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Wait and See: China's Attitude towards the Ukrainian Crisis (November 2013 – September 2014)

Introduction

Along with the emergence of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq and the persistence of economic difficulties that affect the European Union (EU), including Greece's debt burden, the Ukrainian crisis has undoubtedly arisen as one of the main problematic issues to the interest of the European public opinion. Such attraction of interest derives, of course, from the geographic proximity of this new source of conflict, while the memory of the Cold War years brings back to light shadows of fear that Europeans had forgotten too fast. The conflict involves several parties: from one side, the Russian Federation and the pro-Russian Ukrainian rebels; and on the other side, the Ukrainian elite who emerged from the downfall of former President Yanukovich, the United States and the European Union members (indeed, once again, EU members had not been able to take a common stand and evidenced different shades on their attitude towards Russia, testified by the fact that the peace negotiations are conducted by the leaders of prominent members such as Germany and France, while the External European Action Service lags behind the scenes). The literature, therefore, mainly focused on any aspects which involve these actors, ranging from correspondence with the past and lessons from history (Borhi 2014) to the factors originating the crisis and Russia's assertive behavior (Mearsheimer 2014), from the analysis of the powers' rivalries and confrontation (Trenin 2014) to the element at stake and risks the parties are facing (Wilson 2014), and so on. A review of this literature suggests

that the academic community is mainly analyzing the Ukrainian crisis through the paradigm of a re-motion of old Cold War schemes and great powers logic of confrontation along the consolidated East-West axis. The role of other actors, such as the People's Republic of China (PRC), in the crisis seems marginal and perhaps it is so with reference to their direct involvement on the issue. China's attitude towards the conflict, however, cannot be dismissed so easily with regard to the indirect consequences of the outbreak of the Ukrainian events on China's foreign policy. Indeed, the PRC could not disregard what was happening in Eastern Europe and should adapt its foreign policies' guidelines to the evolving scenario of US-EU-Russia relations. Looking at the broad picture, then, the international relations axis appears to be an East-West-East one.

The paper, therefore, aims to analyze the PRC's attitude towards the Ukrainian crisis in the light of China's recent increasing assertiveness in the global arena of international relations. In particular, the paper investigates the first months of the crisis, before the events in the Donbass region developed into a low-intensity, semi-asymmetric but continuous conflict. By doing so, the paper is articulated in four paragraphs. The first paragraph provides an overview of China's foreign policies recent trends. The second one briefly describes the evolution of Sino-Ukrainian relations since Ukraine's independence. The third paragraph studies China's behavior during the Ukrainian crisis mainly through the analysis of the press releases by China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson conferences, as well as several online newspaper articles. As we will see, the analysis of *China Daily* articles confirms a neutral attitude towards the Ukrainian events. The issue of the Chinese stakes in the Eastern European country has been avoided as much as possible: in fact, the articles often copy the statements from the Foreign Affairs Ministry spokespersons' regular press briefings; editorials and comments disregarded the Chinese interest on the issue and focused on the European, American and Russian stakes and outputs. Eventually, the study of Foreign Affairs Ministry spokespersons' regular press briefings deserves some notes and explanations. Indeed, the use of the Foreign Affairs Ministry spokespersons' regular press briefings for academic research has been subject to some criticism. Shambaugh has outlined that although they "do convey information publicly, many foreign journalists based in Beijing do not consider them very useful. The spokespersons often dodge and do not answer questions from the press corps, and usually they just provide boilerplate responses. Even worse, their statements are sometime peppered with nationalistic and sharp

rhetoric" (Shambaugh 2013, p. 178). The analysis I conducted generally confirms the American scholar's opinion but I also noted some insightful exception. The briefings, indeed, offer several helpful hints on the Chinese attitude towards the Ukrainian issue.

Finally, some concluding remarks and suggestions close the paper.

Chinese Foreign Policy: An Overview

Zhu Liqun (2010) summarized three key concepts that characterize Chinese foreign policy: "*Shi*" (roughly speaking, it identifies the current distribution of the power within the international relations), "Identity" and "Strategy". The last one, in particular, indicates how national interests and goals can be realized within the international arena. Since the institution of the People's Republic of China, the Chinese foreign policy strategies have evolved, but still they remain attached to the leading doctrine of the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence. These principles call for "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, "equality and mutual benefit", and "peaceful co-existence." Furthermore, Deng Xiaoping's doctrine to keep a low profile within the international relations, which should allow the PRC to strengthen its economy and institutions, still leads the Chinese policymakers. Zhu Liqun (2010), however, assumes that continuing to pursue the "keeping a low profile" strategy leads China to be perceived as an "irresponsible" and "non-transparent" actor. As a consequence, China should assume a more pro-active role into the international arena. Several scholars agree with his thought. Hugh White [2013, p. 3], for example, underlines that at the beginning of the Open Policy in the late 1970s, "China relinquished its status as a great power in Asia, but only ever as a temporary expedient. Now that it is stronger, the calculations have changed. China believes it has the power to veto decisions it does not accept, and it is willing to use that power."

Nevertheless, not every scholar argues that China has the necessary tools to overcome the current status of a regional power. Lanteigne (2009, p. 29) has pointed out that "to claim that China has achieved superpower (*chaoji daguo*) status would be premature, as international relations theorists note that to be considered a 'super' or global power one must not only have the ability to project power throughout the world, an ability China still lacks, but also be able to manipulate and construct international systems

on a global level," as well as Shambaugh (2013, p. 246) who outlines that China is not a superpower but just a partial one. According to the American scholar, "China remains highly ambivalent about its relations with the world (...) China is, in essence, a very narrow-minded, self-interested, realist power, seeking only to maximize its own national interests and power. Indeed, it cares little for global governance and upholding global standards of behavior (except its much-vaunted doctrine of noninterference in the internal affairs of countries). Its economic policies are mercantilist and its diplomacy is passive." Eventually, Shambaugh's thought appears to be confirmed by the China's Policy Paper on the EU recently released in April 2014. According to it, "China is playing an important role in major international and regional affairs. But China remains a developing country that suffers from severe lack of balance, coordination and sustainability in its development" (Xinhua 2014). Eventually, it is not clear how much China is taking into consideration the chance to become a global power or not. And, in the case the answer should be positive, is China attempting to rise through offensive strategies or peaceful ones? The analysis of the Chinese attitude during the Ukrainian crisis might help to answer these questions.

The Sino-Ukrainian Relations

Soon after Ukraine's independence, Ukraine and China fastened diplomatic ties. A bilateral investment treaty was signed on October 31, 1992. The treaty entered into force on May 29, 1993 (Apoteker n. d., p. 39). On December 4, 1995, Ukraine and China signed an agreement with the purpose to avoid double taxation. The two countries also started to cooperate in the fields of science and technology fields., collaboration between the Shanghai Astronomic Observatory of the Chinese Academy of Science and the Nikolaev Astronomical Observatory of Mykoloiv dates back to October 1996 (Jin Wenjing et al. 2013, pp. 123–134). The bilateral relationship, however, stagnated for more than a decade. In 2002, the Industrial Policy Ministry of Ukraine and the Chinese Commission for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (COSTIND) signed an agreement for cooperation in the aircraft industry (Giusti 2013). Nevertheless, the first significant Chinese investment in Ukraine dates back to 2006, when the Chinese automaker Dongfeng Motor invested €28 million in the Eastern European country (Apoteker n. d., p. 33).

