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UKRAINE – THE EUROPEAN UNION



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

EU'S LACK OF UNITY ENCOURAGES RUSSIA TO CONTINUE WITH ITS AGGRESSIVE COURSE

It has become a bad tradition for the European Union to demonstrate a lack of unity at critical moments, sending the wrong message to the opponent. Limited economic and political sanctions have been the only answer to Russian military aggression against Ukraine, as well as to the Kremlin's attempts to destabilize the situation in EU countries by funding local radicals and neo-fascists. **However, even those limited sanctions could make a much greater impact if EU leaders did not undermine their efficiency with weak actions and statements.**

European leaders often complain that economic sanctions do not change the Kremlin's policy, and make the paradoxical conclusion that sanctions should be lifted, whilst usually the penalties are increased if the offender does not correct his behaviour. **The EU has deliberately chosen the path of limited sanctions, being aware that they could yield results only in the long term (a more efficient alternative were tough sanctions, able to put Russia on the brink of economic collapse and social fallout within just a few months). The main calculation of the limited sanctions was to hope that the fear of the long-term effect would force Putin to abandon the aggression. However, this strategy would work only if Putin believed in the resoluteness of the EU** and in its readiness to keep sanctions for as long as Moscow does not change its aggressive course. When EU leaders publicly debate on whether it is time to mitigate or to lift sanctions, they send the wrong signal to the Kremlin that the restrictions will be lifted before they may cause critical damage to Russia's economy.

The previous time the EU sent a wrong signal to Russia was in January 2015, when Federica Mogherini decided to propose the EU Council to discuss the normalization of relations with Russia. That time Russia responded to the EU's fluctuations with the resumption of hostilities in Ukraine and with the capture of Debaltseve. The intensity of hostilities was reduced only after Kyiv's consent to the new less favourable Minsk agreement.

On 6-7 March 2015, at the informal negotiations of the EU foreign ministers in Riga, the European Union sent Moscow another encouraging signal, demonstrating the lack of unity over the sanctions policy. The representatives of Italy, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Austria, Czech Republic and Slovakia opposed the continuation of existing sanctions, let alone enhancing them. Of course, debate is a common democratic procedure of the European Union, but a rhetorical question is whether it is appropriate to demonstrate a lack of unity if it may push Russia to escalate the war.

President of the European Council Donald Tusk told 'The New York Times' that Europe was not ready to stiffen sanctions against Russia.¹ It is not easy to understand how these words correlate with his statements of 3 March 2015 and with the corresponding statement of the White House that the EU and the U.S. agreed to impose additional sanctions if Russia violates the Minsk agreements.²

The decision of the EU Council to extend until 15 September 2015 the validity of sanctions against 150 persons and 37 entities over actions against Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence, is rather a symbolic step because this sanctions list lacks the names of key persons responsible for the decision-making on launching the aggression against Ukraine. The warning of the British prime minister that SWIFT would be disabled in Russia remained just an idle threat. Moreover, **it was reported that Russia's representative will be included on SWIFT's board of directors!**

Thus Moscow gains reasons to believe that its aggressive policy is working. The Kremlin's confidence may be reinforced by **the EU initiative to review its European Neighbourhood Policy, announced on 4 March 2015 in Brussels** by high representative for foreign affairs Federica Mogherini and commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and enlargement Johannes Hahn. Formally it is about the intention to make the neighbourhood policy more 'flexible'. However, judging by the words of Austrian foreign minister Sebastian Kurz,³ it becomes apparent that in fact it is about **the intention to engage Russia on the issues of EU cooperation with Eastern European countries.** It is likely that **'friends of Russia' will try to de facto recognize Moscow's veto on the European integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.**

Another opportunity to demonstrate the lack of unity in the EU was provided by President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, who called for the creation of a common EU army, "to help us build a common foreign and security policy" and to show Russia that "we are serious about defending the values of the European Union."⁴ It is remarkable that this idea, which would supposedly strengthen the EU's position in relations with Russia, was supported by Angela Merkel and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, known for their propensity to compromise with Moscow. On the contrary, European politicians who are more sceptical of the Kremlin commented on the idea of a common EU army without enthusiasm. Former Swedish foreign minister Carl Bild called this idea "neither feasible nor desirable",⁵ and current foreign minister of Poland Grzegorz Schetyna said that the idea of an EU army was "very risky".⁶

It is obvious that the EU member states with borders close to Russia perceive the idea of an EU army as an attempt to create an alternative to NATO that possesses a risk of undermining Euro-Atlantic unity without any guaranty of creating something reliable in its place. Permanent

¹European Official Not Ready to Stiffen Russia Sanctions. - http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/09/world/european-official-not-ready-to-stiffen-russia-sanctions.html?ref=world&_r=1.

