

INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

№ 13

01.08.2016 – 31.08.2016



Foreign
Policy
Research
Institute

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FÜR DIE FREIHEIT



UKRAINE – THE EUROPEAN UNION



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

PUTIN'S DEMARCHE OR END OF NORMANDY FORMAT?

On August 19, Vladimir Putin arrived in Crimea and, while chairing the Security Council meeting, he commented on the so-called 'Crimean terrorists' incident. According to him, the attempt of sabotage in Crimea was made on Kyiv's initiative because of the unwillingness or inability of the Ukrainian side to fulfil the Minsk Agreements¹. Russia's accusations have not been supported with substantial evidence. Moreover, the logic of the interpretation that Russia is trying to impose seems to be fundamentally wrong. Why did Ukraine need to arrange the attack in occupied Crimea if it could lead to military, political and reputational loss?

How does one relate the unwillingness to fulfil the Minsk Agreements with the act of terrorism, which itself is a violation of the Minsk Agreements? Apparently Russia understands that there are minimal chances for its interpretation of the Minsk Agreements to be implemented. It seems that Russia is going all-in, making a final attempt to push through its interpretation of Minsk, or otherwise to shift the responsibility for Minsk's failure on Ukraine. This kind of policy is risky. If this all turns out to be a bluff, the Kremlin's threats will not be credible in the future. On the other hand, during these two years Russia has lost the flexibility of its instruments of military pressure. Any escalation of the conflict that involves clear military objectives is lossmaking for Russia, as it automatically prolongs sanctions, while lifting the latter is one of the strategic goals of Russian diplomacy.

Russia is issuing the Ukrainian government with an ultimatum - either it implements the Minsk Agreements with de facto reintegration of the uncontrolled territories into Ukraine in a short time, or a new wave of confrontation will take place. The Kremlin is intimidating in order to worsen the situation not only in the occupied territories of Donetsk and Lugansk region, but is also showing its ability to start fighting in southern Ukraine. The President of Ukraine swiftly reacted: on his behalf, Ukrainian representatives in the trilateral contact group suggested a ceasefire initiative starting from September 1, 2016². In general, Petro Poroshenko continues his peaceful course with the primary emphasis on OSCE security instruments and the withdrawal of Russian troops. In fact, the position of the Ukrainian side remains unchanged.

Although the statement of withdrawal from the Normandy format resembles blackmailing and threatening Ukraine, the logic is quite similar to the situation with the 'Crimean terrorists' - the Kremlin wanted it to look like blackmailing. Russia possesses two options that fit into the tabula rasa strategy, which they threaten to launch if Minsk

¹ <http://www.rbc.ru/politics/19/08/2016/57b6fa9f9a79473a0adb4196>

² <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/mi-spodivayemos-sho-z-1-veresnya-zamovknut-garmati-prezident-38017>

2 fails. The first option is an alternative to the Normandy format, excluding Ukraine. The Kremlin will try to achieve this goal in the near future, including during G20 summit in China. It has been announced that Vladimir Putin will meet there with Angela Merkel and Francois Hollande.

The second option is a military scenario. But in the context of a freestanding (isolated) Ukrainian question it appears to be lossmaking as it automatically prolongs sanctions against Russia, while the financial position of the latter is steadily deteriorating. For example, Moscow proposes to cut the funding for occupied Crimea in half by 2019 - from 149.3 to 65.98 billion rubles³.

As a result, in the coming days we have to beware of any provocations that could be used by the Kremlin to eliminate us from the negotiations. The very absence of a negotiating process is not threatening while we continue to reform the army, show that Ukraine remains a European security investor and fulfils the formal requirements that are laid down by the EU. Moreover, Putin's strategy to exit from the Normandy format can be used to restart negotiations and get rid of a politically unacceptable point, which involves the federalization and reintegration of Donbas.



³ <https://hromadskeradio.org/ru/news/2016/06/30/finansirovanie-kryma-mogut-sokratit-vdvoe-smi>

UKRAINE – NATO



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

MILITARY EXERCISES NEAR THE UKRAINIAN BORDER. IS THERE A CHANGE OF NATO STRATEGY TOWARDS UKRAINE?

