

---

# A CONFLICT OF MOSCOW AND KYIV: A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY, *THE STATUS QUO,* OR A NEW ROUND OF ESCALATION?

---

Materials for the 10<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting  
18-21 August 2019, Cadenabbia, Italy

This publication was prepared by the Razumkov Centre with the assistance and support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine as part of the project for Ukrainian-German-Russian dialogue

Kyiv, August 2019

Project Manager – Mykhailo Pashkov  
Editors – Alla Chernova, Anna Pashkova, Halyna Balanovych  
Photo Editor – Andriy Khopta  
Design and Layout – Tetiana Ovsyanyk, Oleksander Shaptala

Kateryna Bilotserkovets and Yuriy Silvestrov, employees of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine, took part in the preparation of this publication.

This publication, prepared by the Razumkov Centre with support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine, presents materials to be discussed at the 10<sup>th</sup> regular meeting between Ukrainian, German and Russian experts. Since 2015, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has been holding regular trilateral expert discussions on the issues of the Russia-Ukraine conflict settlement/minimisation. Over the past five years, the expert discussions covered the following topics:

**“Conflict Resolution – Action Ukraine, Russia, Germany and the EU Need to Take”**  
(March 2015)

**“EU-Ukraine-Russia Relations amid the Protracted Conflict”** (August 2015)

**“Ukraine Conflict Settlement, Post-Conflict Development Scenarios and the Impact of the Syrian War”** (February 2016)

**“Paths, Scenarios and Prospects for the Russia-Ukraine Conflict Settlement”** (August 2016)

**“Eastern Ukraine – the Forgotten War? Prospects of the Minsk Agreements and the Normandy Format”** (February 2017)

**“The Russia-Ukraine Conflict in the Context of Global Change”** (August 2017)

**“Development amid a Protracted Crisis. The Fifth Year of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict”**  
(February 2018)

**“The Russia-Ukraine Conflict – Will There Be a UN Peacekeeping Mission?”**  
(August 2018)

**“Political Prerequisites for the Conflict Escalation (The Sixth Year of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict)”** (February 2019)

**“A Conflict of Moscow and Kyiv: A Window of Opportunity, the Status Quo, or a New Round of Escalation?”** (August 2019)

This publication presents opinions and forecasts by German, Ukrainian and Russian experts on the prospects of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the context of the change of government in Ukraine. Of particular interest are the expert proposals on minimising the confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv and relieving tension in Donbas. Selected results of sociological studies conducted by the Razumkov Centre in the period of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014-2019) are also included herein.

The opinions and assessments stated during the interviews represent personal positions and do not necessarily correspond with the positions of the Razumkov Centre and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung.

Please provide a proper reference to this publication when using information contained therein.

Address of the Razumkov Centre: 16 Lavrska St., 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, Kyiv 01015

Phone: (044) 201-11-98

Fax: (044) 201-11-99

Website: [www.razumkov.org.ua](http://www.razumkov.org.ua)

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/therazumkov/>

ISBN 978-966-2050-14-1

© Razumkov Centre, 2019  
© Zapovit Publisher, 2019

---

# CONTENT

## OPENING REMARK

- Elaborating Approaches to the Conflict Settlement and Normalisation  
of Ukraine-Russia Relations  
*Gabriele Baumann* ..... 133

## WAYS OF SETTLING THE CONFLICT: EXPERT PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 135

- Materials of “Virtual” Roundtable with Ukrainian, Russian and  
German Experts for Discussion at the 10<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting (August 2019)*

## A CONFLICT OF MOSCOW AND KYIV: A “WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY”, THE STATUS QUO OR A ROUND OF ESCALATION? ..... 143

- Interviews of the Ukrainian, Russian and German Experts (June 2019)*

### Positions of Ukrainian Experts

- A “Window of Opportunity” is More about Local and  
Situational Compromises  
*Mykhailo PASHKOV* ..... 144

- Kyiv Half-Opens a Window of Opportunity for the Settlement,  
Moscow Keeps its Window Shut  
*Volodymyr FESENKO* ..... 149

