Forum: General Assembly 4 (SPECPOL II)

Issue: Addressing governance issues in the occupied territories in Ukraine

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Introduction

The occupation of Crimea, as well as parts of Donetsk and Luhansk, by Russia, has been a factor of geopolitical concern that reverberates internationally to this day. This prolonged conflict involves complex political dynamics that have given rise to an intricate web of challenges in terms of governance, which calls for meticulous attention and effective solutions. The ramifications of these events go far beyond the geopolitical landscape, impacting even the daily lives of the inhabitants of these Russian-occupied territories.

The emergence of separatist movements around the time of Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 signaled the beginning of a crisis that would pose challenges in political, economic, and humanitarian dynamics. One of the primary issues of governance in the currently occupied territories is the lack of local autonomy and freedom of speech. These basic rights are restricted by external governments who have no real legitimacy over the regions. The absence of legal and administrative frameworks has completely undermined the ability of individuals in these territories to receive justice and proper public services.

Furthermore, the economic fallout for both Russia and Ukraine is profound and has painfully affected essential trade relationships, investments, and infrastructural development efforts. The disruption of these trade routes and investment flows has negatively affected local businesses and industries, exacerbating the economic hardships faced by the government and society. Furthermore, the neglect and destruction of critical transportation networks, utilities, and resources have created long-term challenges to economic recovery and development, which adds to the already existing economic instability and a layer of complexity in the governance dilemma.

Even more alarming than the political and economic impacts of the war are the violations against the human rights of the citizens and refugees living in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine. The rapid and large displacement of the respective populations has made civilians increasingly vulnerable to

aggressions committed against them and a lack of necessities. Displaced citizens and communities are grappling with personal crises that range from lack of housing to lack of access to crucial services like healthcare and education. The dire and horrible humanitarian situation demands urgent attention and concerted efforts to help the individuals suffering from this issue at hand.

As we embark on a comprehensive analysis of the issue of governance in the Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine, it becomes apparent that the complex and multifaceted circumstances of the political, economic, and humanitarian factors demand an equally intricate response. It is essential to explore potential pathways for mitigating the root causes of the issue, restoring effective governance, and ultimately diminishing the factors that limit the chance of stability and prosperity in these regions.

Definition of Key Terms

Occupied

An occupied place is a territory being controlled by an army or group of people that has moved into it. Having one's time, attention, or territory engaged, controlled, or inhabited by military force, like the case of Russia's occupation of territory in Crimea and the Donbas region of Ukraine.

Territory

An area of land, or sometimes sea, that is considered to belong to or is under the control of a particular ruler, state, or nation, such as the Crimean peninsula and the Donbas region.

Crimea

A peninsula and autonomous region in Ukraine between the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. It was annexed by Russia in 2014 after a controversial referendum and military intervention that violated Ukraine's sovereignty.

Donbas

An industrial region in eastern Ukraine comprising the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (provinces), which has been partially occupied by Russia-backed separatists since 2014.

Warfare

The waging of armed conflict against an enemy, as exemplified by the ongoing clashes between Ukrainian forces and Russia-backed separatists.

Annexation

The act of appropriating territory from one state by another through aggressive expansion, as demonstrated by Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine.

International Displacement

International displacement refers to the forced removal of citizens during uncertain times like persecution, conflict, violence, and human rights violations. Citizens would be forced across the border and would be left in a position where they require international protection. In the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, multiple persons in Ukraine have been displaced due to the full-scale aggressions made by Russia.

Decentralization

Decentralization pertains to the process of transferring authority to regional and local levels of government. This process aims to strengthen Ukraine's defense against Russia by promoting a strong local self-government that reduces the possibility of separatists and the annexation of more territories.

Sham Referendums

In the context of Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine, sham referendums refer to manipulation or fraudulent elections that Russia conducted in an attempt to occupy Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhya. These referendums are now widely denounced as illegitimate and do not change the legal status of the territories under International Law.

Commission of Inquiry

The Independent International Commission of Inquiry was established by the UNHCR to investigate violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the context of the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine. They work to hold parties accountable and to protect the rights of victims who have suffered due to the conflict.

