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Ukraine as a security challenge

Ukrajna mint biztonsági kihívás

Abstract

The author's aim with the present publication is to describe the background of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, the reasons behind its appearance and escalation, and in particular its aspects impacting the European Union's and Hungary's interests.

Absztrakt

Szerző célja jelen publikáció keretében bemutatni az ukrán-orosz konfliktus hátterét, megjelenése és eszkalációja okait, különös tekintettel annak az Európai Unió és Magyarország érdekeit érintő aspektusaira.

EU leaders have become increasingly concerned about the 1-year-long Ukrainian-Russian conflict that by now has extended into a civil war. The EU is forced to consider in and around its broader frontiers:

- the Arab Spring's legacy¹
- the deepening Syrian civil war²
- the rise of ISIS³
- the illegal migration affecting among others Hungary⁴
- the EU-internal terrorist threat (e.g. the attack against Charlie Hebdo⁵ and related events in Belgium⁶ and Denmark⁷)

¹ PECZÖLI, Ákos: Probléma az Unió peremén – Líbia, Felderítő Szemle, 2012. március XI./1. szám pp 84. <http://www.kbh.gov.hu/hu/letoltes/fsz/2011-3-4-2012-1.pdf> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

² Syria: The story of the conflict, BBC, 08. 12. 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-26116868> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³ How Islamic State is expanding its empire of terror, The Guardian, 21. 02. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/21/islamic-state-empire-al-qaida-isis> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁴ Kosovans risk perils of roads, forests and criminals in chase for better life in EU, The Guardian, 17. 02. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/17/kosovans-risk-perils-of-roads-forests-and-criminals-in-chase-for-better-life-in-eu> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

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- the increasing anti-Semitic atrocities and Israel's response to them⁸
- the continuous threat of Greece going bankrupt⁹.

On this agenda characterized by shifting priorities the Ukrainian uprising was first considered as a "task to be handled" with lower importance. Nevertheless, it has become urgent at the same time as all the other events, which is a telling sign of Pro-Russian separatists' timing.

The underlying aim of the author with the present article is to prove that:

1. Global politics have failed to prevent the current Ukrainian situation, going forward they can but address the escalating crisis.
2. The current situation in Ukraine has direct impact on European and in particular on Hungarian interests including Hungary's Eastern relations and national politics.
3. Hungary as a NATO and EU member is in a position to exert a mutually positive influence on the constellation due to its active foreign affairs.

The current conflict in Ukraine has reached and even exceeded the level of challenge¹⁰ (moreover the level of threat/hazard) described in international documents. Though, neither the new NATO Strategic Concepts¹¹, nor the European Defence Strategy or Hungary's National Defence Strategy¹² and National Military Strategy¹³ provide an exact definition of these terms.

⁵ Charlie Hebdo attack: Three days of terror, BBC, 14. 01. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-30708237> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁶ Police in Belgium, France, and Germany make arrests in latest anti-terror raids, FOX News, 16. 01. 2015. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2015/01/16/police-in-paris-berlin-make-arrests-in-anti-terror-raids-after-belgian-plot/> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁷ Danish police kill 22-year-old suspected of Copenhagen shootings, Reuters, 2015. 02. 16. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/15/us-denmark-shooting-idUSKBN0L10N720150215> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁸ Danish chief rabbi responds to Netanyahu: Terror is not a reason to move to Israel, Haaretz, 2015. 02. 15. <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/1.642552> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁹ Greek bailout: Germany claims victory as Greece agrees four-month bailout extension, The Independent, 2015. 02. 20. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greek-bailout-greece-and-eurozone-creditors-reach-deal-10060734.html> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹⁰ MOLNÁR, Ákos – PECZŐLI, Ákos: Az Európai Unió határellenőrzési rendszere II. - Aktuális kihívások, http://www.biztonsagpolitika.hu/documents/1343850231_MOLNAR_Akos_Peczoli_Akos_Az_Europai_Unio_hatarellenorzesi_rendszere_II_-_biztonsagpolitika.hu.pdf time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹¹ Active Engagement, Modern Defence, NATO, 2010. 11. 19. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68580.htm time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹² Magyarország Nemzeti Biztonsági Stratégiája, 1035/2012. (II. 21.) Korm. határozat http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/download/f/49/70000/1035_2012_korm_határozat.pdf time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹³ Magyarország Nemzeti Katonai Stratégiája, HM, 2012. http://www.kormany.hu/download/a/40/00000/nemzeti_katonai_strategia.pdf time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

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The definition of security challenge¹⁴ is derived from the general meaning of safety: lack of physical threat, state of being exempt from threat. Therefore, once the relevant escalation levels are defined, any factor involving threat or danger may be considered as a security challenge or provocation.