- We Should not Expect Any Improvement in Relations between Ukraine  
and the Russian Federation in the Near Future  
*Kostyantyn KONONENKO* ..... 153

- New Ukrainian Government Does Not Have the Potential  
to End the Russia-Ukraine Conflict  
*Lidiya SMOLA* ..... 156

- The Change of Power in Ukraine as Such Will not Lead  
to the Conflict Settlement  
*Mykhailo HONCHAR* ..... 160

### Positions of Russian Experts

- Movement Towards Minsk Model Execution Would Help  
to Normalise Political Dialogue  
*Sergey UTKIN* ..... 164

- Any Agreements With Kyiv Will Be Tied to the Agreements with  
the EU and the USA  
*Tatiana PARKHALINA* ..... 167

---

Economic “Window of Opportunity” <i>Mikhail SUBBOTIN</i> . . . . .	170
The “Window of Opportunity” Does Exist, Yet Neither Party Is Jumping at the Chance <i>Andrei ZAGORSKII</i> . . . . .	175
<b>Positions of German Experts</b>	
No Significant Progress in Resolving the Conflict is Expected So Far <i>Andreas UMLAND</i> . . . . .	177
There is a “Window of Opportunity” in Ukraine Itself <i>Susan STEWART</i> . . . . .	179
The Conflict Will Simmer, Occasionally Disturbing the International Community <i>Dr. Eckart D. STRATENSCHULTE</i> . . . . .	181
Overall Russia-Ukraine Relations Will Remain Tense <i>Wilfried YILGE</i> . . . . .	183
<b>Article</b>	
<b>CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE: POST-2019 ELECTIONS PROSPECTS</b>	
<i>Vladislav INOZEMTSEV</i> . . . . .	187
<b>CITIZENS OF UKRAINE ON THE KYIV-MOSCOW CONFLICT</b> . . . . .	
<b>THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS: OPINIONS AND ASSESSMENTS OF UKRAINIAN EXPERTS</b> . . . . .	194
<b>“BANK OF PROPOSALS” FOR SETTLING (MINIMISING) THE CONFLICT</b> . . . . .	
<b>PROPOSALS FOR THE SETTLEMENT (MINIMISATION) OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT</b> . . . . .	228
<i>Based on the Interviews with Ukrainian, Russian and German Experts (June 2017)</i>	231
<b>PARAMETERS OF THE UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN DONBASS: EXPERT INTERVIEWS</b> . . . . .	
<i>Summary of Interviews with German, Ukrainian and Russian Experts to be Discussed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting (August 2018)</i>	244

## ELABORATING APPROACHES TO THE CONFLICT SETTLEMENT AND NORMALISATION OF UKRAINE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

It's been five years since the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung offices in Kyiv and Moscow and the Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies named after Alexander Razumkov (the Razumkov Centre) launched trilateral meetings of Ukrainian, Russian and German experts in February 2015. We assumed that by doing so, the expert community could formulate approaches to settling the conflict and normalising relations between Russia and Ukraine or even reach a consensus on certain issues.

The conflict between Russia and Ukraine started in 2013 and heated up in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of territories in the East of Ukraine, which *de facto* led to the emergence of new pseudo-state entities under Russian patronage. This means that even today Russia sends military equipment and personnel to these areas, and also fully finances the public sector, including the separatist armed forces.

Over the five years of trilateral meetings, each side has formed a core group of experts who are ready to conduct a credible dialogue and bring their opinions up for open discussion, as evidenced by this publication. This makes the discourse accessible to a wider range of stakeholders. Establishing trust-based relations, sharing views and research results with (almost) no unnecessary emotions – this alone exceeds our initial expectations. After two years of work, even the Russian experts' concerns about possible exposure of their viewpoints gave way to a conviction that the discussion results should be made public.

