

Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War

By Paul D'Anieri

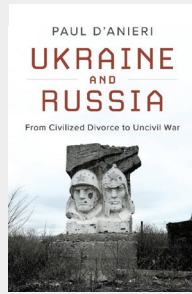
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Paul D'Anieri, a professor of political science and public policy at the University of California, Riverside, is a well-known scholar for his studies on Ukrainian and Russian politics, notably *Understanding Ukrainian Politics* in 2007, *Economic Interdependence in Ukrainian - Russian Relations*, and the current book, *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, in 2019.

In *Ukraine and Russia: From Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War*, D'Anieri mainly deals with the dynamics within Ukraine, between Ukraine and Russia, and between Russia and the West, which appeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union and eventually led to war in 2014. The book differs from other books in the literature in that chronologically it shows how Ukraine's separation from Russia in 1991, at the time called a "civilized divorce" (p. 1), led to what is now called "a new Cold War" (p. 1).

In this sense, it is argued that the conflict has deepened due to three major factors: the security dilemma, the impact of democratization on geopolitics, and the incompatible goals of a post-Cold War Europe. Rather than a peaceful situation that was wasted, he strongly underlines that all were deep-seated preexisting disagreements that could not be resolved regarding the Ukraine conflict. The book also highlights how this conflict has evolved into an international dispute regard-



ing Russia's interaction with Western countries and the dynamics of conflict and geopolitical issues.

The book consists of 8 chapters with a good overview of Ukraine-Russia relations not found in most of the current literature. Therefore, it enables us to understand the origin of

the conflict, pointing to the fact that the problems that broke out in 2014, in fact, go back to the beginning of the post-Cold War period and have increasingly gained prominence over time. When the Cold War ended in 1989, the leaders in Russia, Europe, and the U.S. expected a considerable reduction in tension and an increasing harmony of interests and values. However, Russia and Ukraine held vastly different expectations and views about whether their relationship would be based on sovereign equality or traditional Russian hegemony. As long as Russia's great power status included controlling Ukraine, the notion of its national security was not in accordance with the wishes of Ukraine's democracy and independence. More importantly, the author underlines that what was true in 1991 has not changed much. In other words, the aspirations of Ukraine and Russia are not incompatible with one another after the end of the Cold War.

D'Anieri emphasizes that a traditional problem in international politics and the new one in the post-Cold War era linked the Russia-

Ukraine conflict to broader European affairs, making both much more challenging to deal with. In this respect, the steps one country considered necessary to protect itself were threatening by others and led to a cycle of action and reaction, generally known as a security dilemma. Additionally, the enlargement of NATO to Eastern Europe was another issue. Namely, the spread of democracy triggered the security dilemma, making states in the West feel more secure but undermining Russia's perception of national interest. As Western leaders promoted the extension of democracy and democratic institutions, Russia felt threatened as new democracies sought to be part of Europe through NATO and the European Union. The further this process went, the more resentful Russia became, and Ukraine became more important to it.

Pointing to the mutual fears of the possibility of a change of status quo in Eastern Europe, he contends that this conflict was not caused only by the overthrow of the Yanukovich government in 2014, but also by the long-term antecedents of the invasion. Therefore, he chronicles the evolution of Ukrainian-Russian relations since 1991, showing that while violence was never inevitable, conflict over Ukraine's status emerged before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, it is pointed out that even though the collapse of Communism ended the Cold War, it did not create a shared understanding of Russia's role relative to the West, for it was believed that these disagreements would be resolved over time. More importantly, the complexity of the relationships involved has been ignored because it is considered difficult to focus simultaneously on internal affairs in Ukraine and Russia, their relationship with each other, and their relationships with the West. However, the author thinks it is essential and stresses that by the Orange Revolution in

2004, Ukraine's domestic struggle between pluralism and authoritarianism was tightly connected to greater autonomy from Russia and Russia's increasing conflict with the West. In fact, it was neither a domestic Ukrainian conflict that became internationalized nor a great power conflict fought over Ukraine.

When looking at the existing works, it is understood that they are not based on the large literature related to international conflict. In this sense, it should be noted that unlike much of the literature, this work does not limit the explanation of the conflict only to the defensive school. Still, taking the view of the offensive school more seriously, it explains the conflict without identifying an aggressor. Strikingly, the author contends that whereas Russia, Ukraine, and the West can all be criticized for their policies, several post-Cold War Europe dynamics resisted the resolution. For instance, by freeing Ukraine and challenging Russia's status as a great power, the collapse of the Soviet Union left Russia deeply dissatisfied with the status quo. Therefore, by 2014, Russia still wanted to exert influence over Ukraine, but its inclination to adhere to European regulations diminished.

Referring to Radoslaw Sikorski's criticism about "Russia's 19th-century approach" (p. 276) to security in 2013, he argues that Russia seeks an order based on the dominance of the great powers before the First World War. While the West insists that an order be based on democracy and international institutions. Therefore, D'Anieri asserts that the conflict will remain unresolved, with Ukraine caught in the middle, unless new security arrangements are made in Europe. In fact, it can be claimed that after the book's publication, the emergence of the war validates what the author said. In other words, he strongly recommends that the likelihood of the resolution

depends on the fact that “the wolves should be fed and the sheep kept safe” (p. 1). He expects Russia to be satisfied and Ukraine to be kept independent. Yet he is not sure about whether both goals will be accomplished.

The author tries to captivate the reader’s attention by asking interesting questions to see whether it is still possible to agree on the conflict, such as if a vision of the European order is compatible with Western norms and Russia’s great power aspirations. It is replied that as in 1989, after 2014, the answer appears to be no because the security perception of Western Europe is mainly built on great power restraint. While Germany recognized that its power and history caused fear in others, led to a security dilemma, and undermined Germany’s interests, Russia insisted on preserving its historical influence. Here, the author comments that these different approaches stem from the two societies’ readings of the Second World War. The defeated Germany accepted that its power threatened its neighbors, while the victorious Soviet Union decided that it had given it the right to establish dominance over its neighbors. Therefore, D’Anieri argues that democracy will not lead Russia to abandon its goals. Indeed, except for Yeltsin’s personal power in the 1990s, the belief that a democratic Russia will necessarily reach an accommodation with the West does not comply with Russia’s great power aspirations. Henceforth, he thinks that the merger of democracy with geopolitics reduces the likeli-

hood that a democratic Russia would voluntarily limit its power to reassure its neighbors.

The violent conflict in 2014 can not be understood and assessed in detail, ignoring the historical background dating back to the collapse of the Cold War and even to the period before it. However, it should be noted that along with the end of the Cold War, the author could also have focused on the deep historical aspirations of Russia, dating back to Ivan IV and Peter I, and the continuity of aspirations of Russia and the West in the 19th century. This could have enabled us to evaluate the different attitudes of Russia and Europe from a more holistic and broader perspective.

Moreover, the progress and the backsliding of democratization in the region meant that the status quo was repeatedly shattered, raising new fears and new conflicts, and due to some domestic pressures, the policies followed have not been able to produce conciliatory results for voters or elites in the U.S., Ukraine, or Russia. In the author’s words, a return to peace and security requires an agreement on a new architecture for security in Europe. Without such an architecture not negotiated even when the Cold War ended and Russia was democratizing, with an autocratic Russia, deep East-West antagonism, and ongoing conflict in Ukraine, it will be even harder to find. As a result, rather than making conciliatory policies, it has been thought that unusual leadership could manage the conflicts of interest.