² Press Statement after European Council President Donald Tusk's participation in a video conference on Ukraine and Libya 3 March 2015. - <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/03/150303-statement-after-video-conference-ukraine-libya>; Obama, EU leaders agree to put more costs quickly on Russia if needed over Ukraine. - <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/04/us-ukraine-crisis-obama-idUSKBN0LZ2QK20150304>.

³ Відень вимагає кардинального перегляду європейської політики сусідства. - <http://www.dw.de/відень-вимагає-кардинального-перегляду-європейської-політики-сусідства/a-18301353>; Kurz: European Neighbourhood Policy must become more flexible. - <http://www.bmeia.gv.at/en/the-ministry/press/announcements/2015/03/kurz-european-neighbourhood-policy-must-become-more-flexible>.

⁴ Kommissionschef Juncker fordert eine EU-Armee. - <http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article138169533/Kommissionschef-Juncker-fordert-eine-EU-Armee.html>.

⁵ <https://twitter.com/carlbild/status/574894899440541696>.

⁶ Schetyna o dostarczaniu Rosji wyposażenia wojskowego przez Szwajcarię: to trzeba piętnować. - <http://www.bankier.pl/wiadomosc/Schetyna-o-dostarczaniu-Rosji-wyposazenia-wojskowego-przez-Szwajcarię-to-trzeba-pietnowac-3301987.html>.

reductions in the military budgets of the major European countries and poor condition of the Bundeswehr lead to reasonable doubts about the ability of the EU to protect itself without the U.S. military umbrella.

At a time of war Europe has no right to show weakness and a lack of unity, for it is exactly what Moscow is seeking to achieve by its aggressive policy. ***The EU should not encourage the aggressor by demonstrating disunity and doubts in the chosen method of forcing Russia to peace, by shattering transatlantic solidarity with the inopportune idea of a European army, and by diluting the neighbourhood policy in order to please the Kremlin and to de facto deprive Eastern European countries of the right to freely choose democratic development together with the EU.*** The European Union should understand that now Ukraine is the key to the future order in the region. If Europe betrays the aspirations of Ukrainians and abandons the country to Russia, it will be the beginning of the path which led to World War II in the middle of the previous century. Dictators dazzled by their success are not inclined to stop aggression.



UKRAINE – NATO



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

MISGUIDED STRATEGY OF THE U.S. AND NATO RESULTS IN INCREASED RUSSIAN AGGRESSION

NATO's position on the issue of support for Ukraine against Russian aggression is dictated by the corresponding viewpoint of the Alliance's leader, the U.S., while the latter demonstrates inconsistency. On the one hand, officials and congressmen from both major U.S. parties criticize Russia for the violation of the Minsk agreements, and publicly support the idea of lethal weapons assistance for Ukraine. On the other hand, Barak Obama refuses to help Kyiv with arms, alleging that it would be harmful to the diplomatic solution.

Apart from playing the traditional game of 'good cop, bad cop' (where the 'the dove of peace' Obama restrains the American 'hawks' and therefore counts on the corresponding Kremlin concession), the duality of the U.S. position may be due to the forthcoming presidential election, when neither the Republicans nor the Democrats will want to be associated with the weak foreign policy of the current head of state. Assistant secretary of state **Victoria Nuland clearly recognizes that Russia continues to transfer tanks, armoured vehicles, heavy artillery and rocket equipment to separatists.**⁷ A commander of the US Army in Europe **Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges says that there are around 12,000 Russian soldiers in Eastern Ukraine.**⁸

However, the final decision on whether and which military assistance is to be provided to Ukraine, depends on the current president Barack Obama, who seeks above all to complete his term avoiding deepening confrontation with Russia. Under the pretext of waiting for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, **the United States has frozen even the scheduled training mission of their military instructors to the Ukrainian army.** Russia predictably has not appreciated this grand gesture and continues arming and training separatists as well as managing their military operations.