The events of the past five years have contributed to the mainstreaming of our discussions. For example, in 2015-2016 we focused on assessing the Minsk Agreements implementation and the importance of the Normandy format for achieving peace. Since 2017, the discussion of various concepts for the possible deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission came to the fore. And although the Crimean issue has never loomed large, it



**Gabriele BAUMANN,**  
Head of  
the Konrad-Adenauer-  
Stiftung Office  
in Ukraine

was always borne in mind, including by the Russian side. It became particularly relevant in relation to the construction and opening of the Kerch bridge in May 2018 and the attack on Ukrainian ships and their crews in the Sea of Azov in November 2018.

All these events occurred against the backdrop of pivotal elections, including presidential elections in Russia in early 2018 and in Ukraine at the beginning of 2019. Therefore, when analysing relations between the two countries, we have always proceeded from the current domestic political and economic situation. Although Russia could appear stable to an external observer thanks to its self-perpetuating leader and his rubber-stamp parliament, the situation in the country became increasingly more explosive and tense due to aggressive propaganda and state repression.

In the meantime, Ukraine kept itself in finding new scenarios and changed its policy, which in April 2019 produced unexpected transformations with many unknowns. These, however, can still provide positive dynamics for future development.

The question of the day is whether we should expect a renewed search for the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict under president Volodymyr Zelenskyy. Then again, the Russian president must also finally demonstrate his readiness to do so.

In my opinion, the course of events of the past 5-7 years suggests that this is exactly what we have been missing. Russia could, for example, comply with the decision of the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea and release the 24 Ukrainian sailors, thereby sending a certain signal. Such signals would allow our experts to discuss concrete steps towards the conflict resolution. Yet our meetings have clearly demonstrated that both in Ukraine and Russia there are people who have the know-how and the will to settle the conflict. One last step is to give them the opportunity to make decisions.

# WAYS OF SETTLING THE CONFLICT: EXPERT PROPOSALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Materials of “Virtual” Roundtable with Ukrainian, Russian and German Experts for Discussion at the 10<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting (August 2019)*

---

The regular 10<sup>th</sup> expert meeting is devoted to the de-escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The roundtable participants tend to link rather cautious positive expectations with the change of power in Ukraine, namely the arrival of the new president Volodymyr Zelenskyy, subsequent renewal of the Verkhovna Rada and the appointment of a new cabinet.

Therefore, the present package of proposals that supplement previous developments has been prepared with due consideration of both internal changes and new geopolitical circumstances.

However, one should take into account the massive inertia of the five-year-long interstate conflict and currently “frozen” status of key problems of Donbas and Crimea. This is exactly why the expert proposals primarily focus on mitigating the severity of the confrontation, on preventing further aggravation of the conflict, on seeking local compromises that may be possible under current conditions.

Initially, no one planned to elaborate a single, universal “recipe” for settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict with the help of experts, whose positions differ in many respects for obvious reasons. Therefore, it is obvious that some proposals are hardly compatible. This is a matter for discussion at the upcoming meeting of the representatives of German, Ukrainian and Russian expert communities.

However, quite encouraging is the fact that this material, while summarising proposals of experts from the three countries, does include some points of contact. This allows us to assume the possibility of reaching some joint positions on the problems of minimisation (and further settlement) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Expert proposals and recommendations are presented in the summarised form.

## UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

- ❖ Both sides – Ukraine and Russia – should refrain from actions that would expand the subject of the conflict and further complicate its settlement. It is necessary to pursue a balanced policy for easing tension in the zones of confrontation.
- ❖ It is also necessary to undertake new attempts to negotiate real and long-lasting ceasefire along with strengthening control in problem areas and optimising the “hot link” system across the contact line for prompt termination of the spontaneous shelling.
- ❖ In order to break the deadlock in the Donbas negotiations, it is desirable for Russia to change its tactics – namely to abandon its demands for the priority fulfilment of the political section of the Minsk Agreements, focusing instead on the achievement of a complete ceasefire as a decisive prerequisite for implementing the political section of the said Agreements. It is also necessary to suspend the issuance of Russian passports to the *ORDLO* residents (or dramatically limit the scope of this process).
- ❖ Efforts should focus on “freezing” the conflict in Donbas as an initial phase of its settlement. Then it is expedient to isolate the first three points of the Minsk Agreements (ceasefire, withdrawal of arms and effective monitoring of the implementation of these actions by the parties), to arrange these items into a separate agreement (Memorandum) on armistice, and to adopt it in the Normandy format with further adoption at the UN Security Council.
- ❖ The unconditional release of all hostages and prisoners could be an important indicator of the parties’ willingness to revise the “military agenda” in bilateral relations. In this regard, Russia has a unique opportunity to generate a positive impulse by freeing 24 Ukrainian Navy POWs, 120 convicts in the occupied areas of Donbas and 114 political prisoners held in prisons in occupied Crimea and in the Russian Federation (the Sentsov’s list). Without this step any discussion of actions aimed at regulating bilateral relations are meaningless.
- ❖ Russia’s practical steps (ceasefire, release of hostages and POWs, withdrawal of troops from the territory of Ukraine) will create necessary prerequisites for initiating the constructive phase of the conflict settlement. For its part, Ukraine is ready to bend every effort in order to ease tension in Donbas and in the Azov-Kerch area, if Russia and Russia-controlled illegal armed groups truly guarantee the observance of relevant provisions of the Minsk Agreements.

- ❖ It is expedient to promote the internationalisation of the Donbass settlement process, including by using international mechanisms and platforms and by engaging various international players in the peace process. This includes the expanded presence of the UN, the OSCE, the PACE and the EU missions, the Red Cross, Reporters Without Borders, as well as other international human rights and humanitarian organisations in Donbas.
- ❖ The change of power in Ukraine offers an excellent opportunity for resuming negotiations in the Normandy format. Nowadays, a direct dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow is only possible via international mediation. The negotiation process badly needs new impulses and breakthrough ideas capable of improving its effectiveness and confirming its viability.
- ❖ There is a need to establish a more inclusive dialogue on a wide range of issues, which in addition to the Ukrainian concerns would also address other pressing challenges to regional and global security. In this case, the process would benefit from the increased number of mediators, such as the involvement of new players in the Normandy format – primarily the United States as one of Ukraine's security guarantors within the Budapest Memorandum.
- ❖ The renewed Normandy Format should prioritize the development of compromise solutions within the framework of international law, capable of unlocking the peace process based on the Minsk Agreements. These may include harmonisation of additional tools to ensure real de-escalation and contribute to implementing the Minsk document in the sequence and wording acceptable for all parties involved.
- ❖ It is necessary to intensify efforts aimed at achieving a compromise on the deployment of a full-scale multi-component UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas, including the international interim administration.
- ❖ The international sanctions policy against Russia requires substantial adjustments. It should become a more effective tool for forcing the aggressor to halt its aggressive actions. Current sanctions are more symbolic rather than practical. They should have a specific impact on the financial, economic and business interests of the Russian state, implying threat to personal wealth of the Russian leadership. They should be directed against Nord Stream-2 and other Russian gas pipeline projects.
- ❖ Prevention of side-lining the Crimean issue from international agenda remains one of key challenges for Ukrainian diplomacy.

- ❖ It is necessary to intensify cooperation with Ukraine's potential allies in order to achieve more tangible results in the process of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- ❖ Gradual strengthening of Ukraine's military might is another vital task. To this end, it is necessary to audit the defence industry, as well as weaponries currently used by the Armed Forces of Ukraine, through rearment, to reduce the size of the military and make the Ukrainian army purely professional, to pursue the rational defence industrial policy with a focus on attracting private capital and foreign investment to create a fully functional and well-developed defence industry, to increase the number of local tactical drills with the armies of Ukraine's partners.
- ❖ More active mediation of the EU and Germany in the gas negotiations between Ukraine and Russia is essential. A temporary agreement on the transit of Russian gas across the Ukrainian territory may be one of possible compromises.
- ❖ It is expedient to initiate an international permanent conference (possibly under the auspices of the UN or OSCE) on the peacekeeping in Donbas. Its participants could include representatives of government bodies of interested countries, international organisations, non-governmental structures.
- ❖ It is important to introduce and maintain platforms for contacts between civil societies of Ukraine and Russia in a neutral territory, e.g. in Germany and other EU countries. On the one hand, this would support communication between Ukrainians and Russians who are ready for the constructive dialogue. On the other hand, this would shape the potential for improving relations in the future. Such platforms make sense when thinking about the implementation of joint trilateral projects (social, cultural, communication).

