



CENTRO STUDI SUL FEDERALISMO

AVERTING THE MILITARY OPTION IN UKRAINE

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In this dramatic moment, when the civil war in Ukraine threatens to degenerate into an armed conflict between East and West and cast its grim shadow over Europe, Merkel and Hollande's journey to Moscow to try to definitively avoid the military option as a solution to the crisis must be applauded: an option that, instead, is not excluded in Washington.

Some commentators have rightly pointed out the weakness of Merkel and Hollande's power to negotiate with Putin and have urged the EU governments and institutions to make a determined effort for a unified policy on foreign affairs, security and defence, starting with a permanent structured cooperation that could be activated even by just a small group of EU Member States. If Europe stirs from its torpor and deals with its divisions condemning it to political irrelevance, it could be the sign of the intention to speak with one voice in the world and act as a global player in facing the risk of war.

However, the EU and the United States should also show that they are prepared to unflinchingly re-examine their errors and that they have the intention to change course, starting with the decisions that must be taken immediately.

Although it is a given that borders between countries cannot be redrawn by force, as Putin has done by annexing Crimea and is continuing to do by stirring up civil war in eastern Ukraine, the responsibility of Europe and the United States in having helped exacerbate the crisis cannot be ignored.

In military terms, NATO's expansion towards the East with the request by the Kiev government to join NATO was an act of cold war against Russia. NATO is a military alliance and its expansion was unquestionably aimed at weakening the enemy front i.e. Russia and its allies. As a result, Putin responded with the most effective tool at his disposal; and there is no doubt that, in military terms, his forces are dominant. The annexing of Crimea which, in practice, no-one questions any more, was the dress rehearsal for a counteroffensive that could lead to a military confrontation with the West. It is to be remembered that the invasion of Georgia by Russia in 2008, halted by the arbitration of Sarkozy (at the time, France presided at the Council of the European Union), encouraged Bush to give up the idea of enlarging NATO to include Georgia and Ukraine.

On the economic front, the association of Ukraine with the EU has helped increase tensions with Russia. Ukraine, which for centuries was part of Russia, is considered by Putin to be a strategic element in his plan to establish a Euro-Asian economic union.

It is still possible to avert the military option if Europe shows its intention to resume the "Common European Home" project espoused by Gorbachev, abandoned after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.



The dismemberment of Ukraine can still be avoided if it relinquishes to exclusively opt for the Atlantic Alliance and the EU but instead acts as a bridge between the EU and Russia:

- enhancing the international “interregional” organisations that bring together stakeholders in the negotiations (the United States, Russia and the EU), such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe (where the United States are observers), which could be the framework for restarting negotiations and rebuilding an ever closer collaboration
- abandoning the idea of NATO membership
- participating in the processes of economic integration in the EU at the same time as being involved in the Euro-Asian Union
- reorganising its structure to be a federation, allowing the Russian-speaking provinces greater scope for self-government in the areas of education, culture and public order.

Time is running out before embarking on a course with no return. It is necessary to act now to:

- declare an immediate cease-fire
- request the intervention of a UN peacekeeping force
- convene a conference on security and cooperation in Europe between the EU, Russia and the United States.

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(The opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the CSF)