In March 2015 the U.S. finally promised to provide non-lethal military aid to Ukraine, including 230 military SUVs, drones, communications, counter-mortar radar systems, night vision goggles and other equipment, totalling \$75 million. This is really very important aid, but it is absolutely not enough to compensate for the increase in separatists' military capabilities, built up recently by Russia, which transferred hundreds of tanks and armoured personnel carriers, as well as hundreds of

⁷ Obama Said to Resist Growing Pressure From All Sides to Arm Ukraine. - http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/11/us/politics/obama-said-to-resist-growing-pressure-from-all-sides-to-arm-ukraine.html?_r=0.

⁸ Some 12,000 Russian soldiers in Ukraine supporting rebels: U.S. commander. - <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/03/03/us-ukraine-russia-soldiers-idUSKBN0LZ2FV20150303>.

multiple launch rocket systems, besides the radars and drones.

Of course, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is right to say that Ukraine is not a member of NATO and therefore does not enjoy the Alliance's security guarantees.⁹ However, it is clear that this is not the only reason for the passive NATO position. After all, neither Kuwait, nor Croatia and Kosovo were NATO members, but that fact did not prevent the U.S. and Allies from direct involvement in those conflicts. At that time Moscow also strongly stood against the Alliance's actions; and in 1999, in Pristina, NATO troops were one step away from direct confrontation with Russian soldiers. Of course, since that time the Russian army has become stronger, but still not enough to be compared with U.S. armed forces, not to mention the combined combat power of all the NATO member states. The difficulties faced by Russian elite special forces in battles with poorly armed Ukrainian troops indicate that **Vladimir Putin has much more succeeded in bluffing and intimidating his Western counterparts than in reforming the Russian army.**

Barack Obama and Angela Merkel tirelessly repeat the mantra that arms will not help the Ukrainian army to win against the Russian troops. However, this allegation does not correspond to reality, because the aim is not victory over the Russian army. **The aim is to provide the Ukrainian army with enough weapons to stop Russia's further advance or at least to make it too expensive to be used by Vladimir Putin for supporting his political rating.** Russia cannot afford to throw all its combat-ready troops into Ukraine, thus leaving exposed the Caucasus, Central Asia and Far East (in fact Russia does not have too many *good combat-ready* troops). Large supplies of high-performance Western weapons to Ukraine would force Russia to abandon the idea of escalating the aggression, for in fact Moscow is not materially ready for a real arms race.

NATO has made a mistake while choosing its present tactics of containment, which are convenient for Russia and disadvantageous for the victims of aggression, the Alliance's partners. NATO does not use its advantages and allows Russia to transfer its limited combat-ready army units from one region to another, threatening and attacking neighbouring countries one by one. The threat of simultaneous deployment of large NATO contingents in several strategic areas, including the Baltic States, Poland (near the Kaliningrad enclave), Romania (near Russia-occupied Transnistria) and Georgia (near Russian-occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and a large NATO fleet in the Black Sea (near Crimea) would force Russia to abandon the escalation plans and to start thinking of how to keep the already occupied areas. If the U.S. and EU simultaneously propose favourable political and economic deals to Russia's allies Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan, then the Kremlin would be forced to seek a compromise with the West rather than imposing its own game.

Russia succeeds in restraining the U.S. and NATO with plain nuclear blackmail. On the one hand, there is nothing new in this practice, as since the times of Nikita Khrushchev Moscow has been intimidating the West with nuclear missiles. On the other hand, **Russia's nuclear bluff has never been so obvious**, given that the majority of the Russian ruling elite send their children to live, study and work in Europe and the U.S. Besides, Russian VIPs prefer to keep in Western countries the significant portions of their assets. They surely would not send their families and money to the West if they planned to launch nuclear missiles in that direction. Another important factor is the absence of confidence in the combat effectiveness of the very old Soviet nuclear arsenal. By the way, it should be kept in mind that **one of Russia's objectives in the war against Ukraine is to strengthen the nuclear arsenal**, for the best

⁹ NATO Chief: 'Deterrence Is Working In Ukraine'. - <http://news.sky.com/story/1444723/nato-chief-deterrence-is-working-in-ukraine>.

soviet intercontinental missiles were made in Ukrainian Dnipropetrovsk.