When the pro-Russian leader Yanukovych won the presidential election in 2010, relations with the People's Republic of China became a main concern for Ukraine. He visited China in 2010 and the Chinese President Hu Jintao paid back the visit in June 2011. Both visits offered the opportunity to sign several agreements and dealings, most of them involving economic matters (Apoteker n. d., p. 57).

In a nutshell, Chinese interest in Ukraine mostly relied on two factors:

- the necessity to diversify China's investment portfolio;
- the attempt to find an easier access to both the EU and Russian markets.

The Chinese started to implement several projects, such as the construction of a railway line between the capital city and the Boryspil airport, a fragment of Kyiv's ring road, the modernization of the state-owned Melnykov mine in Lysychansk (Iwański 2012). In August 2012, the Ukrainian NJSC Naftogaz and the China Development Bank signed a framework agreement to enhance the "Substitution of Imported Gas with Ukrainian Coal" program. The Chinese granted a credit worth \$3.6 billion to Ukraine to finance the substitution of imports of Russian gas with local Ukrainian coal. The credit line should have been open for 19 years (2012–2031). Among the projects contemplated by the agreement are also the construction of coal gasification plants in Luhansk, Donetsk and Odessa (Giusti 2013). In June 2013 the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corp (XPCC), also known as Bingtuan, signed a circa \$3.2 billion agreement with KSG Agro, Ukraine's leading agricultural company. According to the Telegraph, the farmland in the eastern Dnipropetrovsk region would be cultivated principally for growing crops and raising pigs (Spillius 2013). Ukraine is expected to export 3 million tons of maize to China in return for seeds, crop-protection agents and equipment. An organic fertilizer plant should have been built in Ukraine, as well as a crop-protection agent plant (Plank 2013).

Looking to the bilateral trade, Ukraine mostly exports to China iron ores (80%), while imports are predominantly represented by processed goods. In 2011 China was Ukraine's third trade partner accounting for 3.2% of Ukrainian exports and 7.5% of imports (Giusti 2013). Among the Chinese exports to Ukraine, there are the Geely cars. Indeed, Geely leads the passenger car sales in Ukraine, with a 12.4% market share in January 2014 (China Daily 2014). Table 1 shows how China's share in Ukrainian exports decreased in the last 15 years, as well as imports from the PRC

have constantly increased. Anyway, despite the fact that by November 2013 China had approximately provided \$10 billion loans to Ukraine (Rt. com 2013), China still remains a secondary trade partner for Ukraine.

Military ties are also relevant. In 2011, 43% of the Ukrainian military exports worldwide were addressed to China (Giusti 2014). China bought several pieces of Soviet military equipment from Ukraine, among which the half-finished aircraft carrier “Varyag” for \$20 million in the 1990s. The ship has been refurbished into the China’s first aircraft carrier named “Liaoning.” The People’s Liberation Army Navy also acquired a replenishment ship (Type 908 Fusu class) from Ukraine. Moreover, China ordered 4 Ukrainian “Pomornik” hovercrafts; two units should have been built in the Eastern European country, two in China. The order dates back to September 2010, and the first ship built in Ukraine was sent to China at the end of 2012. The second one was transferred to China at the beginning of March 2014. Actually, the ship was incomplete, but the two sides agreed to move it to China before the Ukrainian political situation got worst (Annati 2014). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Ukraine also provided China with 25 (out of 50 ordered pieces) diesel engines for main battle tanks, 42 turbofan for JL-8 trainer aircraft and 2,000 R-27/AA-10 Alamo air-to-air missiles for SU-27 and SU-30 fighters (SIPRI 2014).

Table 1. China’s Share in Ukraine’s Foreign Trade. Five Years Average in %

	Export	Import
1996–2000	6	1
2001–2005	3	3
2006–2010	2	6

Source: Rautava n. d., pp. 38–59.

Table 2. China’s Outward FDI Stock in Ukraine, 2003–2010. USD Millions

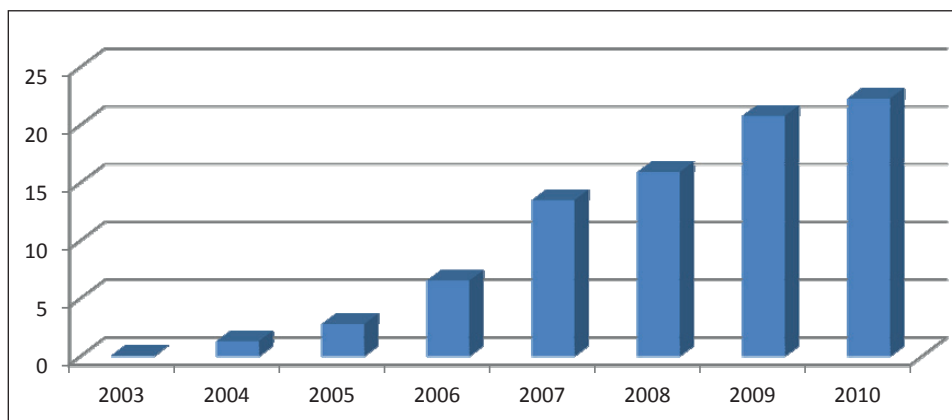
2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
0.06	1.31	2.78	6.54	13.51	15.92	20.79	22.29

Source: MOFCOM, 2009; MOFCOM, 2010.

Table 3. China’s Outward FDI Flows to Ukraine, 2003–2010. USD Millions

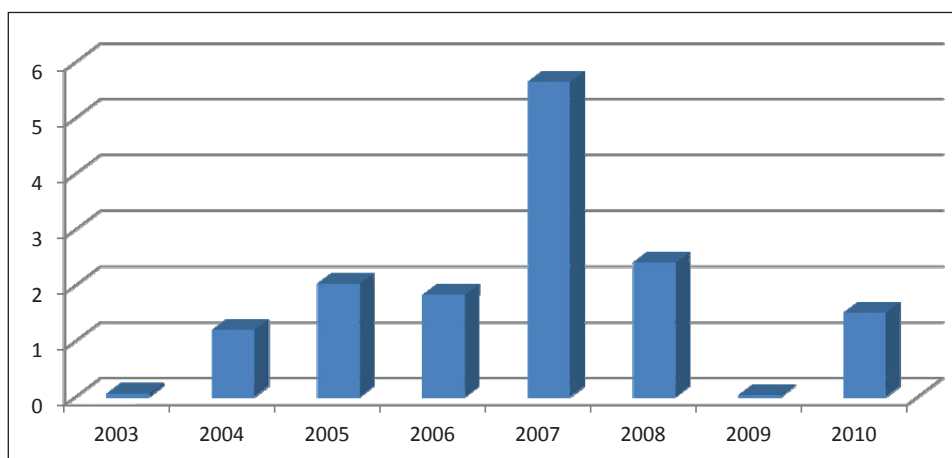
2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
0.06	1.20	2.03	1.83	5.65	2.41	0.03	1.51

Source: MOFCOM, 2009; MOFCOM, 2010.