Background Information

Russian-occupied territories of Ukraine

The main conflict in Ukraine began in 2014 when protests in Kyiv led to the ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian president. In 2014, political turmoil in Ukraine led to a change in government that favored aligning with Europe rather than Russia. In response, Russia intervened militarily in Ukraine by annexing Crimea and backing separatist rebels in Eastern Ukraine's Donbas region. This led to conflict and

Russian occupation of those territories, which has been viewed internationally as a violation of Ukraine's sovereignty. The situation remains unresolved as Ukraine seeks to regain control of the occupied areas.

Donbas Region

The Donbas region in eastern Ukraine, containing Donetsk and Luhansk, has been a contested territory since 2014 when pro-Russian separatists seized parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. With backing from Russia, the separatists formed de facto states known as the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic. Fighting between Ukraine forces and the Russia-supported separatists has left parts of the Donbas under the control of the self-declared republics. Despite ceasefire agreements, clashes continue periodically in the region. Ukraine views the separatist-held areas of the Donbas as illegally occupied by Russia, while Russia argues that it is defending ethnic Russians in the region. The disputes between the two countries have resulted in the control over the Donbas territory to remain unresolved.

Crimea

Crimea is a peninsula located on the Northern coast of the Black Sea and was annexed by Russia in 2014. It was previously an autonomous republic within Ukraine. Crimea contains the city of Sevastopol, which houses Russia's strategic Black Sea naval fleet. In February 2014, Russian forces moved in to occupy key sites, leading to a disputed referendum in which Crimea voted to secede from Ukraine. Russia later declared Crimea as part of the Russian Federation, but Ukraine and most of the international community have not recognized the annexation. Russia has asserted historical ties and the need to protect ethnic Russians to justify annexing Crimea; however, Ukraine considers it an illegal occupation of its sovereign territory. Currently, Crimea remains under Russian control and governance.

Kherson

Kherson is a city and surrounding region in Southern Ukraine. In February 2022, during Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Russian forces captured the city of Kherson as well as the wider Kherson oblast. Even though Russia has occupied the area, Ukraine has launched efforts to retake Kherson. Russia moved to formally annex Kherson in September 2022, though Ukraine does not recognize the annexation. Kherson holds strategic importance as the only regional capital Russia has been able to occupy since the invasion began. Control over the Kherson region allows Russia to maintain a land corridor between Crimea and the Russian border. Ukraine insists Russia is illegally occupying the territory and depriving the local population of basic rights and freedoms.

Other territories

Apart from Crimea, Donbas, and Kherson, Russia occupies territories in the Southern Zaporizhzhia and Eastern Luhansk regions of Ukraine. The city of Mariupol and surrounding areas in the

Donetsk Oblast have also been captured by Russia. Control of these additional industrial areas provides strategic value in connecting Russia to Crimea and the separatist-held parts of Donbas. However, Ukraine claims that all these occupied areas are sovereign Ukrainian territory and has repeatedly sought to regain control of these territories.
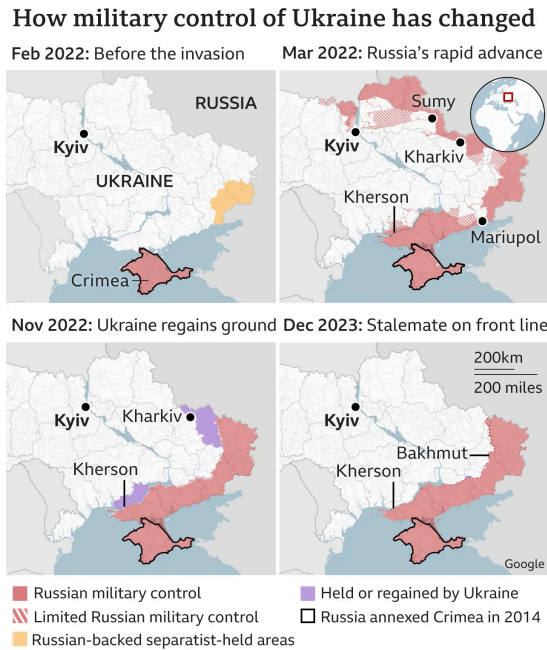

