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## Article

# Geopolitics and War within a 280 Characters Limit: A Positive and Normative Analysis of Elon Musk's "peace plan" for Ukraine

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**Abstract:** *The subject of the current conference paper concerns Elon Musk's "peace plan" for ending the war Russia started on February 24th 2022 against the independent and sovereign Ukrainian state, that he tweeted in October 2022, so seven months into the military confrontations between the two sides. Starting with the intuitive assumptions that combat is costly for each side, and that "every war must end" (Ikle, 1971) – so there will be a form of war termination also for Russia's invasion of Ukraine – the research question that I will address is whether Musk's simplistic forty-two words proposal could represent an actual peace settlement or at least a genuine basis for peace negotiations between Kyiv and Moscow.*

*In order to address the issue, I start by presenting Musk's "peace plan", then I argue that the specific proposals: (i) do not lay the foundations for a durable and stable peace in Europe, on the contrary, they are a form of appeasement towards Russia, an aggressor state; (ii) represent mostly Putin's claims for starting the war in the first place – they are not neutral, but come very close to Moscow's position and demands, while also the language is overtly favourable towards Russia; (iii) would be impossible to implement without recognizing/ legitimizing Russia's policy in the temporary occupied territories of Ukraine.*

*The analysis contributes to a better understanding of the reasons for war continuation for the time being, despite limitations stemming from the fast pace of the battlefield events unfolding (that change the negotiations power between the sides) and also from the lack of information on if and how negotiations are held during wartime and what are the real reasons why the settlement process is delayed.*

**Keywords:** *Elon Musk; game theory; negotiations; peace plan; Ukraine; war*

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## 1. Introduction

After illegally annexing Crimea in 2014 via a fake referendum (Podolian, 2015) and engaging for eight years in the protracted conflict in the Eastern regions of Ukraine – Donetsk and Luhansk, following

its covert and by proxy initiation and support for the separatist outbreak in the Donbass, Moscow decided to openly invade independent and sovereign state of Ukraine with Russian regular troops in the early hours of February 24<sup>th</sup> 2022. Despite not having officially declared war, incorrectly calling its invasion of Ukraine a „special military operation”, Russia’s current actions in Ukraine fit in with the war definition used by The Correlates of War Project (CoW). War has been defined as sustained combat involving organized armed forces, resulting in a minimum of 1,000 battle-related fatalities (Small and Singer, 1982:210), later specified as 1000 battle-related fatalities within a twelve-month period. Both criteria unfortunately have long been met and surpassed (Ukrinform, 2022; Reuters, 2023).

At the time of writing this paper (early March 2023) the war is still ongoing. Nevertheless, „every war must end” (Ikle, 1971). There have been multiple armistice/ peace initiatives, but none were successful in solving the dispute between the sides.

A few days into Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the two sides met in Belarus for negotiations. Kyiv’s agenda according to public statements was pressing for an immediate cease-fire and the withdrawal of Russian troops (RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service, 2022a). On the other hand, according to media reporting, Putin’s requests to halt the fighting were for Kyiv to be neutral and for Moscow’s control over Crimea to be officially recognized by the international community (Reuters, 2022b). Given the diametrically opposed negotiations mandates of the sides, there have been no agreement. After a few more rounds of talks, the potential for progress was only regarding humanitarian corridors (DW, 2022), exchange of prisoners (RFE/RL’s Ukrainian Service, 2022b), and the so-called Black Sea Grain Initiative agreement brokered by Turkey under UN auspices in order for „commercial food exports from Ukraine in the Black Sea” (Guterres, 2022).

Different war termination alternatives have been constantly debated. For example, in May 2022 Italy proposed a four-point peace plan calling for „local cease-fires to allow for civilian evacuations and creating the conditions for a general cease-fire leading to a long-lasting peace” (Sylvers, 2022), meaning Ukraine’s neutrality, clarifying the status of Crimea and Donbas and a multilateral peace agreement between the European Union and Russia (The Kyiv Independent, 2022). In February 2023, China also proposed its vision on the peace, structured in 12 points: respecting the sovereignty of all countries; abandoning the Cold War mentality; ceasing hostilities; resuming peace talks; resolving the humanitarian crisis; protecting civilians and prisoners of war; keeping nuclear power plants safe; reducing strategic risks; facilitating grain exports; stopping unilateral sanctions; keeping industrial and supply chains stable; promoting post-conflict reconstruction (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, 2023).