Graphic 1. China's Outward FDI Stock in Ukraine, 2003–2010. USD Millions

Source: MOFCOM, 2009; MOFCOM, 2010



Graphic 2. China's Outward FDI Flows to Ukraine, 2003–2010. USD Millions

Source: MOFCOM, 2009; MOFCOM, 2010

Yanukovych had planned a new trip to Beijing for early December 2013, when the protests stirred up in Kyiv. At the end of November 2013, indeed, Yanukovych decided to get closer with Russia and avoided signing an important trade agreement with the EU. That move caused a mass square protest. Yanukovych, however, did not delay the journey and met with the Chinese Head of State, Xi Jinping. They signed a joint declaration to enhance a strategic partnership and more than twenty agreements,

memoranda and contracts covering various fields were reached. Among these agreements is a memorandum between the state mortgage company and the Chinese corporation CITIC Construction on the construction of affordable housing in Ukraine, a memorandum on the construction of the new modern deep-water port in the Saki District of the Crimean Peninsula and on the reconstruction of the Sebastopol fishing port. According to the Ukrainian economic expert, Oleksandr Okhrymenko, the new deep-water port should have a container terminal as well as specific terminals for grain and bulk cargo. According to preliminary estimates, the general freight turnover should total circa 140 million tons a year. The project includes the creation of an industrial park and the construction of a branch line near the port. These investments should amount to \$13 billion. Furthermore, the Ukrainian Ministry of Fuel and Energy and the Chinese National Company Wuhuan Engineering Co. Ltd. signed an agreement in the energy field in order to provide for the construction of a factory producing synthetic gas. The project expects to create thousands of new work places. An agreement was signed on the phytosanitary and inspection requirements for soy and barley export from Ukraine with the purpose to enable Ukraine to enlarge the range of agricultural product supplies to the Chinese market. In the financial sector China should provide the National Bank of Ukraine with an export loan worth \$5 billion with the opportunity to use the currency "swap" in the bilateral foreign payments. Moreover, the People's Bank of the People's Republic of China has been called to purchase the Ukrainian external loan bonds (Euractiv 2013).

Eventually, some rumors also speculated about a Chinese offer to Ukraine for a nuclear umbrella in case of invasion involving nuclear weapons or just the threat of nuclear invasion (Conroy 2014). The two countries further agree to not allow "the establishment of any separatist, terrorist and extremist organizations or groups, and any of their acts, to harm each country's sovereign rights, security and territorial integrity" (Yu 2013).

Commentators, however, have argued that Yanukovych's trip to Beijing has been a failure. According to this view, the Ukrainian president was literally looking for cash money in order to pay Ukraine's huge debts with Russia, but China has showed unwillingness to grant funds in the short term. In fact, even if at the beginning of the protests China probably did not figure out the high degree of Yanukovych's troubles at home, China assumed a cautious attitude towards the Ukrainian events, both because of the friendship with Russia and the geographical distance of the

East European country (Ramzy 2013). The next paragraph, therefore, analyzes China's attitude within the context of the overall Chinese foreign policy strategies.

The Chinese Attitude towards the Ukrainian Crisis

During December 2013 and January 2014 the protests continued with various clashes between protesters and police forces. In February, Yanukovych left the country and found asylum in Russia. The presidential power shifted to the new parliamentary speaker, Oleksandr Turčynov, but, in the meantime, pro-Russian protesters rallied in Crimea against the new Ukrainian administration, Russia immediately supported the anti-Ukrainian activists and, in March, Russian troops entered in Crimea. The Ukrainian military forces did not oppose any significant resistance to the Russian troops. On March 16, 2014, a regional and non-authorized referendum showed the Crimean will to join the Russian Federation. At the end of March, pro-Russian rebels in the East Ukrainian regions turned against the Ukrainian administration and organized a referendum on independence. The election of Petro Oleksijovyč Porošenko as Head of State of Ukraine gave more solidity to the Ukrainian administration. The new Ukrainian government, however, unsuccessfully tried to crackdown the rebellion. Contrary to its stand on the Crimean issue, Russia had been (at least at first) more reluctant to sponsor the pro-Russian protest in East Ukraine but urged the new Ukrainian government to pay back its huge debt on the gas supplies (Al Jazeera 2014). Nonetheless, Russia fueled the rebels and probably sent troops to integrate the separatist forces. In September, the two conflicting parties reached an unstable and temporary ceasefire agreement, which showed all its weaknesses during the events of January 2015.

The People's Republic of China assumed a neutral position on the Ukrainian issue from the very beginning. The Chinese could be embarrassed by the Yanukovych's visit to Beijing while mass protests were bursting in Kyiv. The PRC leadership, however, had been able to handle such an uncomfortable situation through some moderate concession to Yanukovych on the investment field and avoiding any important declaration in favor or against the Ukrainian leader. The Foreign Ministry spokespersons outlined that Yanukovych's visit was "long-scheduled" and "based on bilateral agreement", while it has been a "complete success with fruitful

results" (Annex 1). Such fruitful results are actually questionable but what is important is to highlight China's careful and cautious attitude, attentive not to displease any actor involved in the issue: with the abovementioned statements, the Chinese argued that the visit could not be postponed even if they wanted to do so; nevertheless it has been a success. China decided to carefully comply with the traditional tenets of its foreign policy: the respect for other countries' sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs. Therefore, when Mykola Azarov resigned as prime minister, China respected "the choice made by the Ukrainian people" (Annex 1). At the end of January, the Chinese Ambassador in Ukraine, Zhang Xiyun, declared that despite the adoption of a non-interference line on the Ukrainian issue, China was not indifferent to what was happening in the Eastern European country (Voice of Russia 2014). Moreover, Zhang Xiyun denied the possibility that the cooperation between Ukraine and China could be linked to the sign of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (Kyiv Post 2014). Indeed, according to Oleksandr Okhrymenko, the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU could expand the prospects of the Ukrainian and Chinese partnership (Euractiv 2013). Nevertheless, such rumors were further denied by the Chinese side (Annex 1). The Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokespersons avoided any remarks on Yanukovich's fall, but the appointment of Turchinov as president *ad interim* has been significantly interpreted as "the independent choice made by the Ukrainian people" (Annex 1).

Furthermore, the neutralist approach has been confirmed by the decision to avoid to vote neither in favor nor against the UN Security Council Resolution on the Crimean referendum on the independence from Ukraine (Montrella 2014). Considering the Chinese position illustrated so far and the highly important principle of the respect of the territorial integrity, the abstention could be the only available choice for China. The Crimean separatist wish and the Russian support, however, put China in a more difficult position. On February 28, the spokesperson avoided answering a question on the Chinese respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (Annex 1). Not only did China not want to displease neither the Western partners nor Russia, but also within the UN arena China must keep in mind its well-known internal territorial concerns such as Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet. On one hand, a vote in favor of the resolution could give more voice to the ethnic internal dissent, something China is obviously determined to avoid. On the other hand, a vote

against the resolution could re-enforce the image of the “China threat,” with the Chinese close to the worst authoritarian regimes, a picture that the current leadership needs to turn off in order to boost its outward foreign direct investments.

In order to react to the worsening situation, China attempted to take a moderate pro-active role. At the beginning of March, Xi Jinping called once again “for all parties concerned to remain calm and exercise restraint” during a telephone talk with US President Barack Obama (Zhang & Qin 2014). The appeal for a peaceful resolution of the issue appeared ambiguous and vague, confirming China's difficult position. Liu Jieyi, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, however, presented three proposals to the various actors: the establishment of an international coordination mechanism to explore possibilities of a political settlement, the avoidance of any escalation of the dispute between the involved parties and the restoration of the economic and financial stability in Ukraine with the help of the international financial institutions (Rt. com 2014). The first proposal in particular appears interesting, as it calls for the assumption of some kind of multilateral approach. Indeed, in its international relations China has always preferred a bilateral approach, therefore a call for multilateralism may appear quite surprising and highlights a new consciousness of China's role in the global arena.