Figure 1: A map of how military control in Ukraine has changed

Major Countries and Organizations Involved

The Russian Federation

The Russian Federation, or Russia, is one of the main countries involved in the Russo-Ukrainian war. Ever since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the occupation of parts of Donetsk and Luhansk, the country has been in conflict with Ukraine. The conflict worsened when Russia declared a "special military operation" on Ukraine in 2022, indicating Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A war between the two countries has been going on ever since. In 2022, Russia announced the annexation of Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. However, the United Nations (UN) denied the annexations in a resolution. Despite this, Russia still exercises its federal laws on some of these territories and violates the human rights of individuals. They have been unlawfully enlisting Ukrainians in the territory into the Russian military and hosting allegedly staged voting. The presence of Russia in these territories has also led to the displacement of Ukrainian Refugees into the occupied territories of Russia or Russia itself. The reason Russia has been fixated on controlling Ukraine is because it does not recognize

Ukraine as a real state. Furthermore, Russia claims that Ukraine was historically a part of Russia, which justifies the claims of Ukraine's territories belonging to Russia.

Ukraine

Ukraine is the other main country involved in this issue. After World War I, Ukraine was divided between the Soviet Union, Poland, Romania, and Czechoslovakia. It was retaken by the Soviets in 1944, and its borders were redrawn. Ukraine was an integral part of the Soviet Union, as it provided the Union's agricultural production, defense industries, and military. Thus, its decision to sever ties in 1991 proved to be a fatal blow for the Soviets. Ever since its independence, Ukraine has been wanting to align with The European Union (EU) and The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Ukrainians had mixed views about joining Western alliances; however, after the Russian invasion in 2022, more civilians are supportive of Ukraine's Westward leanings. Because of domestic and international support, Ukraine has been able to defend itself against Russia. However, the war has accounted for 27% of Ukraine's territory lost and the casualties of around half a million Ukrainians.

European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) is an international organization consisting of 27 governing countries that work together to promote peace and uphold its values and interests. The EU has continuously condemned Russia for its actions and has constantly supported Ukraine in the conflict. Ever since the start of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the EU has imposed 12 packages of sanctions on Russia. These sanctions have included freezing the assets of a few Russian entities, restricting transactions with Russia's central bank, and prohibiting certain imports and exports. Moreover, the EU has provided almost €85 billion to Ukraine for military, financial, humanitarian, and emergency assistance, including helping Ukrainian refugees. Even though some of the EU's member states are still relatively dependent on Russia's energy resources, they plan on diminishing all Russian fossil fuel imports before 2030.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a security alliance between 31 member states. Its purpose is to guarantee the freedom and security of its members through political and military means. By guaranteeing military protection when one of the member states is attacked, nations in NATO are protected by fellow member states. This may be one of the reasons Russia felt threatened when Ukraine was trying to join NATO. Similar to the EU, NATO has been condemning the actions of Russia and supporting Ukraine. NATO has pledged €500 million to meet Ukraine's critical needs, established the NATO-Ukraine Council, provided a multi-year assistance program, and transferred weapons to Ukraine's military. Most importantly, NATO does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea and its occupation of any Ukrainian territory.

United Nations (UN)

The United Nations (UN) is an international nonprofit organization formed to increase political and economic cooperation among its member states. It discusses and resolves various issues by providing an equal opportunity for every member state to participate in. To alleviate the situation Ukrainians are facing, the UN has launched coordinated Flash Appeals for a combined $1.7 billion in 2022. The UN deplores Russia's aggression towards Ukraine and implores Russia to cease conflict immediately. The UN also views the elections Russia conducted in Ukrainian Territory as illegal and a threat to prospects of peace.

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

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a forum that addresses a wide range of security-related concerns in Europe and Central Asia. The OSCE condemns Russia's actions of violating Ukraine's sovereignty and illegally occupying Ukrainian territory. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has also established the Parliamentary Support Team for Ukraine to consolidate support and ensure that the needs of Ukraine are recognized.