The main aim of the current research is, however, to assess whether Musk’s simplistic forty-two words proposal could represent an actual peace settlement or at least a basis for peace negotiations. I chose this particular „peace plan” for two reasons: *i.* it is less likely to be seriously considered by the belligerent sides or the academic community compared to propositions made by state actors, due to Musk not being a reliable and established mediator; *ii.* it might be more appealing to regular citizens who either want peace or are fatigued by the war and the gruesome news about Russia’s war crimes in Ukraine, both categories being at risk of falling for the appeal of simplicity and apparent logic of Musk’s proposal, without deeper understanding of the meaning and possible consequences of implementing it.

## 2. Theoretical framework on appeasement

Appeasement has long been an intensely debated subject in international relations especially since the interwar period, having been almost exclusively associated with Chamberlains' concessions towards Hitler that improved Germany's power position and, in the end, led to the start of the Second World War. Ripsman and Levy (2008), citing Paul Kennedy's *Strategy and Diplomacy*, quoted Winston Churchill saying about appeasement that it is as if „one who feeds the crocodile, hoping it will eat him last”.

One of the first working definitions for appeasement belongs to Hans Morgenthau, who explained the choice for unilateral concessions as a „a politically unwise negotiated settlement that misjudges the interests and power involved (...) we speak about appeasement when a nation surrenders one of its vital interests without obtaining anything worth while in return” (Morgenthau cited in Rock, 2000: 11). Robert Gilpin stated that appeasement „has been regarded as inappropriate under every conceivable set of circumstances”, while Glenn Snyder defined appeasement as „giving in cravenly to the demands of an aggressor in order to avoid being attacked” (Gilpin and Snyder cited in Ripsman and Levy, 2008). According to Schelling (1966: 66-69), „this willingness to satisfy limited demands makes the [victim] vulnerable to salami tactics”. Similarly, Jordan (2015) addresses the fact that „if an aggressor threatens war unless another nation makes concessions, why would that aggressor refrain from demanding additional concessions?”.

There are exceptions, according to Hirshleifer (2002: 2), appeasement can be rational if the aggressor is persuaded to be less hostile, as such there need to be „appeasability guarantees” it will not execute the threat. Similarly, according to Rock „appeasement can work. Inducements can remove the causes of tensions between states without prompting further demands or overt acts of aggression” (2000: 10). Rock attempts a more balanced definition for the concept – „the policy of reducing tensions (...) by removing the causes of conflict and disagreement. (...) Appeasement is not incompatible with compromise, reciprocity, and mutual accommodations. (...) however a state pursuing a policy of appeasement will usually take the initiative in offering inducement and will ultimately make greater sacrifices than its opponent” (Rock, 2000: 12).

However, „some adversaries are fundamentally unappeasable, either because their demands are so extreme that they simply cannot be met, or because they actually desire war” (Rock, 2000: 76). The main argument against appeasement – that I will also use in the current paper – is that „appeasement is dangerous because it undermines subsequent attempts at deterrence. Rather than simply failing to prevent aggression, it actually serves to promote it” (Rock, 2000: 4). According to Rock, this happens on the one hand because of the „material effect” (Rock, 2000: 4) according to which concessions regarding strategically important goods contribute to an increase in the strength of the aggressor, relative to the victim. On the other hand, it happens because of the „psychological effect” (Rock, 2000: 4) that works by diminishing the credibility of the deterrent threat, because the aggressor will find unlikely that a victim who first makes concessions, later to stand firm against further demands, thus leaving the defending party with the option for more compromises, or war.

### 3. Analysis

On October 3<sup>rd</sup> 2022, Elon Musk, who provided Starlink terminals for Ukraine after the start of the war (Sheetz, 2022), tweeted a simplistic Peace „plan”. Musk proposed a four-points plan of a total of 42 words. According to his vision of the peace:

1. *The two sides should „redo the elections in the four annexed regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson under UN supervision. After the elections, Russia should withdraw from Ukraine if that is the will of the people.”*

Musk refers to Moscow’s referendums organized in September 2022 in the temporary occupied regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson, with the aim of annexing these territories. The so-called electoral process was condemned by Kyiv and Western nations (US Department of State, 2022) who „dismissed the votes as a sham and pledged not to recognise their results” (Polityuk, 2022). Ukrainian officials stated that people from temporary occupied territories were banned from leaving before the so-called referendum was over, thus being forced to vote in favour of annexation. Furthermore, armed groups were going door-to-door threatening the population at gunpoint if they did not participate in the referendum (Polityuk, 2022).