On August 10, an FSS statement on the so-called Crimean terrorists stirred up the media. Security services reported that they had supposedly prevented a terrorist attack prepared by the Defence Intelligence Agency of Ukraine. The international community recognized that Russia had not supplied substantive evidence for such accusations against Ukraine⁴. Nevertheless, the Kremlin continued to use the news hook and attempted to question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian authorities⁵. This step is clear: an attempt to colour the image of the Ukrainian government as a sponsor of terrorism would facilitate Moscow rejecting the majority of moral arguments in the case of sanctions against Russia. In the context of the information campaign, Putin said it meant that the Normandy meeting as having no sense. In other words, the Russian President hinted to the West that he is putting out an ultimatum - either implement Minsk now or Russia will find the space for its imagination⁶.

The campaign against Ukraine failed, but the leadership of Russia has gone further. During the last week, Russia has held a series of military exercises, including a couple near the Ukrainian border. During August 14-19 'Interaction-2016' exercises with the participation of CSTO member states were held in the Pskov and Leningrad regions near the border with Latvia. One of the elements was the interaction of forces "in conflict escalation in one of the border regions of a CSTO Member"⁷. On August 15-20, training for radiation, chemical and bacteriological defence troops as well as testing of a rocket propelled flame thrower, Solntsepek, took place in occupied Crimea, in the Volgograd region and Chechnya. On August 23, CSTO military exercises 'Unbreakable Brotherhood-2016' began in Belarus near the Lithuanian border. On August 25, on the order of Vladimir Putin, troops of the Southern, parts of the Western and Central military districts were placed in operational readiness, while a series of exercises involving "logistical support for ground forces groups and amphibious landing" were held in occupied Crimea⁸.

The consistency of military exercises on the western borders of Russia demonstrates the fact that Moscow continues to associate the Ukrainian case with the wider context of the 'NATO threat'. Given that the Warsaw Summit was not successful

⁴ goo.gl/c8bmzZ

⁵ http://zn.ua/WORLD/putin-postavil-pod-somnenie-legitimnost-ukrainskoy-vlasti-221197_.html

⁶ <http://carnegie.ru/commentary/2016/08/12/ru-64315/j3md>

⁷ <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2016/08/14/7117686/>

⁸ <http://www.unian.ua/society/1477821-rosiya-provodit-viyskovi-navchannya-v-okupovanomu-krimu.html>

for Ukraine, it seems that Moscow is not satisfied even with this minimal level of cooperation between Kyiv and Brussels. In this case, the policy of concessions to the Kremlin seems completely illogical.

These military training exercises are a demonstration of the threat not only to Ukraine, designed to prevent it from Euro-Atlantic integration, but also to NATO members. It was clearly visible during the Interaction-2016 exercises, when CSTO military practiced sending propaganda messages to a simulated NATO enemy with a call to surrender and "stop being puppets in the hands of your leaders"⁹. In this context, the NATO Eastern states' fear of Russian aggression can be considered to be quite reasonable.

At the same time, there are reasons to believe that NATO has changed its attitude towards Ukraine. On August 30, a NATO defence planning delegation visited Ukraine¹⁰. This is the first visit of representatives of the Department to Ukraine. During the visit the sides discussed military reform in Ukraine and further steps by NATO to support Ukraine. This visit could mark a change of NATO's perception of Ukraine. Over their history, Ukraine-NATO relations mainly concerned joint participation in peacekeeping operations. Now, there is a potential for launching full-scale military cooperation.



⁹ https://ria.ru/defense_safety/20160818/1474725307.html

¹⁰ <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/news/27954318.html>

FOREIGN POLICY OF UKRAINE



KEY THEME ANALYSIS

WHAT IS THE PERSPECTIVE OF ANDRZEJ DUDA'S VISIT TO KYIV?

On August 24 of this year, during the celebration of the 25th anniversary of the independence of Ukraine, President of Poland Andrzej Duda stayed in Kyiv on an official visit. The distinguished guest attended the military parade and a meeting with Ukrainian diplomats. Given the facts that the Polish president was the only high level guest, one can conclude that the visit was designed to have a rather symbolic meaning - Poland was the first country, together with Canada, that recognized the independence of Ukraine on December 2, 1991. In this context it also seems symbolic that the Polish President during the visit confirmed the invitation to Petro Poroshenko to visit Poland on December 2 this year.

