

One Ukraine

By Sergei Lyovochkin, Jan. 20, 2015, 5 a.m.

Months after European diplomats first leaked and then recanted stories about an alleged plan by Russia to split my country between itself and Poland, the future integrity of Ukraine remains in doubt. For months, we have been frozen in time: between war and truce, between default and salvation, between behaving as a single nation or merely as cabals of rivaling elites. If Ukrainians cannot find some common ground soon, the idea of One Ukraine may become lost for a generation. Now, more than ever, we need our friends to help us help ourselves.

A number of countries have said the right things when it comes to ending the war that is our first, most existential threat. Germany has been more forceful of late in its talks with Russia, and the Americans have now passed legislation allowing for more aid and even the provision of lethal arms. France has paused delivery of the Mistral warship, and there is growing unity among these Western states. Meanwhile Eastern friends, such as Kazakhstan, have offered to broker peace talks, and more quietly China has voiced its unease with the policies that have brought us to our current condition. While all of this does help, Ukraine now needs its own concept of what is realistic, dignified and achievable as we struggle with ourselves for a plan to end the war.

Foreign lenders may be sympathetic, but still ask themselves “why” and “what if” when it comes to yet another bailout. Seven years ago, it was not until the shooting stop that Georgia received a much-needed injection of emergency aid after Russia breached its borders, and today it would be unrealistic for us to expect more. But as we are in an increasingly dark new geopolitical trend, it is reasonable for us to plea for help. But with our request, donors and lenders deserve to hear a real plan.

To realize the dream and expectation of One Ukraine, there are several things all sides in our contentious country must quickly agree:

First, Russia must acknowledge Ukraine’s right to sovereignty in accordance of all the international treaties to which it is a party, not least of which the Helsinki Final Acts of 1975. Our friends in the West and the East need to hold Russia to that acknowledgement for their own sake, rather than ours. Repairing the damage that has been done is one thing we cannot do on our own, but with encouragement and support, we can build a country stronger than the one that was dragged into war.

Second, we look to ourselves to implement the deep reforms necessary for private enterprise to grow, and for Ukraine no longer to be among the world’s most difficult places to do business. For this purpose, a multinational, non-governmental receivership may be the best way to guarantee that whatever aid comes our way is not squandered. If we can cut out the middleman, and eliminate endemic graft and overhead, then there is a path to restoring our industrial strength while fostering our technological capacity.