United States

The United States (US) has played an important role in the Russo-Ukrainian war by deterring Russian forces and enhancing its military presence in Europe. These military and humanitarian aid were invested by the US because they believe that supporting Ukraine "keeps the peace and prevents open season for would-be aggressors to threaten [the] security and prosperity [of the nation]." Moreover, the US does not recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea and condemns Russia's imposition of federal law in its occupied territories of Ukraine.

Timeline of Events

Date	Description of event
February 20th, 2014	Russia illegally annexes Crimea. This marked the beginning of the conflict in Eastern Europe.
September 2014 & February 2015	Signing of the Minsk Agreements. Aimed at ending the conflict and coming to a political settlement, including decentralization and constitutional reform.
March 2014	Establishment of International monitoring mechanisms. Such as the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, to investigate human rights violations in the occupied territories.

December 19th, 2016	The adoption of the UN General Assembly Resolution 71/205. This called for the protection of human rights in the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine and urged all parties to respect and abide by international humanitarian law.
2017-2022	Ongoing conflict, with Russia's continuous violation of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as the European Union's support for Ukraine's independence and territorial integrity.
February 24th, 2022	The war in Ukraine was initiated by Russia assisted by further attempts to annex territories of Ukraine.
2023-2024	Ongoing efforts to address the governance issues in the occupied territories of Ukraine, including the consideration of a political solution, the establishment of monitoring mechanisms, and the continued violations of International Law.

Relevant UN Resolutions and Treaties

- Resolution 68/262, 2014 **(A/RES/68/262)**

This resolution, also known as the "Territorial Integrity of Ukraine" resolution, was adopted in 2014 to address the crisis in Ukraine, particularly the annexation of Crimea by Russia. This resolution emphasizes the importance of sovereignty and territorial integrity, rejects the annexation, calls for peaceful dialogue, and urges all nations to respect Ukraine's borders and unity.

- Crimea Declaration

The Crimea Declaration by the G7 nations strongly condemned Russia's annexation of Crimea, characterizing it as a violation of International Law. In response to Russia's actions, the G7 announced the imposition of sanctions as a means of applying economic and diplomatic pressure. This declaration called on Russia to de-escalate the situation and to come to a peaceful resolution regarding the crisis in Crimea.

- EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

This agreement represents a comprehensive and far-reaching partnership between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine. The agreement aims to strengthen political, economic, and cultural ties between the two entities. Overall, the agreement underscores a commitment to democratic principles, the rule of law, and respect for human rights.

- Minsk Agreement I & II

Minsk Agreement I and Agreement II, which were signed in 2014 and 2015 respectfully, were aimed to outline comprehensive steps for a ceasefire and political settlement. Both agreements included provisions for the withdrawal of heavy weaponry, the exchange of prisoners, and the establishment of a buffer zone. Minsk II further emphasized comprehensive political solutions to restore Ukrainian control over the border with Russia. The Minsk Agreements remain a focal point in international efforts to bring stability to the region.

- Resolution 68/262, 2014 **(A/HRC/RES/68/262)**

This Human Rights Council resolution addresses the human rights situation in Crimea following its annexation by Russia. It expresses the international community's concern about violations and abuse, particularly discrimination against minority groups. It calls for access to the region by international monitors to assess and report human rights situations. This resolution emphasizes the importance of upholding human rights standards in Crimea, urging all parties to respect the rights of the civilian population and work towards a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

Possible Solutions

Establishing an agreement that implemented a way to a peaceful ceasefire. Historically, the Minsk Agreements were signed to resolve the conflict in Eastern Europe between the Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists. The agreements specified and outlined a roadmap for a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, and local elections. The agreements saw partial success in reducing the intensity of the hostilities between the parties involved and establishing essential temporary ceasefires. These ceasefires facilitated the exchange of prisoners and aided in the withdrawal of dangerous weapons. As a whole, the agreements created the framework for political dialogue and autonomous discussions for the affected parties. Despite these achievements, the Minsk Agreements were faced with challenges when the implementation of the agreements was hampered by violations, with accusations of ceasefire breaches and reluctance to fully comply with the agreements. The political aspects of the agreement, such as local elections and the establishment of self-governing bodies, faced harsh obstacles, preventing an effective resolution. The lack of enforcement mechanisms and understanding of the complex geopolitical dynamics contributed to ongoing tensions and limited success in fully implementing the Minsk Agreements.

