and painful process.

People will long debate the question of who was responsible for this tragedy and how a fratricidal war could erupt in the middle of Europe in the 21st century. And because nobody can bear the burden of such a curse, the participants will attempt to shift the blame to their neighbor or political opponents.

However, such mutual accusations and denunciations will not improve the situation for anybody. All of us — Ukrainians and their neighbors — will inevitably have to answer the main question: With Ukraine now at a historic crossroads, what future awaits it?

Although the current Ukrainian leadership claims that the country has made its choice in favor of Europe, that is largely a rhetorical statement. After all, before it can "go over to Europe" or anywhere else, Ukraine must full establish itself as a country and a society.

That is why the country faces a very difficult choice: Either it will embark on the long and painful path of restoring national unity, forming democratic institutions, resolving its socio-economic problems and conducting a balanced foreign policy, or else it will degenerate into a failed state, with all of the serious consequences that this would entail for Ukraine itself and for Europe as a whole.

It goes without saying that all sane and responsible politicians as well as ordinary citizens both in Ukraine and beyond its borders should desire nothing but peace for that country and for it to overcome the awful consequences of this terrible tragedy.

Of course, the main responsibility for resolving the crisis lies primarily with the politicians who have come to power in Ukraine. They will have to account not so much for how they gained power or even what they promised their citizens, but for what type of country they pass on to the new democratic government institutions that will eventually replace them.

Are the current Ukrainian authorities capable of meeting this historic challenge singlehandedly? Probably not. They lack the requisite legitimacy, institutions and resources for it. But most importantly, they lack the trust of at least part of the Ukrainian population.

Perhaps the association agreement that Ukraine recently signed with the European Union, and that was accompanied by so much fanfare, can rescue that country from its current crisis?

Of course, in signing that document, the EU shouldered a major political and moral responsibility for Ukraine's future. It is up to Brussels to assess whether it can carry that burden, but initial reactions indicate that most Europeans are horror-stricken at the prospect of having to pay down Ukraine's debts in addition to their own.

Under such circumstances, only the combined efforts of the international community can save Ukraine.

Half-measures alone cannot solve a problem of this scale and complexity. And although the creation of an EU Contact Group — in which negotiations are already underway — is a step in the right direction, it is already proving inadequate to the task.

The Ukrainian crisis long ago extended beyond that country's borders and is rapidly coming to resemble the recent Balkan tragedy. Entire regions are burned and the number of civilian casualties dramatically increases as armed confrontation continues with aircraft, tanks, artillery and multiple rocket launchers.

The scale of the tragedy requires an urgent convening of a high-level international conference on Ukraine. That meeting, held under the auspices of either the UN or the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, should involve participation

by Ukraine, Russia, leading European states and the U.S. The agenda must address one very specific question: How can we all work together to save Ukraine?

That conference should produce a detailed and comprehensive roadmap out of the crisis, along with a prioritized action plan that includes deadlines for the provision of outside assistance and strict external control measures for the implementation of the agreed upon points.

The procedures for implementing the roadmap should be as transparent and democratic as possible and should involve the entire spectrum of responsible political forces and all the regions of the country. Only such concerted action can successfully isolate the extremists inside Ukraine on the one hand, and achieve the mutual understanding and trust between the major international players on the other.

With Ukraine now at a crossroads, we must work together to help it make the right choice.

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The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

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