Any source of threat against security must be identified pro-actively and provided they show activity, must be addressed with the relevant pre-defined countermeasures.

Challenges are usually rather complex. From a NATO, EU and Hungarian point of view, the Ukrainian situation can be described as a geographical (by proximity), military-type, direct (non-preventable with immediate impact), and lasting armed conflict with no identifiable end date¹⁵.

A conflict of such complexity combines multiple symptoms:

- decades-long lack of legitimacy characterizing the weak Ukrainian state
- internal riots
- rapid impact of the Russian monetary crisis
- presence of organized crime across every layer of the state.

The synergy of these factors has by now escalated into regional conflict triggering regional instability from which Hungary is not exempt either.

To analyse the root-causes and background of the conflict, it is necessary to understand the Ukrainian situation and to depict the country's profile.

Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe with an area of 603.550 sq. km. Its capital city is Kiev; the larger cities are Kharkov, Odessa, Donetsk and Lviv.

It borders Russia to the east and northeast, Belarus to the northwest, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary to the west, Romania and Moldova to the southwest, and the Black Sea and Sea of Azov to the south and southeast, respectively. The borderline with Russia is 1.576 km long.

Due to its continental climate and its extensive fertile steppe, half of the country is ideal for agriculture. The Donetsk-basin in the East is the centre of the country's heavy industry. 70% of the population lives in urban areas.

According to the 2001 Ukrainian Census, the country's population of 44 million (estimate of 2014) is made up of 77.8% Ukrainians, 17.3% Russian, and smaller nationality groups including 0.3% Hungarians.

Language usage breaks down in a similar way. 67% speaks the constitutional language of Ukrainian and 24% the regional Russian dialect. Minority languages such as Hungarian are spoken by 9% of the population.

¹⁴ Hadtudományi Lexikon A-L, szerk.: Szabó József, Magyar Hadtudományi Társaság, Budapest, 1995. ISBN: 963 04 5226 x pp. 144

¹⁵ DEÁK, Péter: Biztonságpolitika a hétköznapokban, Zrínyi Kiadó, Budapest, 2009. ISBN: 978 963 327 471 2

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Regarding the organization of the state, Ukraine is a presidential republic. Its parliament contains a single chamber. Administratively speaking the country contains 24 districts. Its constitution has seen multiple changes recently.

The current President is the allegedly corrupt “Chocolate King” Petro Poroshenko¹⁶, a candy company magnate who previously held ministerial offices for different political sides. His Prime Minister, Arseniy Yatsenyuk¹⁷ also has experience in the government. Previously he supported the unpopular economic reforms.

The country’s GDP as per a 2014 estimate is of 337.4 billion USD (7400 USD per capita/ year)¹⁸. The state can only avoid defaulting thanks for the continuous monetary aid packages of the IMF (International Monetary Fund)¹⁹. One quarter of the population has been living below the poverty threshold since 2010.

The country’s history has always been full of contradictions. Being on the borderline (kraina = frontier, brink in Russian) of the Russian Empire, its sovereignty has been limited since the 18th century.

Following the fall of Tsarist Russia, the country enjoyed a 3-year long independency before merging into the Soviet Union. The Soviet era started with the first artificial famine. Then the country saw the second famine called “holodomor”²⁰, before entering World War II. Since then Ukrainian foreign affairs and interests have been defined by a Soviet framework. The fall of Soviet Union has launched Ukraine on the same path as other post-soviet countries: it has been trying to amalgamate Soviet reflexes with Western ideology without success.

Following the separation from the Soviet Union in 1991, the state built on corruption and favouritism of oligarchs functioned only to a limited extent and soon reached complete disorder. The political system aligned alongside the two parties, which also reflected the country’s ethnic-regional composition²¹.

The nationalist heritage and the renaissance of Western trends all lead to the “Orange Revolution” of 2004-2005, which brought along the victory of Victor Yushchenko at the presidential elections. The Western turn however has only been partially successful. Victor

¹⁶ Profile: Ukraine's President Petro Poroshenko, BBC, 07. 06. 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26822741> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹⁷ Ukraine's prime minister: A young but experienced leader, The Washington Post, 2014. 03. 11. http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/ukraines-prime-minister-a-young-but-experienced-leader/2014/03/11/ceab69da-a8fe-11e3-8a7b-c1c684e2671f_story.html time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹⁸ The CIA Factbook, CIA, d.n. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

¹⁹ Itt az ukrán államcsőd?, HVG, 2014. 03. 05. http://hvg.hu/gazdasag/20140305_itt_az_ukran_allamcsod time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

²⁰ COURTOIS, Stéphane (szerk.): A kommunizmus fekete könyve, Nagyvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 2000. pp. 171 ISBN: 963 9175 09 9

²¹ KUBICEK, Paul: The History of Ukraine, Greenwood Press, London, 2008. ISBN: 978 0 313 34920 1

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Yanukovych returned to power first as Prime Minister before being elected President in 2010.