There are a few underlying assumptions in Musk’s first proposition. With this idea Musk: *i.* acknowledges Moscow’s right (or any state for that matter) to invade other countries if it assesses that the population in certain areas is willing to and decide to join Russia (or to change borders by popular voting); *ii.* acknowledges Moscow’s right to hold referenda in the temporary occupied territories in Ukraine, highlighting only the issue of the procedure of holding the voting, namely the fact that the process was not supervised by the UN; *iii.* sets the exact conditions for a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine (the retreat is not necessary to be unilateral, but on the contrary, conditional on local population voting to be part of Ukraine);

2. *Crimea should be formally recognized as part of Russia, „as it has been since 1783, until Khrushchev’s mistake”.*

Here Musk refers to the fact that despite in 1954 Nikita Khrushchev administratively transferred Crimea to Ukraine for economic/ logistical and political reasons, the decision has been a „mistake”. According to Musk, the peninsula historically belongs to Russia since Moscow has annexed Crimea in 1783 after defeating the Ottomans who founded the Crimean Khanate. Given these considerations, the 2014 annexation was, according to Musk’s line of thought, legitimate, and as a consequence, so was Putin’s decision to invade Ukraine to secure the land bridge connecting Russia, Donbass and Crimea *via* the Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia.

3. *Ukraine should guarantee water supply to Crimea.*

By stating this as a condition, Musk frames the decision to start the war as a solution for a humanitarian problem. The peninsula has been depended on the freshwater supply from Ukraine mainland *via* the North Crimean Canal. According to some estimates, the canal provided 85% of drinkable water to Crimea (Vynohradova, 2020) and without a stable water supply from Ukraine mainland, the peninsula and its water resources/ reservoirs are heavily affected by weather conditions (Vynohradova, 2020). As such, freshwater supply became one of Russia’s most used propaganda narratives to justify the war.

#### 4. *Ukraine should „remain neutral”.*

Musk refers to the fact that former president of Ukraine, Petro Poroshenko, has signed in February 2019 a constitutional amendment committing Kyiv to becoming a member of NATO and the EU (RFE/RL's Ukrainian Service, 2019). This was maintained also after Volodymyr Zelensky won the presidential elections, possibly due to the fact that a large majority of Ukrainians endorse this (Reuters, 2022c). As such, in September 2022 Zelensky announced that Ukraine is „taking a decisive step by signing Ukraine's application for accelerated accession to NATO” (President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Official website, 2022), after on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2022, during the European Council, Ukraine was granted candidate status (European Council, Official website, 2022) following the application for membership in late February 2022, days after Russia launched the invasion.

The last three conditions (points 2-4) for peace are aspects that should be unilaterally implemented by Ukraine. The underlying assumptions of these points are that: *i.* Russia had legitimate reasons and concerns that made Putin order the invasion, namely the fact that historical mistakes should be corrected, and that Russia is under a humanitarian and military threat due to Ukraine's actions; *ii.* Kyiv (the victim) bears the responsibility for the military invasion; therefore, it should acquiesce regardless of Russia's (the aggressor) past or future actions. Then, Musk added that his vision on the peace is „highly likely to be the outcome in the end – just a question of how many die before then”, while also mentioning the possibility of a nuclear escalation „Also worth noting that a possible, albeit unlikely, outcome from this conflict is nuclear war”. This part of Musk's logical argument first tries to rationally appeal to the fact that should the belligerent sides in a war know the outcome of the military confrontations, they would choose that particular distribution of the good in dispute in order to save the costs associated with combat involvement. Despite this might be true in theory (Spaniel, 2022) it is difficult for someone to make the point that they *know* that a certain war outcome is „highly likely”. Should this type of settlement exist, there should be a common understanding between the sides. Most likely this is not yet the case. For the time being both parties continue to assess that each has a chance to win or to obtain a better negotiated settlement (ultimately) should they continue to engage in combat.

