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International Sanctions Against the Russian Federation Imposed Due to the Annexation of Crimea

Międzynarodowe sankcje wobec Federacji Rosyjskiej nałożone w związku z aneksją Krymu

Abstract

The article is devoted to the analysis of international sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, which represented a blatant violation of international law and principles of territorial integrity. The study examines the prerequisites and consequences of the annexation, as well as the Crimea's role in Ukrainian-Russian relations. The article highlights the effectiveness of sanctions as a mechanism of international influence, their economic and political consequences for Russia, Ukraine, and the global community. The author identifies the types of sanctions – economic, political, personal and assesses their impact on the international order and geopolitical dynamics. The consequences of sanctions, including reduced economic activity in Russia, the strengthening of the authoritarian regime, and shifts in the geopolitical balance of power, such as the growing influence of China, are discussed. The author emphasises the need for global coordination of sanction policies to ensure their effectiveness and prevent future acts of aggression.

The article examines the impact of the annexation on international institutions, such as the UN and OSCE, and underscores the necessity for their

reform to enhance conflict response. The research highlights the importance of sanctions as a tool to support Ukraine and uphold international law, demonstrating their potential as a deterrent mechanism against violators of the global order.

Key words: *sanctions, annexation, Crimea, restrictions, violations, international law.*

Abstrakt

Artykuł poświęcony jest analizie międzynarodowych sankcji nałożonych na Federację Rosyjską po aneksji Krymu w 2014 roku, która stanowiła rażące naruszenie prawa międzynarodowego oraz zasad integralności terytorialnej. W opracowaniu omówiono przesłanki i konsekwencje aneksji, a także rolę Krymu w relacjach ukraińsko-rosyjskich. Artykuł podkreśla skuteczność sankcji jako mechanizmu wpływu międzynarodowego, ich ekonomiczne i polityczne skutki dla Rosji, Ukrainy oraz społeczności międzynarodowej. Autor wyróżnia rodzaje sankcji – gospodarcze, polityczne, personalne – i ocenia ich wpływ na porządek międzynarodowy oraz dynamikę geopolityczną. Przedstawiono konsekwencje sankcji, w tym spadek aktywności gospodarczej w Rosji, umocnienie reżimu autorytarnego oraz zmiany w globalnym układzie sił, takie jak rosnący wpływ Chin. Autor podkreśla potrzebę globalnej koordynacji polityki sankcyjnej, aby zapewnić jej skuteczność i zapobiec przyszłym aktom agresji.

W artykule przeanalizowano również wpływ aneksji na instytucje międzynarodowe, takie jak ONZ i OBWE, wskazując na konieczność ich reformy w celu zwiększenia skuteczności reagowania na konflikty. Badania podkreślają znaczenie sankcji jako narzędzia wsparcia dla Ukrainy i obrony prawa międzynarodowego, ukazując ich potencjał jako mechanizmu odstraszającego wobec naruszcycieli ładu światowego.

Słowa kluczowe: *sankcje, aneksja, Krym, ograniczenia, naruszenia, prawo międzynarodowe.*

The issue of international sanctions against the Russian Federation, introduced in response to the annexation of Crimea, remains highly relevant for several key reasons. The 2014 annexation of Crimea represented an unprecedented violation of the territorial integrity of a sovereign state, contravening the norms of international law. Additionally, it established a dangerous precedent that undermines the principles of global security and stability. Apart from serving as a means of pressure on Russia, the sanctions

have also intensified tensions between the Western world and the Russian Federation. The conflict between Ukraine and Russia, accompanied by military actions and political destabilisation, carries significant consequences for Europe and the international order as a whole.

The effectiveness of sanctions as a mechanism of international influence remains an open question. Despite substantial pressure exerted by international partners and the global community on Russia's economy, efforts to compel the country to alter its political behaviour have not succeeded. This underscores the importance of analysing the efficacy of such measures to develop effective international approaches for addressing similar crises. Moreover, sanctions have economic ramifications that extend beyond Russia, impacting the nations implementing them and the global economy at large, contributing to energy crises, disruptions in trade chains, and heightened economic inequality. At the same time, sanctions serve as an important tool for supporting Ukraine in its struggle for territorial integrity and advancing its integration into the global community.