The results of the 2012 elections have been questioned by Western observers due to allegations of vote rigging. The clearly pro-Russian move of 2013 triggered protests in November and ultimately led to the events of Maiden Square. The situation escalated after 3 months when the local riot police unit "Berkut" got deployed against the protesters leaving dozens of people dead and several wounded. The continuing resistance finally forced the President to flee to Russia²².

In the meantime, while the world was watching the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, the leadership of the autonomous Crimean peninsula declared independence from Ukraine on 11 March 2014 and requested admission to the Russian Federation, which has not been recognized since by the international community.

Even though the Crimean events have not seemingly breached international law, they have been particularly painful for Ukraine: its sovereignty has been ignored in the interest of "protecting a Russian ethnic minority". The stability of its borders and the principle of non-intervention have equally been dismissed²³.

International law requires peaceful settlement of any conflict²⁴. However, none of the parties respect the previously negotiated ceasefires and attempt to gain advantage at any opportunity.

Before the elections scheduled by the temporary government could be held, the country saw the eruption of a so-called proxy-war in the region, by definition a war is encouraged by one or more greater powers without their direct intervention.

Comparing the Ukrainian army to the Russian, the latter appeared to be the unquestionable winner. Nevertheless, locally trained Russian-speaking minority separatists and disguised members of Special Forces (whose clothing, equipment and tactics have prompted experts to identify them as members of the Russian regular forces) have become engaged in a lasting armed conflict. Russian convoys of camions allegedly carrying aid have crossed the frontiers. Among the fighters there are also Russian volunteers²⁵ who believe in the nation's "sacred war" and whose equipment has either been provided by Russian nationalist groups or stolen from Ukrainians.

²² Special Report: Flaws found in Ukraine's probe of Maidan massacre, REUTERS, 2014. 10. 10. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/10/10/us-ukraine-killings-probe-special-report-idUSKCN0HZ0UH20141010> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

²³ BRUHÁCS, János: Nemzetközi jog II., Dialóg-Campus Kiadó, Pécs, 1999. pp. 33-36, 83 ISBN: 963 85756 7 0 II. k.

²⁴ BRUHÁCS, János: Nemzetközi jog I., Dialóg-Campus Kiadó, Pécs, 1999. pp. 222-227 ISBN: 978 963 7296 82 6.

²⁵ The Russians fighting a 'holy war' in Ukraine, BBC, 18. 12. 2014. <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-30518054> letöltés ideje: 2015. 02. 22.

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It is interesting to mention here that President Putin signed a decree in January 2015 authorizing foreign citizens to serve in the Russian army²⁶. Professional soldiers also serve in the Ukrainian ranks though²⁷.

In 2014 Russia spent 90 million USD on developing its high-tech Ratnik infantry equipment²⁸. It has grasped the live testing opportunity in Ukraine to try out its other electronic warfare as well developed since the last war with Georgia in 2008. These include UAVs (drones), communication systems capable of jamming and/or direction-finding and also longer range artillery systems. In addition to these (Pro)-Russian forces also have at their disposal Buk missile systems, Grad rockets systems and mobile hospital equipment. Ukrainian army is clearly outclassed by this modern equipment and cannot prevent the country from becoming a live testing ground²⁹.

The Russian army also benefits from the fact that almost each of its ranks has participated in an armed conflict before (either in Afghanistan, or in Chechnya or Georgia) and has thus experience in carrying out operations. As evidence, it is sufficient to note that by the time the Ukrainians reacted, the (Pro)-Russian forces already kept multiple strategic locations and infrastructure under control and enjoyed full diplomatic support from Russia.

Russia's aspirations are limited by the considerable funds needed for building an empire. In addition, since January 2015 they have been facing economic crisis. The central bank had to interfere to protect the rouble which had lost half of its value over the last year³⁰. Even though previously high oil prices made Russia gain considerable reserves (385 billion USD in gold and foreign currency), the recent fall of oil prices have hit the market already suffering from overproduction.