Also, Musk attempts to appeal to the risk of nuclear escalation. In line with the structural deterrence theory (as classified by Zagare and Kilgour, 2000), despite Ukraine is a non-nuclear state, Musk's underlying assumption is the following: given the fact that Russia is a nuclear power and can impose enormous costs to Ukraine or any adversary, the other party should acquiesce due to the fact that resisting Russia is an irrational strategy because of the risk of a nuclear strike which bears a cost that cannot be reasonably assumed and is significantly much lower than accepting Moscow's requirements.

Musk proposal has been met critically by Ukraine, mostly ignored by the West, and acclaimed by Russia. President Zelensky declared that „the billionaire would do well to fully understand the situation before making pronouncements about it” (Bigg, 2022). International community criticized the „peace plan”. U.S. Senator Lindsey Graham tweeted that Musk's suggestion „to end the Russian invasion by simply giving Russia parts of Ukraine – after all the suffering – is dumb” (Graham, 2022). Former U.S. Representative, Adam Kinzinger, tweeted that Musk's plan is „pretty much the worst idea” (Kinzinger, 2022) he has read. Lithuanian President, Gitanas Nausėda, responded sarcastically that „when someone tries to steal the wheels of your Tesla, it doesn't make them legal owner. Even though they claim both

voted in favour of it” (Nausėda, 2022). On the other hand, Dmitry Peskov declares that „It’s very positive that such a person as Elon Musk is trying to look for a peaceful settlement” (The Associated Press, 2022). However, Russia warned that it will not turn back on its previous moves to annex the four Ukrainian regions, because the local citizens have already expressed their desire to be a part of Russia and „there could be nothing else” (The Associated Press, 2022).

#### **4. The Model**

To assess Musk’s plan in Ukraine’s case, I illustrate a game-theoretic model to deciding whether to accept or reject territorial concessions and a loss of sovereignty facing Kyiv. For simplicity, I assume that Ukraine and the West coordinate their actions, have identical strategies and preferences so in this game they are the same actor – designated as Ukraine. On some aspects Ukraine and the West might have dissenting views, but for the aim of the paper is of secondary importance. So, their choices are either to appease Russia, or to resist Moscow’s demands for concessions. The other actor is Russia, facing the decision to either initiate an invasion of Ukraine (choose war) or not (maintain status-quo). The main subject that motivates the players, their preferences, positions, and choices and subsequently constitutes the primary criteria for analysis I assume to be the independence and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state.

The case to be considered here is a static prisoners dilemma structure interaction. If Ukraine appeases Russia’s demands and Moscow decides to maintain the status-quo the outcome is that there are some territorial concessions, enough to convince the Russian side not to start a war (outcome A), but if Moscow chooses to invade, then there are both compromises and military confrontations between the two sides (outcome B). If Ukraine resists accepting concessions and Russia chooses to maintain the status-quo, the result of the interaction is that there is no territorial concession made by Ukraine, so it maintains its sovereignty and Moscow accepts the situation (outcome C). If, however, Russia decides to start a war, then the two sides clash in military confrontations and the result of the strategic interaction is decided on the battlefield (outcome D).

For Ukraine the following order of the preferences is assumed to be true. The best outcome would be for Kyiv to resist and for Russia to accept the continuation of the status-quo – outcome C – because Ukraine would receive the largest benefits by maintaining its territorial integrity and sovereignty, while avoiding any other costs. The second-best outcome would be for Ukraine to appease Russian demands, and for Moscow to maintain the peace – outcome A – because Ukraine despite supporting some costs associated with partial concessions, it avoids the large costs that it would have to support should war broke out. The second worst outcome would be for the Ukrainian side to resist and for Moscow to initiate an invasion– outcome D – because Kyiv pays the costs of war, but it spares further costs that come with accepting concessions. The worst outcome would be for Kyiv to appease Russia, while the latter starts a war – outcome B – because in this case Ukraine pays both the cost for concessions and for war.