Since Crimea was transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1954 by the decision of CPSU General Secretary N. Khrushchev, it has held special significance in Ukraine's political, social, and geostrategic landscape. This influence was strongly reflected in the internal and national relations of the republic during Soviet times. (*The Historical Background*)

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Ukraine's declaration of independence, Crimea became one of the 24 administrative regions of the newly independent nation. In 1992, defying national authorities, Crimean leaders declared the peninsula's independence and adopted a constitution proclaiming Crimea as a republic within Ukraine, granting its laws precedence over Ukrainian legislation, establishing Russian as the official language, and permitting Crimea to conduct its own foreign policy. After a series of compromises with Ukraine's national authorities, this constitution was annulled, and the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine granted Crimea the status of an autonomous republic within Ukraine, passing a separate law that defined the jurisdiction of Crimean authorities. This law allowed Crimea to adopt its own regulations as long as they did not conflict with Ukrainian laws, implement a budget and local taxes aligned with Ukraine's national tax system, and pursue its own policies in environmental regulation, social protection, culture, and humanities. Local referenda could be held on issues within the republic's jurisdiction. (*Крим. Війна: передумови російської агресії...*)

Several key stages in the escalation of tensions between Ukraine and Russia over Crimea can be identified. The first period of heightened tensions occurred in 1991-1992, when the question of Crimea's autonomy arose following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. On February 26, 1992, the Supreme Council of the Crimean Autonomous Republic renamed the Crimean ASSR

as the Republic of Crimea. On May 6 of the same year, the Crimean constitution was adopted, reaffirming this name and confirming Crimea's inclusion within Ukraine. The jurisdiction of Crimea's authorities was delineated in Article 137 of Ukraine's Constitution, which enumerates the areas where the Autonomous Republic of Crimea can exercise its autonomy. (*Конституція України...*)

Another significant source of tension was the issue of the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevastopol. In 1997, Ukraine and Russia signed an agreement allowing Russia to lease the fleet's base until 2017 (later extended to 2042 in exchange for a reduced gas price under the 2010 Kharkiv Accords). However, the presence of Russian military forces in Crimea remained a political threat to Ukraine. Additionally, the mid-1990s saw the emergence of pro-Russian political movements in Crimea. In 1994, pro-Russian politician Yuri Meshkov became Crimea's president, but his policies promoting closer ties with Russia created a crisis. Ukraine responded by abolishing the presidency of Crimea and tightening its control over the region. (*Угода між Україною і Російською Федерацією ...*)

One of the most contentious issues was the Crimean Tatar Mejlis. Crimean Tatars, who had returned to their homeland after being deported in 1944, actively supported Crimea's integration into Ukraine. Their position often conflicted with the pro-Russian sentiments on the peninsula, further exacerbating tensions in Ukrainian-Russian relations. (Тищенко, 2016) In the 2000s, Russia began employing "soft power" tactics in Crimea by supporting pro-Russian organisations, political movements, and cultural initiatives. This included issuing Russian passports to Crimean residents and intensifying pro-Russian propaganda. Following the Orange Revolution (2004–2010) and the election of the pro-European Viktor Yushchenko as Ukraine's president in 2004, Ukrainian-Russian differences reached a peak. Pro-Russian forces in Crimea began advocating more actively for autonomy or even complete secession from Ukraine.

The 2013–2014 Revolution of Dignity, which led to the ousting of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, marked a turning point in Ukrainian-Russian relations. Russia perceived this as a threat to its geopolitical interests, particularly its influence over Ukraine. Pro-Russian sentiments in Crimea, bolstered by Russian propaganda and political activity, became more pronounced. In February 2014, exploiting Ukraine's political instability, Russia launched a military intervention in Crimea. Under the guise of so-called "little green men" (Russian soldiers without insignia), Russia swiftly seized key sites on the peninsula. On March 16, 2014, an unconstitutional referendum on Crimea's status was organized, the results of which were not recognised by either Ukraine or the international community. On March 18, 2014, Russia officially announced the annexation of Crimea, violating international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity. (*Хронологія окупації Криму...*) This operation had been secretly prepared since 2004, following the Orange Revolution.