Freezing of the 'open door' policy, aimed at pleasing the Kremlin, would be considered NATO weakness. **On 2 March 2015, after meeting with the NATO Secretary General, French President Francois Hollande said that "France's position for the moment is to refuse any new membership."**¹⁰ It is obvious that Mr. Hollande was referring to Georgia and Ukraine, but his statement caused considerable concern in Montenegro, which expects to join the Alliance soon. **Under the conditions of strengthening military cooperation between Russia and Serbia, the risks for all Balkan states are increasing.** Therefore Montenegro rightly considers prospective membership in NATO as a guarantee of avoiding its own 'Donbas scenario' in the form of a Serbian 'rebellion', inspired by Moscow and Belgrade (Serbs constitute about a third part of Montenegro's population). In the medium term the compliance and improvidence of Paris may result in the resumption of hostilities in the Balkans.

Obama's consent to bargain over the Ukrainian issue for the sake of resolving the Iranian one is also a mistake. Thus the White House plays along with the Kremlin's policy of inventing artificial problems and then helping to solve them in return for real concessions. It should be admitted that the UN Security Council cannot serve as a proper tool for solving the challenging issue when one of its permanent members continuously breaks the UN Charter and international law. The United States and its allies in the Middle East do not need the participation of Russia to find enough compelling arguments to persuade Iran to abandon the idea of nuclear weapons. On the contrary, **by throwing Ukraine under Russia's bus, the U.S. will convince Iran that only by developing their own nuclear weapon can real safety be guaranteed.**

Ukraine should take a number of steps to significantly increase its chances of getting more efficient Western support. In particular, **it is important to obtain the official international recognition of Russia as an aggressor-state, and Ukraine as a victim of aggression.** Such recognition may be obtained through the voting in the UN General Assembly, and in the bodies of the European Union and NATO. These steps would ease decision-making on arms assistance for Ukraine and on tougher sanctions against Russia. **Another important task is the effective reforming of the Ukrainian Armed Forces with the corresponding increase of Western partners' confidence in the top-level military staff.** European and American politicians often stress that weapons cannot help the Ukrainian army to stand up to Russia; it will be difficult to get weapons until this viewpoint is changed.

¹⁰ Hollande Statement On Halting NATO Enlargement Under Scrutiny. - <http://www.rferl.org/content/nato-hollande-statement-enlargement-georgia-montenegro/26882183.html>.

FOREIGN POLICY OF UKRAINE



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

RUSSIA BLACKMAILS UKRAINE, DEMANDING UNILATERAL IMPLEMENTATION OF MINSK AGREEMENTS, AND PREPARES NEW OFFENSIVES

Moscow continues to successfully exploit the willingness of the West to turn a blind eye to Russia's violation of the Minsk agreements. Berlin and Paris talk about the significant improvement in Donbas, pretending the redeployment of separatists' troops towards the directions of the next possible offensives is exactly the fulfilment of Minsk arrangements on withdrawal of heavy weapons. At the same time, Berlin expresses its dissatisfaction with the statements of supreme allied commander Europe, General Philip M. Breedlove and assistant secretary of state Victoria Nuland,¹¹ who do not consider it necessary to conceal the facts of Russian troops' presence in Eastern Ukraine and the ongoing military supplies to separatists. The British Royal United Services Institute prepared for German and French optimists the briefing paper 'Russian forces in Ukraine', in which a detailed analysis of the Russian invasion of Ukraine is given, including the names of the military units and the number of troops.¹²

In early March 2015 German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier announced the agreement with Russia that separatists will allow the OSCE mission to fully control the withdrawal of heavy weapons; however, by the middle of the month it had not happened. The sole positive news was **the decision of the OSCE Permanent Council to extend the mandate of the special monitoring mission to Ukraine until 31 March 2016 with the possibility to extend the number of personnel to 1000.** However, it should be kept in mind that the OSCE has not managed to find resources to fulfil the previous quota of 500 mission members. Besides, the mission critically lacks technical equipment for monitoring, including drones and armoured vehicles. Russian militants do not allow the OSCE mission to conduct all necessary monitoring, and numerous violations by the Russian side, recorded by the mission, have never lead to any legal and political consequences.