In April 2014, considering that China had not publicly given support to Russia, German Deputy Chancellor Sigmar Gabriel called the Chinese Government to play a more active role in the Ukrainian issue (Martel 2014), possibly coupling with the Western side, of course. Nevertheless, it was not the case. As a matter of fact, while President Xi Jinping was making his appeal to both the sides to remain calm and exercise restraint, the spokesperson Qin Gang outlined China's respect for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, but adding something new: the consideration for “historical facts.” Later, Qin denied that his statement was an ambiguous legitimization of the Russian aggressive attitude in Crimea, but it actually appears so. Indeed, the call for the respect of the territorial integrity of Ukraine gave way to “a proper settlement of the Ukrainian crisis through political and diplomatic approaches” and the need to “safeguard the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic communities in Ukraine, restore normal social order as soon as possible and maintain peace and stability of the region” (Annex 1). The support for the territorial integrity of Ukraine appeared again during the spokesperson's

briefings on March 27, when the East Ukraine separatist regions wishes were publicly arising and in concomitance with the UN vote on the Crimean problem. Indeed, China could accept Crimea's secession from Ukraine due to "historical facts," but it could not be so for the Donbass region, where most of its programmed investments should have been located. When Ukraine's Eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions held referendums on May 11, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson confirmed China's stance for the territorial integrity of the Eastern European country (Annex 1). The escalation of the conflict in the Donbass region led to the shooting down of flight MH17 and to a growing Russian involvement. The United States and the EU imposed several round of sanctions to the Russian Federation. In line with the non-interference principle, China did not agree with the sanctions on Russia. According to the Foreign Ministry spokesperson, "sanctions can in no way help achieve political resolution" of the Ukrainian issue while "they may give rise to new and more complex factors" (Annex 1). It must be noted, however, that the Foreign Ministry spokespersons avoided any reference to the sanctions imposed by the US and the EU on the former establishment led by Yanukovich earlier in February.

Conclusions

At the beginning of 2013, Serena Giusti, a scholar from the Italian think tank Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale (ISPI), noted that the "Substitution of Imported Gas with Ukrainian Coal" program could not irritate Russia because, even if it aimed to cut Ukrainian imports from Russia, who had many clients, including China, where it might re-address the exports. Looking to the recent events, Serena Giusti's prediction on the China-Russia gas relationship has been revealed to be right. On May 20, 2014, Putin and Xi Jinping met in Shanghai. The two countries signed several agreements, among which is one on Russian supply of natural gas (Notizie Geopolitiche 2014). Starting in 2019, Russia will sell \$456 billion worth of natural gas to China, who has been successful to negotiate a price lower than that usually accorded by Russia to European countries. Furthermore, Putin and Xi declared themselves against any attempt to modify the constitutional system of a country, any unilateral sanctions and any external effort to interfere into the internal affairs of a state (Press Agency Agi 2014). However, all that glitters is not gold. First of all, the

amount of gas supply is not that big, considering the supplies will be diluted in many years (Mini 2014, pp. 51–64; Paolini 2014, pp. 65–72). Negotiations were hard (Perlez 2014) and the document was signed at 4 AM, showing the Russian urgency to reach an agreement. In fact, Russia needs to diversify its gas export foreseeing further and more effective European sanctions. Moreover, Putin could not to return empty-handed to the following annual St. Petersburg Economic Forum, which was largely boycotted by Westerners (NASDAQ 2014). Since then, China has been able to play the negotiations from a position of strength. That is a key point in the analysis of the Chinese attitude towards the Ukrainian crisis.

At the beginning of the crisis, China found itself in a very uncomfortable position. Ankit Panda recently noted that some of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, such as the respect of territorial integrity and the non-intervention in the affairs of other states “highlights the importance of Westphalian values to China’s leaders” (Panda 2014). According to the author, the Chinese leadership is still attached to an international order based on nation states. It is probably a limited vision of the Chinese long-time foreign policy perspective as a whole, but it fits with the attitude China has assumed on the Ukrainian issue. Due to its attachment to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, China could not take any side: not the Western side, because it could mean to interfere in the internal affairs of a sovereign country; not the Russian side on the Crimean issue, as it could mean a violation of the respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty. These principles are the cornerstones of the Chinese external policy. Territorial integrity, in particular, is a hot topic for China, due to their Xinjiang, Taiwan and Tibet issues. Moreover, on one hand, in recent years Russia has proved to be a reliable partner for China within the international arena. The two countries are aligned on many international issues, the Syrian one, for example, and their economic ties are tight. On the other hand, the EU and US are the biggest economic partners for China, and much more important than Russia is. Finally, the Chinese investments in Ukraine and the agreements signed with Yanukovich’s government are at stake. The scheduled Chinese projects in Ukraine are currently suspended because of the political and social turmoil. In particular, the projects located in the eastern regions are at risk. Indeed, the regions interested by the agricultural agreement signed in June 2013 are located in the eastern part of Ukraine, now engrossed by the secessionist movement. That is a huge problem for the Chinese stakeholders, and it also explains the rumors of China acting to attempt to regain its funds.

As a consequence of this situation, China decided to take a neutralist attitude in front of the Ukrainian crisis, waiting for the development of the events and trying to dissatisfy none of the actors. The abstention vote on the Crimean issue at the UN Security Council is a clear sign of the Chinese neutralist attitude.

The Chinese attitude has paid off: both Russia and the USA have been “courting Beijing’s support on the Ukrainian issue” (Ching 2014). The gas deal with Russia is only the first example, but some commentators argue that Washington too is willing to take steps closer to China in order to push China to keep continuing to maintain a neutralist approach, at least (Rt.com 2014). Doing so, it must be noted that when Daniel Russel, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told a congressional hearing in April that the Crimea model could serve as a precedent for China to obtain territories in the South China Sea by force and coercion (Annex 1), Washington made a huge mistake by hurting the Chinese sensibility. Therefore, Russia has been more successful in courting China (The Economist 2014). Russia gained Chinese support against the Western sanctions and the PRC has been very cautious in commenting about the MH17 tragedy, while cooperation with Russia may help China to not waste its efforts for economic investment in Crimea and Donbass. Moreover, we cannot forget that Ukraine is excluded from the annual China – Central Eastern Europe Forum. Such an exclusion might mean that, to the Chinese eyes, Ukraine is outside the European area and still pertains to the Russian influence zone. Sino-Russian relations, however, may be cordial just on the surface: the two countries undoubtedly are tactical allies in several issues and theatres, a situation that induced someone to argue an emergence of a “soft-alliance” (Gabuev 2015). The fact that the two countries appear reluctant to reach a formal and full alliance, however, testifies that they are strategically opponents in the Asian scenario, both in Central and East Asia (Bremmer 2014). Furthermore, Russia appears weaker than China and the partnership seems to be unbalanced in favor of China. Actually, the recent deal puts Russia in a subordinate position, as China does not depend from the Russian gas, which is just one energy source among many others. Russia needs China more than China needs Russia.