The intervention marked the beginning of an armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The next phase was the war in eastern Ukraine, where Ukrainian forces actively opposed Russian troops, proxy terrorist groups such as the “LPR” and “DPR”, and Russian sabotage units. (Kulchytskyi, 2004) Following the annexation, Russia tightened its military control over the peninsula and implemented a policy of repression against Crimean Tatars, Ukrainian activists, and others opposing the occupation. Concurrently, Russia began integrating Crimea into its economic, political, and administrative systems.

The annexation of Crimea was condemned by the majority of the international community, and Russia faced a series of sanctions from the United States, the European Union, Canada, Australia, and other countries. Ukraine, in turn, declared Russia’s actions illegal and initiated international legal proceedings to regain the peninsula. Russia’s actions effectively signalled its adherence to the principle of might over right in international relations. This approach undermines the system of international security and sets a destructive precedent that could influence all states, both stronger ones—capable of imposing their will on weaker neighbours — and those whose rights are protected primarily by international law.

The annexation of Crimea has had a wide range of negative consequences for the modern system of international law and international relations, impacting not only the European region but the global community as a whole. Russia’s actions constituted a blatant violation of the fundamental principles of international law, enshrined in the UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act of the CSCE, and other agreements that form the basis of the contemporary world order. These principles include:

- The principle of the non-use of force or the threat of force (the annexation of Crimea was carried out with military force, as openly acknowledged by Vladimir Putin);
- The principle of peaceful resolution of international disputes (Russia, alleging the mistreatment of the Russian-speaking population in Crimea, made no effort to address these issues through negotiations, even though they were unfounded, and no international disputes over Crimea’s sovereignty existed prior to the annexation);
- The principle of non-interference in matters within the domestic jurisdiction of states (Russia brazenly interfered in relations between Ukraine’s central government and the authorities and population of Crimea);
- The principle of cooperation (Russia refused any cooperation to address the issues it claimed were of concern);

- The principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples (the military occupation of the peninsula and the organisation of a “referendum” under such conditions constituted a gross violation of this principle);
- The principle of sovereign equality of states (the annexation of a part of the territory of a sovereign state is a flagrant violation of this principle);
- The principle of good-faith fulfilment of international obligations (Russia violated its obligations to Ukraine as stipulated in the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances related to Ukraine’s accession to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1994, as well as the treaties of friendship and cooperation between Russia and Ukraine and agreements regarding the stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet on Ukrainian territory);
- The principle of territorial integrity of states (Russia’s aggression, resulting in the occupation and illegal annexation of part of a sovereign state, violated Ukraine’s territorial integrity and subordinated it to Russian geopolitical interests);
- The principle of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (numerous violations of human rights in Crimea occurred during and after the annexation, most notably the persecution of Crimean Tatars and other Ukrainian citizens who opposed Russian occupation). (*Law of Ukraine "On Sanctions"...*)

Additionally, numerous other international agreements guaranteeing Ukraine’s territorial integrity and establishing the principles of international law were violated. For instance, the Budapest Memorandum of 1994, signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, guaranteed Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty in exchange for its renunciation of nuclear weapons. Russia, as a guarantor, committed to refraining from the threat or use of force against Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea directly violated this memorandum. (*Меморандум про гарантії безпеки...*) Furthermore, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation (1997), in which both countries recognised each other’s borders and pledged to respect territorial integrity and sovereignty, was breached. (*Договір про дружбу, співробітництво...*) The Agreement on the Stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea (1997), which regulated the presence of the fleet on Ukrainian territory, was also violated. The agreement did not authorize military interventions or actions undermining Ukraine’s sovereignty. (*Угода між Україною і Російською Федерацією про статус...*)

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation posed a challenge to the global community, particularly to NATO, the most influential security

organization. NATO condemned the annexation of Crimea as a violation of international law and Ukraine's territorial integrity. In response to Russia's aggression, NATO strengthened its eastern flank by deploying additional troops in the Baltic states, Poland, and Romania. Russia's actions also jeopardised the functioning of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) – an organization tasked with maintaining international peace and security. The presence of an aggressor state as a permanent member of the UNSC with veto power undermines the Council's essence, diminishes its significance, and effectively hinders its ability to function and fulfil its primary responsibilities. (Ничипоренко, 2023) Moreover, the illegal annexation of Crimea exposed internal contradictions within the European Union (EU). Member states with greater dependence on Russia failed to demonstrate adequate support for Ukraine as a victim of external aggression. Economic considerations took precedence over commitments to international law, potentially compromising the EU's integrity in the long term. In summary, while the international community unanimously condemned the annexation of Crimea and supported Ukraine, its measures did not compel Russia to reverse its actions.