On the eve of his visit to Germany, **Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko told 'Bild' that the Minsk agreement "did not work" and the Russian side had violated the armistice 1100 times.**¹³ Berlin will probably try to convince

¹¹ Immer wieder Kopfschütteln. - https://magazin.spiegel.de/digital/index_SP.html#SP/2015/11/132212229.

¹² Russian Forces in Ukraine. - <https://www.rusi.org/publications/other/ref:054FDBCF478D8B>.

¹³ Порошенко: Перемир'я не працює, потрібно посилювати санкції проти РФ. - <http://www.dw.de/порошенко-перемир'я-не-працює-потрібно-посилювати-санкції-проти-рф/a-18317365>.

Poroshenko that even a bad peace is better than war, but the problem is that **Russia is using the truce to prepare for new offensives.**

Ukraine is implementing its part of the agreements: it has withdrawn heavy weapons, has created a commission to amend the Constitution, the president has submitted to Parliament a bill to define areas of Donbas with special procedures of local government. In contrast, Russia has not stopped the flow of arms and fighters to Eastern Ukraine (the recruitment and sending of militants to Ukraine are covered in the Russian media as heroic deeds). Russian generals exercise command of the separatist forces, which continue shelling Ukrainian positions and making attempts to capture new towns and villages, e.g. Shyrokyne near Mariupol.

Russia blackmails Ukraine with the help of separatists, who threaten to escalate the hostilities if Kyiv refuses to unilaterally implement the Minsk agreements. During his visit to Moscow the representative of the separatists Denis Pushilin said that if the Ukrainian Parliament does not adopt a law on defining areas of Donbas with special procedures of local government, then the self-proclaimed Donetsk 'people's republic' will consider that Kyiv is preparing for an attack. "We are ready for anything, but we try to avoid the military developments of the situation." – said Pushilin.¹⁴ In fact Moscow uses such statements as a threat to resume hostilities under the pretext of Kyiv's 'failure' to fully implement the Minsk agreements. Chairman of the International Affairs Committee of the Russian Federation Council Konstantin Kosachev warned that Russia may recognize the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk 'people's republics',¹⁵ if Kyiv does not make concessions.

The current concentration of Russian-separatist forces at three directions at once reminds us of their tactics of January and February 2015, when some directions were used to distract Ukrainian forces, while the major offensive was launched in the other area. A month ago attacks on Mariupol were used as deceptive manoeuvre, while the major offensive was aimed at Debaltseve. Now the Russian-separatist forces are concentrated in the Mariupol direction, north of Donetsk (not far from the destroyed airport), and near the village of Schastya in Luhansk region.¹⁶ Military analysts tend to believe that the major offensive is planned in the Mariupol direction with the aim of conquering a land corridor to Crimea with further prospects of reaching Transnistria.

It is important for Kyiv to convince its Western partners of the necessity of avoiding the mistakes of the first Minsk 'truce'. That time Russia was allowed to use the ceasefire for the preparation of new offensives, while the Ukrainian side was unilaterally performing the agreements. If it happens again, then shortly after 'Minsk-2' Berlin and Paris will have to prepare for 'Minsk-3'. The guarantors of 'Minsk-2' should note the facts of performance or violations of the agreements by all parties, should secure that the implementation is not unilateral, and should make it clear what punishment awaits the violator.

¹⁴ В ДНР потребовали от Рады закона об особом статусе Донбасса. - <http://www.interfax.ru/world/429341>.

¹⁵ В Совфеде заявили о возможной поддержке независимости «ДНР» и «ЛНР». -

http://tvrain.ru/articles/v_sovfede_zajavili_o_vozmozhnoj_podderzhke_nezavisimosti_dnr_i_lnr-383496.

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/dmitry.tymchuk/posts/658496040945721?pnref=story>