In conclusion, the People’s Republic of China has emerged as the real winner from the Ukrainian crisis. China has been able to reverse a very bad situation into a favorable one. It did so simply by avoiding making

mistakes and carrying on a prudent behavior. At least since 1989, the Chinese policies towards the European area have always been prudent and defensive in nature. That attitude has not changed during the Ukrainian crisis. With the exception of Xi Jinping's call and the three points proposal, China has not assumed a pro-active role during the crisis. By doing this, China probably confirmed Shambaugh's theory of the partial power but, in the meantime, the attitude mentioned above has demonstrated to be the right one. Due to common interests within the international arena, the energy supplies and, not least, common borders, at this moment China appears to be closer to Russia than to the US and the EU. Moreover, the confrontation with the US in East Asia might complicate the discourse between China and the US on the Ukrainian issue. The wish to access into the European market and the question of the territorial integrity, however, can represent a huge leverage pushing China towards the Western side. Therefore, if China should assume an active role, even a mediator one, within the crisis, it would have to assume the risk of losing its current comparative advantage. Eventually, China has confirmed its attachment to its proclaimed foreign policy tenets, conceding some ground only on the Crimean issue, showing to the world its reliability and highlighting the concept of its rise through peaceful tools. Shambaugh (2014) has called the role adopted by China to the Ukrainian crisis as "passive." We should not forget, however, that the Ukrainian crisis is not at the core of the Chinese foreign policy agenda, despite its investments in the East European country. So the question should be: why should China assume a pro-active role in issues that are far away from its core interests? At least until now, the Chinese approach towards Ukraine has been prizewinning. By listing the reasons for which China is a partial power, yet, Shambaugh assumes China wishes to become a superpower according to the Western idea of it. Maybe it is not China's desire. Chen Dingding (2014) points out that China is a different kind of global power. Indeed, it is likely China does not wish to become a superpower as the USA is. Looking to the past, China used to be the wealthiest and most powerful civilization in the world, but it never tried to be a global power according to the Western values. So, why should China wish to become a global power in that sense, now? Looking at the history, it is not the Chinese style. More likely, China is trying to build an international order compatible with its own interests and views of the world. Doing so, a neutral approach in no-core issues such as the Ukrainian one, is proving to be the successful path to take.

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Appendix 1. Questions and Answers on the Ukrainian Issue during the Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Briefings

Date	December 4, 2013	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>First, what is China's comment on the current situation in Ukraine? Second, could you give us more details on the Ukrainian President Yanukovich's visit to China?</i>		
Answer	<p>On your first question, China has been following the development of the situation in Ukraine. We hope and believe that relevant parties in Ukraine can address disputes through consultation and jointly maintain social unity and stability. We also hope that the international community will play a constructive role in this regard.</p> <p>On your second question, President Yanukovich has arrived in China for a state visit. He will visit Xi'an first and arrive in Beijing later today. His visit is a long-scheduled one based on bilateral agreement. We hope that this visit will help the two sides deepen political mutual trust, expand mutually beneficial cooperation, strengthen cultural exchanges, lift China-Ukraine relationship to a new level and bring benefits to both countries and peoples.</p>		
Date	December 5, 2013	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>It is reported that a main purpose of Ukrainian President Yanukovich's visit to China is to ask for financial assistance. Is China positive about providing Ukraine with any aid or loans?</i>		
Answer	China and Ukraine have been all along engaged in mutually beneficial cooperation. During President Yanukovich's visit to China, the Chinese leaders will have in-depth discussions with him about issues of common interest, including mutually beneficial cooperation.		
Date	December 6, 2013	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Please brief us on the talks between Chinese leaders and Ukrainian President Yanukovich.</i>		
Answer	<p>On December 5, President Xi Jinping held talks with President Yanukovich. President Xi Jinping said, since the establishment of strategic partnership in 2011, bilateral relationship has entered into a fast track of long-term, healthy and steady growth. Cooperation in various fields is moving forward smoothly with a promising prospect. China is ready to work with Ukraine, to adopt a strategic and long-term perspective, uphold mutual respect, equality and win-win results, enhance cooperation in all fields to ensure that bilateral relationship will move forward steadily along the right course and bring benefits to both peoples.</p> <p>President Xi Jinping made a four-point proposal in further deepening China-Ukraine relationship. First is to strengthen high-level exchanges and increase strategic mutual trust; to deliver firm support to each other in major issues concerning national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; to support each other in independently choosing its development path and</p>		

Answer	<p>and working for development and revitalization. The proposal also calls for progress in practical cooperation, expansion of people-to-people and cultural exchanges and close coordination in international and regional affairs.</p> <p>President Yanukovych fully agrees with President Xi Jinping's proposal for deepening bilateral relationship. He said that people from Ukraine and China enjoy fraternal friendship. The two countries trust and respect each other and have produced notable results in mutually beneficial cooperation. To deepen Ukraine-China strategic partnership serves the fundamental interests of both countries and peoples.</p> <p>Besides, the two leaders signed the Treaty of Friendly Cooperation Between China and Ukraine and the Joint Statement on Deepening China-Ukraine Strategic Partnership and announced the approval of the Development Plan for China-Ukraine Strategic Partnership (2014–2018). Leaders of the two countries also bore witness to the signing of eight cooperation documents.</p> <p>China and Ukraine both agree that President Yanukovych's visit to China is a complete success with fruitful results. This visit has elevated China-Ukraine relationship, enriched the strategic partnership and opened a broad prospect for deeper cooperation in a wide range of areas between the two countries.</p>		
Date	December 11, 2013	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>The Ukrainian security forces reportedly cleared up Kiev's Independence Square held by protesters. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	<p>China hopes that relevant parties of Ukraine can resolve differences through dialogue and consultation and jointly uphold social unity, stability and order. The international community should play a constructive role in this process.</p>		
Date	January 23, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>Ukrainian Prime Minister Mykola Azarov said on January 21 that if the opposition did not stop inciting clashes then the authorities would have no choice other than to use the force. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that the situation in Ukraine was spinning out of control. He criticized the protesters for using violence which completely violated all European standards of behavior. What is China's comment on the situation in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	<p>As a strategic partner of Ukraine, China follows closely the development of the situation there and supports the efforts made by the Ukrainian government and people for the maintenance of social harmony and stability. We believe that all relevant parties could remove differences through consultation and continue to play a constructive role for the well-being of the Ukrainian people and regional stability.</p>		
Date	January 29, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>It is reported that on January 28, Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovych accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and the entire cabinet. The Ukrainian Parliament voted to repeal new anti-protest laws. However, the opposition claimed they had taken a successful step and would continue protests. They want not only to change the government but also the "rules of the game". What is China's comment on the current situation in Ukraine?</i>		

Answer	China has been following closely the development of the situation in Ukraine. As a strategic partner, China respects the choice made by the Ukrainian people and supports the efforts of the Ukrainian government and people to maintain social harmony and stability. We hope all relevant parties in Ukraine bear in mind the interests of the country and the well-being of the people, resolve differences through dialogue and consultation and restore stability and social order as soon as possible. We also hope that the international community could play a constructive role in this regard.		
Date	February 12, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>After the press conference, a journalist asked: As revealed by media reports, someone claimed in public that China had made the signing of the association agreement between Ukraine and the EU the precondition for China's agricultural investment in Ukraine. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	The above remarks are utterly groundless. China and Ukraine are each other's strategic partners. Practical cooperation in agriculture and other fields between the two sides are mutually beneficial, with no political strings attached.		
Date	February 19, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>On February 18, fierce clashes between protesters and police erupted as new waves of protests grip Ukraine, leaving many dead and injured. What is China's comment on the latest developments in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	China closely follows the developments in Ukraine and feels regret about the casualties in clashes. China hopes that relevant parties in Ukraine could give priority to national interests, iron out differences through consultation and restore social order at an early date. The international community should play a constructive role to that end.		
Date	February 20, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>The situation in Ukraine is deteriorating. Some EU leaders condemn the Ukrainian government and are considering sanctions against Ukraine. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	I elaborated on China's position on the situation in Ukraine yesterday. We are deeply concerned about the current situation and the eruption of violent clashes in Ukraine and feel regret about the ensuing casualties. We call on all parties in Ukraine to exercise calmness and restraint, seek a solution through consultation and dialogue as soon as possible and restore the rule of law and social order. It is in the interests of the country and the people. We stand for mutual respect of sovereignty and non-interference in each other's internal affairs among countries. We hope that the international community could stand on an objective, balanced and fair footing and play a constructive role in encouraging all relevant parties in Ukraine to solve problems through dialogue and consultation and restore political and social stability as soon as possible.		
Date	February 21, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>New clashes reportedly broke out on February 20 near the Independence Square of Kiev, capital of Ukraine. Russia describes the violent clashes as "coup" and "armed insurgency". The EU foreign ministers decided at a special meeting</i>		