In 2014, the international community imposed wide-ranging sanctions against the Russian Federation. These measures aimed to restrict Russia's economic, political, and financial activities and to isolate it in international relations. The various types of sanctions imposed on Russia warrant closer examination.

First, economic sanctions included:

- Export and import restrictions: Bans on the export of high-tech equipment, particularly in the energy and military sectors; and restrictions on the import of Russian goods, including raw materials.
- Financial restrictions: Blocking Russian banks' access to international financial markets, including the SWIFT system in 2022; and prohibitions on investments in Russian government bonds.
- Sectoral sanctions: Limitations on the oil, gas, defence, and transportation sectors; and bans on supplying technologies for oil and gas extraction in the Arctic and on the continental shelf.

Second, political sanctions encompassed:

- Diplomatic restrictions: Russia's exclusion from the G8 in 2014, reduction of its diplomatic presence, and the recall of Russian diplomats.
- International isolation: The prohibition of Russian representatives from participating in international organizations and forums.

Third, personal sanctions targeted specific individuals and entities, including:

- Individuals: Freezing assets and imposing travel bans on Russian officials, oligarchs, military personnel, and political leaders involved in the annexation of Crimea.
- Corporations: Restricting the activities of major Russian companies, such as Gazprom, Rosneft, Sberbank, and several others (Ukraine and Russia Sanctions, n.d.; EU sanctions against Russia explained, n.d.).

On March 6, 2014, the first phase of sanctions was introduced. It included the suspension of EU-Russia negotiations on visa liberalization and a new partnership agreement, along with restrictions targeting high-ranking officials. Preparations for the G8 summit, which was to include Russia, were also suspended. On March 11, 2014, the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the Sevastopol City Council adopted the "Declaration of Independence of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the City of Sevastopol". On March 15, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, in response to separatist actions, prematurely terminated the powers of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Golovko & Yakubova, 2016). The next day, March 16, a "Crimean-wide referendum" was held in Crimea. According to the election commission, the absolute majority of Crimean residents (96.77% in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and 95.6% in the city of Sevastopol) voted for "reunification with Russia". The referendum was held under pressure from pro-Russian forces, without the participation of official international observers, and contrary to Ukrainian law. Therefore, its results are illegitimate. (*Всесоюзний перепис населення...*)

The majority of states worldwide did not recognise the referendum or the annexation of Crimea. On March 27, 2014, during a session of the United Nations General Assembly, 100 out of 193 UN member states supported the territorial integrity of Ukraine. The Russian annexation of the peninsula was also condemned by several international organisations, including the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and NATO. Ukrainian legislation, specifically the law adopted on April 15, 2014, designates the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol as temporarily occupied territories. The Ukrainian side has filed several lawsuits against Russia in international courts (Law of Ukraine "On Ensuring Civil Rights and Freedoms, and the Legal Regime on the Temporarily Occupied Territory of Ukraine", 2014). In 2018, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague ruled that Russia must compensate Ukrainian investors \$159 million for damages resulting from the annexation of Crimea. In 2019, the same court declared Russia's expropriation of Crimean assets belonging to the Ukrainian state-owned company Naftogaz illegal. (Задорожній, 2015)

It is worth noting that the legal foundation for sanctions against the Russian Federation is based on violations of the UN Charter, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the Budapest Memorandum (1994), and other international agreements. Additionally, sanctions are grounded in UN Security Council resolutions; however, the adoption of sanctions in the case of Crimea's annexation was frequently blocked by Russia using its veto power. Domestic legislation in individual countries also plays a significant role. For example, in the United States, sanctions are imposed under the Sergei Magnitsky Rule of Law Accountability Act and the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA). In the European Union, sanctions are implemented through specific regulations and decisions of the EU Council (Ukraine and Russia Sanctions, n.d.; EU sanctions against Russia explained, n.d.).