Similarly, for Russia: the best outcome would be for Kyiv to accept implementing territorial concession and for Russia to start a war – outcome B – because it would allow to minimize the costs for war since Kyiv would fight from a weaker position after it has accepted Russia’s demands. The second-best outcome would be for Ukraine to appease Russia and Moscow to choose maintaining the status-quo – outcome A – because it would allow Russia to obtain the benefits stemmed from appeasement, while avoiding the costs for war. The next best out-

come would be if Kyiv resisted the pressure to accept concessions, while Russia decided to invade – outcome D – because, despite supporting the costs for war, it allows Russia to settle the dispute militarily. The worst outcome is when Ukraine refuses to appease, while Moscow decides to no longer pursue an aggressive posture – outcome C – because Russia is denied its objectives and it accepts the unfavourable situation, thus paying the costs for making a step back. Nash equilibrium in this case is the pair of strategies equivalent to (defect, defect), which in this case is for Ukraine to resist and for Russia to initiate a war. The outcome represents for both sides the second least favourable result of the interaction. At this outcome, there is no in-

		Russia	
		Status-quo	War*
Ukraine	Appease	<i>Some territorial concessions and peace</i> 3, 3	<i>Territorial concessions and war</i> 1, 4
	Resist*	<i>No territorial concessions and peace</i> 4, 1	<i>No territorial concessions and war</i> 2, 2*

centive for the players to unilaterally change their respective strategies, because they would risk getting the worst outcome possible of the strategic interaction.

Figure 1. Strategic interaction between Ukraine and Russia

Having laid out the theoretical structure of the interaction, how would be Musk's proposal be transposed in the analysis?

Each of the four conditions from the „peace proposal” means that Ukraine should change its strategy from resisting the Russian demands to appeasing Moscow by taking a step back through accepting the cessation of Kyiv's control over Crimea and most likely over the four „annexed” regions of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia should a popular vote institute Russian control. According to Musk, Ukraine should accept territorial concessions in exchange for peace in the rest of the country – despite, in theory/ abstract, territory is an infinitely divisible good, in practice this cannot always be the case. Territory can be considered a physical representation of the concept of territorial integrity and sovereignty of the Ukrainian state.

According to Fearon (1995) the existence of an indivisible good can represent an explanation why negotiations fail between belligerent parties who end up confronting on the battlefield. The same line of argument is proposed by Toft (2006), who considers that an indivisible good is a cause for bargaining failure. The most important characteristic of an indivisible good is that it is linked to the identity of the group, Toft (2006) giving the example of the national territory of the homeland as being an indivisible good, because threats to the national territory of a country represent threats to the survival of the population, and this is the exact reason why people would rather risk their lives than to live without national identity.

The disputed good, being a part of the sovereign and independent state of Ukraine is of strategic importance – should Ukraine agree on concessions, it would cede a veto right to Russia over the decision-making in Kyiv and it would also offer incentives for further demands

from Moscow. Usual solutions for „dividing” an indivisible good are not viable. Side payments are impossible. Previously Russia has offered economic and energy benefits for Ukraine in order to maintain Kyiv in its sphere of influence (Motyl, 2005; Babachanakh, 2020; Theise, 2019; Al Jazeera, 2018). However, the war produced a radical transformation inside the Ukrainian society, making the theoretical solution obsolete. Also, neither the solution Fearon (1995) gives for random or alternative rounds allocation is not feasible.

Secondly, resuming the water supply for Russian control Crimea is also a form of appeasement. Before the war broke out in 2022 Ukraine constructed a dam on the North Crimean Canal, thus blocking the flow of freshwater towards the Peninsula. The situation allowed Ukraine to indirectly put pressure on Russia to calibrate how sustainable its control and presence in the Peninsula is – for example until building the Kerch Bridge and identifying costly solutions for desalinating the water, the supplies had to be transported *via* ferries. In the first days of the war, however, Russian Armed Forces – having seized control over a part of the Kherson region, destroyed the dam thus allowing the flow of water into Crimea. The fact that Russia didn't stop after it has secured the freshwater supply represents an indicator that Moscow's objectives are not limited to solving the water problem, and appeasing its demands on this issue will not solve the actual problems that caused the war. Spaniel makes a similar argument „the water was solved, but the war persisted afterwards. Thus, water issues (...) cannot be all of it. Otherwise, there is no way to explain Russia's decision to continue the fight after securing the objective” (2022: 22).