Question	<i>to apply sanctions to those responsible for the violence. The US has already imposed visa bans on 20 Ukrainian officials. What is China's comment on the current situation in Ukraine? What is China's position on the European and US sanctions against Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	China pays high attention to the situation in Ukraine. We are concerned about the heavy casualties in clashes and condemn the extreme and violent acts. We maintain that relevant parties should express themselves lawfully and peacefully. We call upon conflicting parties to exercise utmost restraint, truly strive for the Ukrainians' well-being and regional stability, seek settlement within legal framework and restore social order as soon as possible. China hopes that members of the international community will work actively and constructively to stabilize the situation in Ukraine.		
Date	February 24, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>The Ukrainian parliament nominated parliament speaker Oleksander Turchinov as acting president by vote. Turchinov said in a televised address that the priority of Ukraine is the return to the path of European integration. What is China's comment on the situation in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	China follows closely the political situation in Ukraine. We hope that all relevant parties in Ukraine will continue to solve differences through political consultation peacefully within the legal framework, stabilize the situation and restore social order at an early date. China does not interfere in Ukraine's internal affairs, respects the independent choice made by the Ukrainian people in keeping with Ukraine's national conditions and stands ready to foster strategic partnership with the Ukrainian side on an equal footing for win-win progress.		
Date	February 27, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>There's been report that China is seeking compensation of three billion US dollars from Ukraine for the breach of a loan-for-grain agreement. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry denied this, saying that the two countries are consulting on this issue. Could you elaborate on this?</i>		
Answer	We have seen relevant reports. China is willing to further its strategic partnership with Ukraine. On the already signed agreements, we hope that the Ukrainian side will ensure the effective implementation. As to the specific issue you raised, to my knowledge, relevant reports are inconsistent with facts.		
Date	February 28, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>Some people from the Autonomous Republic of Crimea in Ukraine have recently taken to the street for independence. China has voiced its respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in a range of political documents signed between the two countries following the establishment of diplomatic ties. Is there any change in your position?</i>		
Answer	China's position is consistent. We believe that the Ukrainian people can properly resolve the problems that the country is facing.		

Date	March 2, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>On March 1, the Russian Federation Council authorized Russian President Vladimir Putin to use armed forces in order to protect Russians and Russian military officers and soldiers in Ukraine. What is China's comment on the current situation in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	China is deeply concerned about the current situation in Ukraine. We condemn the recent extreme and violent acts there and have been urging the relevant parties in Ukraine to resolve their internal disputes peacefully within the legal framework so as to safeguard the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic communities in Ukraine and restore normal social order at an early date. It is China's long-standing position not to interfere in others' internal affairs. We respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. There are reasons for why the situation in Ukraine is what it is today. China will follow the development of the situation closely and call on relevant parties to seek a political resolution of their differences through dialogue and negotiation based on respect for international law and norms governing international relations in order to uphold regional peace and stability.		
Date	March 3, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>The Russian Parliament approved the use of force against Ukraine. Does China offer diplomatic support to Russia? Does China recognize the new Ukrainian government?</i>		
Answer	On your first question, please refer to the remarks I made yesterday. With respect to the Ukrainian issue, we uphold China's long-standing diplomatic principles and basic norms governing international relations, and also take into account the history and complexity of the issue. It is fair to say that our position, which is objective, fair, just and peaceful, follows both principles and facts. On the second question, judgement needs to be made based on laws of Ukraine.		
Date	March 4, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>China says that not to interfere in others' internal affairs is its long-standing position and it also takes into account the historical facts and the realistic complexity of the Ukrainian issue. What do you mean by historical facts? Does China view Russia's operation in Crimea as interference in Ukraine's internal affairs?</i>		
Answer	China has made clear of its position on the Ukrainian issue. As for the historical facts of this issue, please review or refer to the history of Ukraine and this region. I believe that you will understand what we mean after learning about relevant history. On your second question, please have a complete and comprehensive understanding of China's position. We uphold the principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs and respect international law and widely recognized norms governing international relations. Meanwhile we take into account the historical facts and realistic complexity of the Ukrainian issue. You may also analyze why the situation in Ukraine is what it is today based on activities and behaviors of relevant parties in the past months.		

Date	March 6, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>The US said that China and the US agreed to uphold the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. If so, does China support Russia's position on the Ukrainian issue?</i>		
Answer	We have made a complete and comprehensive elaboration on China's position. I hope that you will understand and report on it completely and accurately. On the Ukrainian issue, our decision is made not only based on our long-standing principles, but also on the cause and effect as well as the merit of the issue. Under the current circumstances, we hope that concerns of all parties will be considered and the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic communities in Ukraine will be respected and accommodated. We support a proper settlement of the Ukrainian crisis through political and diplomatic approaches.		
Date	March 7, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>It is reported that the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea made an announcement of holding within ten days a referendum on whether to join Russia or not. The US and the EU regard it as a breach of international law. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	We call on relevant parties in Ukraine to act within the framework of law and order, peacefully resolve relevant issue through dialogue and negotiation, truly safeguard the lawful rights and interests of all ethnic communities in Ukraine, restore normal social order as soon as possible and maintain peace and stability of the region.		
Date	March 14, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>The US has submitted a draft resolution to the UN Security Council about the referendum in Crimea, Ukraine. The Russian government has already said that it will definitely veto the resolution. What is China's position on that?</i>		
Answer	You must be following China's position on the Ukrainian issue. I want to stress that China's position is consistent and clear-cut. Under the current circumstances, we hope that all parties can keep calm, exercise restraint and work to find a political resolution to the dispute through dialogue and negotiation based on international law and basic norms governing international relations.		
Date	March 21, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>The US and the EU announced to impose sanctions on Russia. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	We have elaborated on our principled position on the issue of Crimea. Under the current circumstances, we call on all parties to keep calm, exercise restraint, push for political settlement of the issue through dialogue and negotiation and jointly maintain regional peace and stability.		
Date	March 24, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>After the press conference, a journalist asked "Igor Schwayka, Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine, reportedly said that China has filed a lawsuit</i>		

Question	<i>to a London court asking Ukraine to give back the three billion dollars invested in the agricultural cooperation project between the two countries. Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Prime Minister of the Ukrainian government, said the other day that the whereabouts of the three billion dollars China provided to Ukraine was unknown. Please confirm that and give us more details."</i>		
Answer	Relevant Chinese companies have made clarifications on this issue, and the spokesperson of the Chinese Foreign Ministry has also made remarks. So far, there has been no latest development. We hope the public will not readily believe some false reports.		
Date	March 26, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>The US recently decided to drop language outlining reforms of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) from a Ukraine aid bill to increase the odds it will get through Congress. This will be a blow to IMF's efforts to give emerging markets bigger shares ahead of the G20 Summit. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	China upholds fairness and objectiveness on the Ukraine issue. We have put forward a three-point proposal in resolving the Ukraine issue. First, an international coordination mechanism comprising all relevant parties should be set up as soon as possible to explore a political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine. Second, all parties should refrain from taking actions that will lead to further deterioration of the situation. Third, international financial institutions should start discussing how to maintain economic and financial stability of Ukraine and provide assistance in this regard. We believe that this is the direction that relevant countries should follow. As for the quota reform in the IMF, China's position is clear. We call on relevant countries to push for the approval of relevant bills by their parliaments as soon as possible, and earnestly implement relevant decisions already adopted by the IMF.		
Date	March 27, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Does China support punitive measures against Russia? Will China provide financial assistance to the new government in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	We have expounded our position on Ukraine repeatedly. It is our longstanding position to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries. The complex history and reality brings Ukraine to where it is today. Under the current circumstances, China calls on all sides to exercise calm and restraint, and seek a political settlement to the issue of Ukraine through dialogue. China follows a just and objective position on the issue of Ukraine, and is committed to promoting a political settlement of it. To this end, China has put forward a three-point proposal. One of the points is that international financial institutions should start exploring ways to assist Ukraine in maintaining economic and financial stability. China will play a constructive role in this regard.		
Date	March 28, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>On the night of March 27, the UN General Assembly voted on a draft resolution on the issue of Ukraine. China abstained from the vote. What is China's comment?</i>		

