

**SCRIPTS OF SOVEREIGNTY:**  
*The Freezing of the Russia-Ukraine Crisis and  
Dilemmas of Governance in Eurasia*

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**REPORT HIGHLIGHTS**

Russia's annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine present the strongest challenge to the norms, rules and institutions governing European security since the end of the Cold War. Russian officials have invoked six identifiable "scripts of sovereignty" to justify Russia's territorial maneuverings in its near abroad: self-determination, responsibility to protect (R2P), upholding the rights of co-ethnics, accessing strategic assets, claiming sacred territory, and following the Kosovo precedent. While these scripts seek to invoke international law, they in fact hold minimal legal weight and contradict previous official Russian positions on issues of sovereignty. Instead, the main aim of these justifications has been to forge a new Russian-led space – centered on the Georgian breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Transnistria, Crimea and now eastern Ukraine – whose political institutions, economies and normative values align with Moscow and thereby frustrate Western efforts in the region.

The creation of new "frozen conflicts" is thus itself becoming a new and distinct Russian-controlled model of alternative sovereign rules and organization within Europe, beyond the scope of prevailing international agreements and institutions. The West has contributed to this "freezing process" through its counterproductive efforts to isolate territories like Abkhazia and eastern Ukraine and its insistence on integrating politically divided states such as Georgia and Ukraine into transatlantic institutions. Ultimately the West must choose between upholding the recognized territorial borders of these states, which would involve conflict resolution in consultation with Moscow, or continuing to pursue the Western integration of divided states at the risk of their permanent dismemberment.

## FOUR SCENARIOS FOR EASTERN UKRAINE

Scenario 1: The Crimea Model – Russian Annexation: Moscow may ultimately decide, as it did with Crimea, to annex eastern Ukraine. Despite Moscow's involvement in the region, this event is the least likely to transpire because it would mean the certain retention and expansion of Western sanctions.

Scenario 2: The Georgia Model – *De Jure* Sovereignty, Russian Patronage: As in the 2008 conflict with Georgia, Russia would recognize the legal independence of eastern Ukraine and subsequently enter into a number of “bilateral” agreements to solidify its patronage of the territory. This scenario is also unlikely not only because it would keep the sanctions regime in place, but because Russia's experience with “recognition diplomacy” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia yielded few results.

Scenario 3: Negotiated Settlement and Radical Decentralization: The third scenario would envision some form of negotiated settlement that would see eastern Ukraine remain under Kyiv's juridical umbrella, thereby preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity, but would grant almost full autonomy to the region, including the right to forge relations with Russia along multiple fronts. Such an outcome would be hindered by significant mutual distrust between Moscow and Kyiv.

Scenario 4: Frozen Conflict, Divided State: Moscow would formally recognize Ukraine's juridical sovereignty but in practice would subsidize, arm and exercise control over the separatist leadership in eastern Ukraine. While this scenario would reinforce the geopoliticization of the conflict, it appears to be the most likely way to restore political equilibrium given the conflicting aims of Russia and the West in Ukraine.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

To Russia:

1. Refrain from further upgrading or changing the status of the breakaway territories and their formal relations with Russia. Such changes damage nascent conflict management processes and generate “facts on the ground” that will become difficult to overcome.
2. Understand that attempts to further network “frozen spaces” risks further isolating Russia and its regional institutions from Europe.

To the West:

1. Refrain from further isolating or cutting off “frozen” areas from parent state capitals or the West. The freezing of conflicts merely serves to cement the hold of Russia over these territories.
2. Separate out conflict management and resolution processes from broader efforts to integrate the post-Soviet states into transatlantic institutions. Transatlantic integration will not solve or unfreeze these conflicts.
3. Recognize that supporting the “sovereign” choices of divided states to join Western security and economic institutions may lead to their permanent fragmentation and/or dismemberment.

To both sides:

Urgently identify potential areas of engagement between Western-led institutions (EU, NATO) and Russian-led bodies (EEU, CSTO) to mitigate the risk of zero-sum competition in the Eurasian space.