At the same time Russia would need funds coming from the sale of hydrocarbons flowing through among others Ukraine to counter-balance the economic sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union. These sanctions increase the costs of foreign trade, hinder the establishment of new relationships, discourage capital investment and worsen the country's credit ratings.

In addition, a weak rouble, being a regional currency, fosters further worries. According to the World Bank Tajikistan's, Moldova's, Armenia's, Georgia's and Kyrgyzstan's economy

²⁶ Putin Signs Decree Allowing Foreigners Into Russia's Army, The Moscow Times, 07. 01. 2015. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/putin-signs-decree-allowing-foreigners-into-russia-s-army/514086.html> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

²⁷ Kiszervezett polgárháború: Zsoldosok, légiósok, veteránok, NOL, 13. 05. 2014. <http://nol.hu/kulfold/zsoldosok-legiosok-veteranok-1461669> letöltés ideje: 2015. 02. 22.

²⁸ \$90 Million of Future Warrior Gear Purchased for Russian Army, The Moscow Times, 04. 11. 2014. <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/90-million-of-future-warrior-gear-purchased-for-russian-army/510600.html> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

²⁹ Ukraine crisis: Russia tests new weapons, BBC, 06. 02. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31146595> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³⁰ Ruble's Fall Tests Governor of Russia's Central Bank, The New York Times, 09. 02. 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/10/business/international/rubles-fall-tests-governor-of-russias-central-bank.html?_r=0 time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

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(in a descending order) are highly dependent on rouble remittances. The deflation of the Russian currency is thus capable of triggering a considerable recession in the region, not to mention the difficulties in paying out support to Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia³¹.

With regards to the Ukrainian conflict, the NATO Summit held in Wales in September 2014 has brought some results, even though none of them forecast any quick resolution. Member states have been allowed to supply arms and military equipment to Ukraine. In response to the armed conflict, the Allies have agreed to a readiness action plan and decision has been made to establish a new high readiness, adaptable force based in Poland³². These decisions have been fostered by Russia's repeated aerial scouting³³ and submarine activities along the European shores³⁴.

In the joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission issued in December 2014, the Allies condemn Russia's deliberate destabilization of Eastern Ukraine, its violation of international law as well as its support of militants. They also condemn the increased military presence in the Black Sea region and recognize Ukraine's right for independence, sovereignty and stability³⁵.

The Alliance's declaration at the end of January 2015 has been equally firm. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has expressed his sympathy for Ukrainian losses and condemned the attack against Mariupol. He highlighted that Russian-backed separatists continue to hinder peaceful settlement of the conflict and called on Russia to stop providing logistical support to the militants³⁶.

The opposing parties first gathered at the negotiating table in September 2014 in Minsk, Belarus. This was followed by a 16-hour long negotiation in February 2015 between Russian President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko, French President François Hollande and German Chancellor Angela Merkel. Despite the non-encouraging signs of a previous truce, they have agreed in:

- an immediate bilateral ceasefire

³¹ Russia's rouble crisis threatens support for rebel republic Transnistria, The Guardian, 20. 02. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/20/transnistria-russia-rouble-crisis> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³² A NATO-csúcstalálkozó eredményei, MTI, 06. 09. 2014. http://kitekinto.hu/europa/2014/09/06/a_nato-csucstalalkozo_eredmenyei/ time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³³ Russian bombers testing the RAF hark back to cold war for Putin and the west, The Guardian, 19. 02. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/19/russian-bombers-raf-flight-west-putin-cold-war-nato> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³⁴ Sweden searches for suspected Russian submarine off Stockholm, The Guardian, 19. 10. 2014. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/oct/19/sweden-search-russian-submarine-stockholm> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³⁵ Joint statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, NATO, 02. 12. 2014.

http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_115474.htm time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³⁶ NATO Secretary General statement on the extraordinary meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission, NATO, 26. 01. 2015. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_116862.htm time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

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- the withdrawal of heavy weaponry by both sides monitored by the OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe)
- a need for local elections
- amnesty to persons participating in the Donetsk and Luhansk fights
- a mutual release of prisoners.

In addition, the parties have agreed in providing humanitarian aid, reviving social and economic ties and restoring Ukrainian sovereignty by withdrawing foreign military equipment, restoring the Ukrainian government's control over rebel-held areas and launching constitutional reforms by the end of 2015.

It is rather telling that on the anniversary of his flight to Russia, previous President Victor Yanukovich declared his willingness to return to Ukraine to ease people's lives, which could shed lights on Russia's future plans³⁷.