Imposing sanctions on Russia. The international community has also previously chosen to impose sanctions on Russia in response to its aggression against Ukraine, aiming to pressure it to respect Ukraine's sovereignty. The economic and trade sanctions were established as a way to inflict economic hardships on Russia, limiting its access to international markets, technology, and finance. However, sanctions also have the potential to bear unintended consequences that could lead to potential humanitarian implications, having the civilian population bear the burden, leading to concerns about the ethical aspects of sanctions and how to regulate them. There are also complicated economic and political ties to Russia as it provides most of the energy resources in Europe. This proves that while economic sanctions can apply pressure on Russia and contribute to diplomatic isolation, there are also limitations to their impacts.

Facilitating inclusive political dialogue that will consistently be monitored. These inclusive dialogues would be facilitated to address the concerns and aspirations of the local community in the occupied territories. This may include discussions on autonomy, cultural rights, and political representation. A proper platform will be established for a structured inclusive dialogue that brings together representatives of the Ukrainian government, the occupied territories, and international observers and mediators. Contrary to the Minsk Agreements that depended on international consensus, the dialogue would be facilitated by a neutral party that would take into account the relevant parties of the issue at hand. By directly engaging with the affected communities there is a sense of transparency and inclusivity when dealing with humanitarian issues. Even though there may be struggles with getting over historical grievances and the question of whether the dialogue will be successful, the sole purpose of the dialogues would initially be to address the needs of the civilian population which is a common issue between Russia and Ukraine. Thus, this negotiation process would need to attempt to reach a consensus on the diverse opinions at hand while making sure that the implementation is followed through.

The implementation of targeted economic development programs in the occupied territories. These economic development programs would focus on initiatives in infrastructure, development, job creation, and the stimulation of local industries. This will improve living conditions, contribute to social stability, and reduce the support for separatist movements. Economic development also requires investment for a more sustainable future, which includes investments in fields such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. This diversification of the economy would make it more resilient to external shocks and create sustained economic growth that would contribute to the territory's evolution into an independent and self-sufficient region. By achieving stability and security in these conflict-torn territories, disputes and warfare can be diminished. While this is a long-term solution that involves the approval of many parties, the cultivation of the economy works to find the growth and stability of the community. Through this solution, both short-term and long-term stability will be achieved.

Questions for Further Research

When researching about the issue, here are some questions to keep in mind:

1. What is your country's stance on the issue? Do they support or not support intervention from the international community in the occupied territories in Ukraine? Different countries will have different views as to how the occupied territories should be dealt with.

2. Is your country more neutral about the situation, or will they take bold steps, like condemning Russia and sanctioning them?

3. Does your country have any historical, political, economic, or cultural ties with the major parties involved in the conflict? In this issue, political and economic relationships, such as trading partnerships, will heavily influence the opinions of a country.

4. What kind of issue does your country want to focus on? Countries may have different agendas in mind. Some countries may want to focus on the humanitarian side of the issue while others might choose to focus on the political complications associated with the issue. This will also dictate a country's priorities when coming up with solutions.

5. Has your country done anything regarding the issue? Was it successful or not? Things your country has done before can be implemented in the resolution and advocated for during the conference. However, if it was not successful, think about what makes it unsuccessful and think of ways to make it better.

6. What resources or partnerships does your country have? Your country may utilize these resources available to them to help them establish an effective solution.

7. Is your country affected or threatened by the conflict? Countries, especially those neighboring Ukraine or Russia, will most likely be threatened and heavily affected by the conflict. There may be large groups of Ukrainian refugees seeking refuge in their borders. This causes these countries to be more proactive when seeking an effective solution.

8. Is your country part of major groups like the EU and NATO? Countries part of the EU and NATO will have similar stances and political views on the issue. They will also work together and utilize each other's resources to make solutions possible.

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