Answer	There are complex history and reality behind the issue of Ukraine, which relates to the interests and concerns of all relevant parties. Therefore, a balanced approach is needed when resolving the issue. What is pressing now is to ease the tension, narrow differences through dialogue and consultation, seek consensus and promote a political settlement. call for the establishment and activation of an international coordination mechanism consisting of all relevant parties to explore ways and plans for a political settlement. At the current stage, all sides should refrain from actions that may sharpen disputes, exacerbate rivalry and complicate the situation. They should create favorable conditions for a political settlement.		
Date	April 4, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Daniel Russel, US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs told a congressional hearing the other day that the Crimea model could serve as a precedent for China to obtain territories in the South China Sea by force and coercion. Countries in Southeast Asia are worried about that. The Chinese side should not doubt the US commitment to defend its Asian allies, and should demonstrate its commitment to peacefully resolving territorial disputes. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	Be it the issue of Ukraine or the issue of the South China Sea, China has many times expressed its positions. Why must the US official mention the two things in the same breath, and make an issue of China? You may ask him.		
Date	May 3, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>On May 2, during the „counter-terrorism” operation launched by the Ukrainian military in the eastern city Sloviansk, two of its helicopters were shot down, killing two pilots. One pro-Russian militant was also killed. On the same day, clashes between several hundred pro-Russian demonstrators and supporters of Ukraine's government in the southern port city Odessa resulted in mass casualties. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	China is highly concerned about the continuous escalation of violent conflicts in Ukraine, and calls on all relevant parties in Ukraine to remain calm, exercise restraint, act upon the consensus reached by Russia, the US, the EU and Ukraine in Geneva, renounce force or any violent action that may cause the situation to deteriorate, start political talks and reconciliation process as soon as possible and move the situation towards de-escalation.		
Date	May 5, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>Seven OSCE observers were reportedly released on May 3 in Slaviansk, a city in eastern Ukraine. What is China's comment on that?</i>		
Answer	China appreciates the constructive efforts made by all relevant parties. We hope the parties and the international community will carry forward measures that are conducive to de-escalating the tension in Ukraine, renounce force or any violent action, peacefully resolve differences through political dialogue and come back to the track of defusing crisis in Ukraine through political means.		

Date	May 7, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>It is said that the Ukrainian Embassy in China announced the recruitment of Chinese young men for combat actions in Crimea. Can the Chinese side confirm that? What is China's comment? Do you know who sent out the message?</i>		
Answer	The Ukrainian Embassy in China never released such messages. As a matter of fact, the Embassy has asked competent authorities of China to assist them in investigating the circumstances and dealing with the issue.		
Date	May 9, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>Russian President Vladimir Putin said the other day that Russia had withdrawn troops from the Russia-Ukraine border and pledged to try its best to defuse the crisis in Ukraine and adopt the most positive attitude toward the international endeavor for peace. Putin also called on militias in eastern Ukraine to put off the referendum scheduled for May 11. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	China welcomes the constructive efforts by all relevant parties for the resolution of the crisis in Ukraine through political means. We support all parties in carrying forward measures conducive to de-escalating the current tensions and advancing the process of politically resolving the crisis in Ukraine.		
Date	May 12, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>Ukraine's eastern Donetsk and Lugansk regions held referendums yesterday. The US and some European countries refuse to acknowledge the result of the referendums. What is China's position on that?</i>		
Answer	China always upholds the principle of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs. We respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and believe that in dealing with the Ukrainian issue, all parties' legitimate and reasonable concerns and rights and interests should be weighed in a comprehensive manner and taken into full consideration, and relevant disputes should be properly resolved within the framework of law and order.		
Date	May 26, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>Ukraine held its presidential election on May 25. What is China's comment? How do you see the future of China-Ukraine relationship?</i>		
Answer	China respects the choice made by the Ukrainian people. We hope that all parties can stick to dialogue and negotiation, and push forward the process of resolving Ukrainian crisis through political means so that stability can be achieved and social order be restored. China attaches great importance to its relationship with Ukraine. We stand ready to work with the Ukrainian side to further improve our friendly and cooperative relationship.		
Date	May 30, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>First, the result of the Ukrainian presidential election is out. Will China send congratulations to the Ukrainian side formally? Second, Officials from Crimea told the Russian media that China will cooperate with Russia to build a deep-water port in Crimea. What is China's comment?</i>		

Answer	<p>On your first question, we have noticed the result of the Ukrainian election. We hope that this election can give a boost to the political resolution of the Ukrainian crisis and help Ukraine achieve stability and development as soon as possible. China attaches great importance to its relationship with Ukraine. We stand ready to work with the Ukrainian side to push forward friendly exchanges and cooperation between the two countries.</p> <p>On your second question, I am not aware of the project you mentioned. There have been discussions between Chinese enterprises and enterprises in Crimea on trade and investment cooperation in the past few years. They are all business behaviors. We believe that such bilateral cooperation that has been forged over time should be respected.</p>		
Date	June 3, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Not long ago, Crimean officials said in an interview with the Russian media that the Chinese side would cooperate with Russia to build a deep-water port in Crimea. Does China know any specifics? What is China's take on cooperation with Russia in Crimea?</i>		
Answer	<p>We have noted relevant reports. In recent years, some Chinese enterprises have established cooperative relations with companies in Crimea. These cooperation are formed in the course of history and we respect the choices of cooperation made by enterprises themselves.</p>		
Date	June 4, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>According to Japanese media report, G7 summit to be held in Brussels will make China's actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea, Ukraine and actions against Russia the focal topics at the meeting. How does China respond to this?</i>		
Answer	<p>We have noted relevant report. As for China-related topics that may be discussed at the meeting, I have expounded on our position yesterday.</p> <p>As for the Ukraine-related topics, we hope that relevant parties can adopt measures which will further defuse the current Ukrainian situation, and push for the political settlement of this issue, not the opposite.</p>		
Date	June 5, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Ukraine will hold an inauguration ceremony for President-elect Petro Poroshenko on June 7. Will China send representatives for the ceremony?</i>		
Answer	<p>President Xi Jinping has sent a message of congratulations to the Ukrainian new president Petro Poroshenko the other day. China respects the choice made by the Ukrainian people, and is willing to maintain and develop Sino-Ukrainian relations on the basis of mutual respect, equality and mutual benefits. China has received invitation from the Ukrainian side and we are studying it carefully. We will release more information in due course.</p>		
Date	June 6, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the commemoration for the 70th anniversary of the Normandy landing and held meetings with leaders from western countries. Will this help to ease the tension in Ukraine?</i>		