So far the war has claimed almost 5500 lives, including many children due to regular hitting of civilian targets and the figure is likely to continue to increase. An estimate of 150 tons of ammunition has been used in Eastern Ukraine since the beginning of the conflict. Close to Luhansk, tanks and other armoured vehicles kept on crossing the border even during the Minsk negotiations.

Previous settlement plans seem to fail as both parties violate the ceasefire and separatists aim at maintaining their control in the currently held regions³⁸. President Poroshenko has already talked about declaring a state of war with Russia and has requested UN peacekeepers to be deployed in the country³⁹, which is even more peculiar if we consider that Russia is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. In parallel, Ukraine intends to purchase weapons despite its lack of relevant resources, which could in the short run contribute to refill supplies and to re-equip and train conscript soldiers, but could only provide actual support in the military operations in the long.

It can be considered as a positive sign though that the opposing parties have exchanged prisoners⁴⁰. In the meantime fighting continued between Ukrainian army and separatist around the strategic city of Debaltseve⁴¹. The lack of relevant supplies on the Ukrainian side finally resulted in the city's falling in the hands of the separatist⁴².

³⁷ Ousted Ukraine leader aiming to return as rebel rockets threaten peace plan, The Guardian, 21. 02. 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/feb/21/ukraine-debaltseve-rebels-maidan-one-year-anniversary> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

³⁸ Emelkedő tétek, HVG, 07. 02. 2015. pp. 20. ISSN: 1217-9647

³⁹ Ukraine conflict: Poroshenko calls for UN peacekeepers, BBC, 15. 02. 2015.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31527414> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁴⁰ Ukraine crisis: Prisoner swap boosts ceasefire, BBC, 22. 02. 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31574921> time of download: 02. 22. 2015.

⁴¹ Furcsa tűzszünet, HVG, 21. 02. 2015. pp. 24. ISSN: 1217-9647

⁴² Ukraine Rebels Celebrate Victory at Strategic City With a Festive Rally, The New York Times, 23. 02. 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/24/world/europe/ukraine-rebels-celebrate-victory-at-strategic-city-with-a-festive-rally.html?ref=world&_r=0 time of download: 02. 23. 2015.

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The short term impacts of the conflict include a recession of Ukraine's economy and a deepening poverty. These trigger instantaneous national instability, a growing black economy that pushes the population to search for illegal means of income and can also lead to the appearance of alternative public utility services where organized crime ensures public order.

Hungary plays a special role within the European Union, since it neighbours Ukraine and shares a large part of its 20th century history with the war-torn country. In addition, because of the existence of a Hungarian ethnic minority in Ukraine, Hungary is directly involved in the conflict. As Ukraine becomes a passageway, Hungary as the entry point to the European Union, has seen a considerable increase in the risk of uncontrolled movement of people and goods.

Based on available sources of information no Western military involvement can be expected at this point in time. Instead, a direct supply of weaponry with eventual involvement of private companies appears to be more plausible.

In the long run the conflict will most likely result in a growing regional instability where malfunctioning government systems directly impact neighbouring states. The lack of public services will hand power over to organized crime and may lead to a humanitarian emergency situation. The new state trying to rebuild itself in such conditions will be forced to grant privileges to its supporters.

Hungary may become a primary transit country, which will further stretch the reinforced border patrol services and will require a complex execution of defence plans⁴³.

Considering the complexity of the conflict, the minimum requirements include a close follow-up of the events, the continuous gathering of intelligence through all available channels, constant analysis and evaluation of the results, the use of ethnic sources and if possible an official presence on the ground through international organizations.

During the crisis management it will be necessary to maintain a genuine relationship between the two parties. The first step would be to secure an effective ceasefire to protect both the civilian population and the infrastructure. This should be followed by the establishment of sustainable peace conditions.

From Hungary's point of view, an active participation in the de-escalation and normalization of the situation will be crucial in the long run, since any influence on the new government will contribute to securing strategic Hungarian interests.

In conclusion, since due to its geographical location Hungary cannot avoid participation in the Ukrainian conflict, it will be impacted in terms of its national and civil defence over the coming years, which will require an active participation of its national security forces.

Key words: Ukraine, Russia, crisis management, war

⁴³ MEZEY, Gyula: Összetett veszélyhelyzeti válaszreakálás és válságkezelés döntéstámogatása a kabinet szintjén ZMNE, Budapest, 2005., ISBN: 963 7060 15 4

Kulcsszavak: Ukrajna, Oroszország, válságkezelés, háború

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