The sanctions imposed by the international community have had a significant impact on Russia's economic and political situation. These sanctions restricted Russian banks and companies from accessing international capital markets, resulting in higher borrowing costs, the freezing of assets abroad, and a decline in investor confidence in the Russian economy. The Russian economy suffered substantial losses, particularly in 2014–2015, when GDP contracted by approximately 2–3% annually. The simultaneous drop in oil prices during this period further exacerbated the negative effects. A considerable number of foreign companies exited the Russian market, reducing competition and innovation within the economy. Russian companies faced challenges in acquiring equipment, technologies, and investments. Restrictions on the export of technology critical for oil and gas extraction, especially on offshore projects and in the Arctic, slowed the development of the energy sector. While the energy sector remained the primary source of revenue for Russia, the sanctions complicated efforts to modernize infrastructure. (*Impact of sanctions on the Russian economy*, 2023)

In response, Russia redirected its export flows to countries that did not support the sanctions, such as China, India, and other Global South nations. The Russian government launched an active import substitution program, particularly in the agricultural sector, which partially reduced dependency on Western imports. Additionally, Russia began exploring the use of cryptocurrencies and the development of its own payment systems to bypass financial restrictions. Russia's foreign policy rhetoric also underwent changes. The occupying state used the sanctions as a pretext to strengthen narratives about "external enemies" and the "protection of national interests". In its effort to reduce dependence on the West, Russia intensified cooperation with China, India, Latin American countries, Africa, and others. The sanctions contributed to the consolidation of the authoritarian regime within the country, as the government leveraged them to mobilize the population around the idea of "defending the homeland." Declining household incomes and rising prices

created a degree of social tension; however, repression and propaganda effectively suppressed large-scale protests. (Korhonen, 2019, p. 19-22)

On the other hand, the sanctions imposed on Russia over the annexation of Crimea also influenced the global order and the geopolitical balance. This is particularly evident in how the sanctions heightened tensions between the West (the United States, the European Union, NATO) and Russia, which intensified its cooperation with China, India, Iran, and other nations that did not support the sanctions. Relations between Global South countries and the West underwent changes, as many states chose not to join the sanctions regime, striving to maintain neutrality. Notably, Russia strengthened its collaboration within frameworks such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), BRICS, and other platforms that exclude Western participation. Furthermore, China's influence as an alternative center of power grew, providing Russia with economic and political support. This has contributed to the emergence of a multipolar global order. (Korhonen, 2019, p. 19-22)

The precedent set by Crimea has prompted the international community to place greater emphasis on preventing aggression and developing new legal mechanisms to deter states. As Russia openly disregards the decisions of international institutions such as the United Nations and the International Criminal Court, this significantly undermines trust in the existing global order and poses the risk of "legal nihilism" for other states.

Conclusion

The deep-seated contradictions between Ukraine and Russia regarding Crimea date back to 1992, when Russia began actively obstructing the process of transferring the Black Sea Fleet under Ukrainian control. Since the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014, relations between Ukraine and Russia have deteriorated, leading to serious political and geopolitical conflicts not only concerning Ukraine but also Europe as a whole. In the case of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, sanctions have proven to be an effective yet slow mechanism with a cumulative impact, exerting significant long-term pressure. However, their effectiveness depends on global coordination and the degree of economic integration of the aggressor state. Cooperation among countries in implementing sanctions is critical, as future restrictions must take into account the lessons learned from the limited engagement of Global South nations.

Sanctions against Russia also set a precedent that may deter other states from violating international law, fearing similar economic consequences. The role of global institutions has been reconsidered in light of this crisis. The United Nations and the OSCE have revealed weaknesses in conflict prevention, prompting calls for reforms to ensure faster and more decisive responses. Overall,

Ukraine and the vast majority of countries recognise Crimea as part of Ukraine and view Russia's actions as illegal violent occupation and annexation. The annexation of Crimea has been acknowledged by only a few states worldwide. Ukraine and the international community continue their efforts to restore Crimea to Ukraine's de facto jurisdiction within the framework of the current international agenda.

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