Answer	China holds a consistent and clear position on the Ukrainian issue. Under the current circumstances, we hope that relevant parties can do more things that are conducive to de-escalating the tension and create favorable conditions for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue.		
Date	June 16, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>On June 14, a Ukrainian transport plane was shot down by pro-Russian militants in Luhansk, killing 49 Ukrainian soldiers on board. On the same day, nearly 300 Ukrainian protesters attacked the Russian Embassy in Ukraine. What is China's comment on that?</i>		
Answer	We have noted that after assuming office, President Poroshenko came up with a peace plan aimed at stabilizing the east, and all parties are engaged in intensive contacts on the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. The situation in Ukraine has come to a crucial stage. We hope that all sides can keep calm, exercise restraint, realize a ceasefire in conflict areas, avoid more casualties and create enabling conditions for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue. China condemns the action of besieging embassies and consulates. According to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations and other related international laws, the safety of diplomatic missions and personnel should be earnestly guaranteed.		
Date	June 18, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Two Russian journalists were killed by mortar fire in Luhansk, east of Ukraine. What is China's response to that? How does China view the current situation in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	We have noted relevant reports. We want to offer our deep condolences over the death of the two Russian journalists and sympathy to their families. China, who is always opposed to violence against journalists, strongly calls for concrete actions to ensure the safety of journalists. Such tragedy should be prevented from happening again. China is deeply concerned about the current situation in Ukraine. We call on all relevant parties to keep calm, exercise restraint, halt violence and confrontation and create enabling conditions for the process of political settlement to make real progress.		
Date	June 23, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question (summary)	<i>After the regular press conference, some reporter asked that on June 20, the Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko came up with a peace plan in the eastern region including 15 specific political measures, and ordered a week-long unilateral ceasefire in the east of the country. What is China's comment on this?</i>		
Answer (summary)	Spokesperson Hua Chunying said that China welcomes all efforts that can help de-escalate the situation in Ukraine, and hopes that relevant parties can join hands to create enabling conditions for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue.		

Date	June 24, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko came up with a peaceful plan for the east of the country. What is China's position on this? As a strategic partner of Russia, will China encourage Russia to fully support this plan? Has China been in any contact with the Russian side on this plan?</i>		
Answer	China has been following the Ukrainian situation. The continuous instability of Ukraine will affect security, stability and development of the region. Recently the conflicting parties in Ukraine declared ceasefire and parties concerned are conducting intensive contact on ceasefire and peace talks, which China welcomes. China hopes for the de-escalation of Ukraine's situation as soon as possible, welcomes all efforts that are conducive to defusing the tension in Ukraine, and expects parties concerned to jointly create favorable conditions for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue. We encourage and welcome relevant parties to continue with their constructive efforts and carry forward the process of politically addressing the Ukrainian issue. We encourage, welcome and support related parties to make positive efforts to ease the tension and strive for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue at an early date.		
Date	June 25, 2014	Spokesperson	Hua Chunying
Question	<i>On June 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin advised Russian Federation Council to revoke a resolution passed on March 1 authorizing the use of Russian military force in Ukraine. How does China see the development in Ukraine?</i>		
Answer	China takes a positive view of the decision made by Russian President Vladimir Putin as well as the constructive efforts made by parties concerned to resolve the Ukrainian crisis, believing that this is conducive to the political settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. China supports relevant parties' efforts to implement the consensus of ceasefire, accelerate dialogue and negotiation based on the Geneva Consensus, seek for a comprehensive solution to politically resolving the crisis, and realize stability and development in Ukraine at an early date.		
Date	June 27, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>In a recent tourism forum held in Beijing, representatives from Russian tourism authorities said that they were studying on the vise-free policy for Chinese tourists who travel to Crimea. A majority of countries still take Crimea as Ukrainian territory, and what is China's comment on this?</i>		
Answer	I am not aware of this. Over the past long time, some regions and companies of China maintained personnel and commercial exchanges with Crimea. We hope that these exchanges and cooperation will proceed. Our position on the Crimean issue is clear. We respect the territory and sovereignty integrity of Ukraine. Considering the complicated historical and realistic factors behind the Crimean issue, we hope that relevant parties can strive for the political settlement through dialogue and coordination.		
Date	September 1, 2014	Spokesperson	Qin Gang
Question	<i>The EU is considering new sanctions against Russia because of the situation in Ukraine. What will China do to stop the situation from deteriorating, given</i>		

Question	<i>China's consistent opposition to sanctions and close relations with Russia? Lately, there is evidence showing that some Russian military personnel are fighting in Eastern Ukraine. What is China's comment on that?</i>		
Answer	<p>On the Ukrainian issue, we have pointed it out on previous occasions that it is by no accident that the situation has reached its current stage. As things stand now, it is imperative for relevant parties to remain calm, exercise restraint and avoid taking further actions to stoke disagreements and escalate tension. They should avail themselves of the mechanisms for communication, dialogue and coordination currently available as soon as possible, and push for a political resolution of the Ukrainian issue. Political resolution is the only way out. Sanctions can in no way help achieve political resolution, still less address the Ukrainian issue fundamentally. They may give rise to new and more complex factors.</p> <p>You mentioned that the EU is considering further sanctions against Russia. But I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that inside the EU, member states are having different opinions on this. They have their concerns. So the top priority remains to be pushing for a political settlement of the Ukrainian issue. Today, Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe will hold a meeting in Belarus. We hope that this meeting can achieve positive progress.</p> <p>I want to reiterate that the imperative is for relevant parties to realize immediate ceasefire, avoid taking actions that will further escalate tension and advance the process of political resolution as soon as possible. Amid such a process, legitimate interests of various regions, ethnic groups and factions inside Ukraine should be fully respected and taken into account. At the same time, reasonable concerns of relevant parties should be accommodated. We hope that relevant parties can make concerted efforts, and take concrete actions as soon as possible to build mutual trust, move the situation toward alleviation, and jointly uphold regional peace and stability.</p>		
Date	September 15, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<i>Crimea reportedly took part in the local and regional elections of Russia on September 14. What is China's comment?</i>		
Answer	There are complicated factors behind the issue of Crimea. This should be properly handled and resolved through political dialogue within the framework of law and order on the basis of respecting all parties' legitimate concerns and lawful rights and interests.		
Date	September 17, 2014	Spokesperson	Hong Lei
Question	<p><i>It is reported that on September 16, the Ukrainian parliament voted in support of President Petro Poroshenko's plan to grant „special status” to parts of eastern Ukraine. A separate act was also adopted the same day to pardon militants from eastern Ukraine. What is China's comment?</i></p> <p><i>A member of the Russian parliament said yesterday that sanctions imposed by western countries on Russia will push Russia to build military alliance with China. What is China's comment on that?</i></p>		

Answer	<p>China has noted that. We hope that all parties concerned can work toward the shared goal, ensure the effective implementation of the Minsk ceasefire agreement and push for the political settlement of the crisis in Ukraine.</p> <p>China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination is based on mutual trust, mutual support, common prosperity and long-lasting friendship. Non-alliance, non-confrontation and not targeting the third party are the salient features of China-Russia comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination, which will be upheld by China no matter how the international landscape changes. We will constantly enhance strategic mutual trust with Russia, promote mutually beneficial cooperation and strengthen our coordination and cooperation in international and regional affairs.</p> <p>We are of the view that sanctions cannot solve the Ukrainian issue. The issue can only be resolved through political means. We hope that all parties can increase communication and make joint efforts for the political settlement of the Ukrainian issue.</p>
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