Despite Musk tries to frame the issue as a humanitarian one, it should nevertheless be considered first of all that such a decision would equate with a recognition of the legitimacy of Russian control over the Peninsula, and second of all, it would mark a shift in the power structure between the two sides. Should Ukraine agree to allow the Dnipro River to flow into Crimea by opening the sluices, it would also come with a transfer of power from Kyiv towards Moscow, thus hurting its own negotiation position in the future, and also will allow Russia to maintain a large military presence in the Peninsula (freshwater is of essential importance also for building and maintaining military capabilities). When a state increases its relative power position (as would be the case for Russia), then there can be no guarantee that in the future, it will try to obtain further benefits as a consequence of its strength not reflecting the actual distribution of territories in this case (Powell, 1996). In Ukraine's case, further allowing a consolidation of Russia makes it more likely for the latter to try to further improve its power position.

Lastly, Ukraine's agreeing to remain neutral is also a form of appeasement. This issue has been discussed in the beginning of the military invasion during the first rounds of negotiations. Ukrainian presidential adviser, Mikhaïlo Podolyak said that Kyiv proposes a „Ukrainian model of security guarantees, which implies the immediate and legally verified participation of a number of guarantor countries in the conflict on the side of Ukraine, if someone again encroaches on its territorial integrity” (Seddon, Olearchyk, Massoudi and Zilber, 2022). The two sides, however, haven't signed the treaty, most likely Russia didn't agree with Ukraine security guarantees in exchange for accepting its neutrality status. The theoretical solution stemming from Fearon's preventive war as a cause for conflict (1995) is not applicable in Ukraine's context. That is because even if it would be possible that a binding agreement that would guarantee Ukraine would not be able to increase its relative power and therefore risk imposing on Russia a worse outcome compared to the status quo, this would be made at the expense of the Ukrainian side freedom to choose its foreign policy orientation. In the meantime, after

Ukrainian Armed Forces succeeded in pushing Russia out of Kyiv region and liberating large parts of Kherson and Kharkiv, thus significantly also improving Ukraine's negotiations stance, president Zelensky withdrew the proposal for neutrality. So, in September 2022 Zelensky announced that Ukraine is „taking a decisive step by signing Ukraine's application for accelerated accession to NATO” (President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Official website, 2022).

## **5. Conclusions**

Elon Musk's "peace plan" for ending the war, cannot, for multiple reasons that I have presented in this conference paper, both positive and normative, represent a real base for negotiations between the two sides. The plan does not lay the foundations for a durable and stable peace in Europe, on the contrary, they are a form of appeasement towards Russia, an aggressor state. After modelling the interaction on a prisoner's dilemma structure, I have demonstrated that the Nash equilibrium is the pair of strategies equivalent to (defect, defect), which in this case is for Ukraine to resist and for Russia to initiate (or continue) the war (depending on the round of the interaction). The outcome represents for both sides the second least favourable result of the interaction. However, after reaching this outcome, there is no incentive for the players to unilaterally change their respective strategies, because they would risk getting the worst outcome possible of the strategic interaction. So, should Ukraine choose to unilaterally switch its strategy to appease Russia (which is what Musk's plan asks for), then the outcome would reach the worst result for Kyiv, that brings the biggest costs (the choice of territorial concessions for Ukraine and war for Russia).

Also, the „peace plan” represent mostly Putin's claims for starting the war in the first place – they are not neutral but come very close to Moscow's position and demands (for example Ukraine's neutrality and a special status for the temporary occupied territories that would grant Moscow control over the decision-making process in Kyiv), while also the language is overtly favourable towards Russia (for example „Khrushchev's mistake”).

Lastly, Musk's „solutions” would be impossible to implement without recognizing/ legitimizing Russia's policy in the temporary occupied territories of Ukraine, due to the fact that acknowledges Moscow's right to hold referenda in the temporary occupied territories in Ukraine, highlighting only the issue of the procedure of holding the voting, namely the fact that the process was not supervised by the UN so this is the reason it cannot be recognized by the international community.

## **Conflicts of interest**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## **About the author**

Sabina Rusu is a second year PhD student at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, SNSPA in Bucharest. Her research interests consist of the security situation in the Black Sea Region, more specifically Russia's aggressive behaviour that culminated with the unprovoked and illegal invasion of the independent and sovereign state of Ukraine. The author's preferred method of analysis consists of game theory modelling the strategic interactions between the relevant players. She

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