In order to understand the role of this visit, the Volyn massacre resolution is worth mentioning. It was adopted by the Polish Parliament in July to recognize the events of 1943-1945 in Volyn as “genocide committed against the residents of the Rzeczpospolita by Ukrainian nationalists”. The main initiators of the vote on the bill were members of the Law and Justice party, which now possesses a majority both in the lower and upper houses of Parliament. Moreover, last year’s electoral promises of the aforementioned party were the recognition of these events as genocide, and most people who voted for it in 2015, live in Eastern Poland. Among them are many descendants of the victims of Volyn events¹¹.

Obviously, President Duda intended to soften the impact of this political decision. The text of the joint declaration of the presidents shows that the parties acknowledge the desire to build a peaceful and open dialogue based on understanding of historical truth "on the already established ethical formula of understanding between our peoples". President Duda said in this context: “You can expect our coordinated actions in this matter. And I think in December we'll be able to talk about a tangible result”¹². Obviously, the final formula that could set apart political action and historical discussion is only being developed by the parties.

During the meeting, the Polish President paid special attention to the issue of Central and Eastern Europe. In his speech to Ukrainian diplomats, he stressed the importance of protecting the states' rights to self-determination and urged not to roll

¹¹ http://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/politics/2016/07/160722_volyn_qa_sx

¹² <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/ukrayinsko-polskij-dialog-shodo-istorichnih-pitan-maye-spriy-37967>

back to the policy of spheres of influence. According to him, Central and Eastern Europe in particular suffered from wars that were caused by the hegemony of the great powers. The countries of the region should intensify their efforts, including within NATO, to enhance security¹³. For Poland, which is trying to balance its regional initiatives with the influence of Germany and France in the EU, the strategic support for Ukraine is natural. The corresponding point is textually enshrined in the Declaration – “declares readiness for cooperation (...) in Central and Eastern Europe, which contributes to the interests of our countries, enhances the values of the region, and is key to the stability of the whole continent”¹⁴.

Generally speaking, this visit can be assessed as having a largely symbolic meaning. Its goal was to revive positive dynamics in relations that worsened after the adoption of the mentioned resolution. But the symbolism of the visit is determined not only by the desire to resolve the crisis in relations caused by the decision of the Polish Parliament to recognize the Volyn tragedy as genocide of the Polish people. A deeper symbolism resides in the fact that President Duda actually announced his new foreign policy doctrine of regional cooperation between three seas – Black, Baltic and Adriatic. This statement demonstrates Poland’s intention to take the role of a regional leader in Central and Eastern Europe. It is worth noting that this desire is not determined by the ambitions of the young Polish President, but by objective circumstances. While the EU is facing a crisis of its own security and solidarity decline after the British referendum on leaving the EU, Poland should rethink its own place on the European continent and its geopolitical role in Eastern Europe. In the circumstances of a security vacuum, Poland recognizes its leadership role and builds its own geopolitical construct, able to be self-sufficient. But without Ukraine this cannot be done.

The Three Seas doctrine defines the following strategic directions of Poland’s foreign policy. The first point is strengthening integration between Central European states in the Visegrád format. The second is unification of NATO’s eastern flank under the framework of the Polish-Romanian initiative as well as the incorporation of Croatia as a strategically important link of the geopolitical construct. The third is a new quality of relations with Ukraine, which is considered by Poland as an ally, not only as a partner. The Polish President clearly stated that he assesses Ukraine as an ally with which Poland will actively cooperate and will create the regional community of nations.

One of the priorities of the Three Seas Alliance, according to a statement of Andrzej Duda, should be the construction of joint military capabilities and the creation of common energy networks to overcome Russia's gas intimidation. The settling of historical issues is also on the strategic agenda. Thus, the purpose of this alliance is the integration of Eastern European territory located between three seas (the Baltic, Adriatic and Black seas), as well as uniting efforts of the region in countering collective threats.

Ukraine should join this project as an EU membership perspective seems to be illusory and Ukraine has abandoned the prospect of NATO membership yet again. However, systemic Russian military exercises near the eastern border of NATO provide Ukraine with the opportunity to form the Alliance suggested by the Polish president in Kyiv.

¹³ <http://ua.112.ua/video/zustrich-petra-poroshenka-ta-andzheia-dudy-z-ukrainskymy-dyplomatomy-24082016-208376.html>

¹⁴ <http://www.president.gov.ua/news/spilna-deklaraciya-prezidenta-ukrayini-ta-prezidenta-respubl-37975>