### RUSSIAN EXPERTS

- ❖ The political solution – namely formation of sustainable political platform in Ukraine in support of the compromise solution to the Donbas conflict, as well as neutralisation of radical groups in both Ukraine and Russia that may obstruct the implementation of agreements – seems to be the most challenging task. If the settlement process is generally backed by the majority of the Ukrainian electorate (as some polls suggest), then this hypothetical silent majority should find its voice after the parliamentary elections.
- ❖ Various political forces in both Russia and Ukraine have been using the conflict as a weapon in political battles. It is necessary to halt further movement

within this vicious circle and show greater rhetoric restraint. This might be possible if the parties manage to avoid new serious incidents in bilateral relations and focus on solving a multitude of the existing problems.

❖ The restoration of normal human and economic communication between “separate areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts” and other parts of Ukraine will be essential for creating an encouraging atmosphere. People on both sides of the contact line must be the first ones to sense this movement towards settlement.

❖ The implementation of the Normandy format agreements on disengagement of forces in *ORDLO* along with recognition of the “Steinmeier formula” can be the first realistic step towards the conflict settlement that does not force either party to cross its fundamental “red lines”.

❖ Elections in *ORDLO* are also quite realistic, if the majority in the new Verkhovna Rada following parliamentary elections in Ukraine will be disposed towards compromise decisions based on the Minsk Agreements.

❖ Any movement towards the implementation of the Minsk Agreements may require arrangements for some larger-scale formats of international presence in the conflict zone compared to the mandate of the OSCE’s Special Monitoring Mission. In this case, we should not rule out the use of the UN’s capacities and expertise.

❖ The participation of international structures – the OSCE or the UN – in the conflict settlement process, as well as the overall effectiveness of the Normandy format suggests intensified communication with foreign partners, primarily with the Western countries and with permanent UNSC members to ensure clear understanding of the agreements that are being reached.

❖ The restoration of economic ties and transport links between Russia and Ukraine could be one of more important results of peace initiatives, benefitting the citizens and wellbeing of both countries.

❖ Practical measures aimed at preventing escalation are directly linked to the resumption of the Minsk format and productive work of its groups. In any case (whoever stands behind them or whoever they are controlled by), it would be necessary to negotiate with the separatists, as global practice excludes any other scenarios and possibilities. It makes sense to begin with an OSCE peacekeeping mission, albeit with limited mandate.

❖ It is important to develop economic instruments for the interaction between Ukraine, Donbas and Russia, as this can gradually lay foundation for the

conflict settlement. While searching for the ways out of crisis, one should not ignore the mechanisms of public diplomacy, including expert discussions.

❖ We need to start with small – even symbolic – steps towards each other in economy and culture, to gradually introduce mutually beneficial projects and to restore respect and trust. It is better for this process to occur in multilateral environment, since the presence of third parties makes it easier to maintain purely pragmatic nature of the relations in each particular case. It is further necessary to strengthen mediation, because it is also easier for wounds in bilateral relations to heal with the help of the respected mediators.

❖ The global community needs to demonstrate consistency not so much in maintaining international sanctions or searching for punishment to Russia, as in developing international rules of conduct together with Russia to be adopted by all and properly regulated.

❖ While addressing particular issues, one should see the solution for the global settlement problem. Although much depends on the decisions of politicians, we still need to shape economic prerequisites for settling the conflict. In particular, there should be clear and universally accepted “rules of the game”:

- Legal mechanisms of sanctions;
- Mechanisms for unconditional compensation of damages;
- Conditions of the EU and other countries’ participation in the economic restoration of Donbas.

❖ Moscow should have released the Ukrainian sailors and warships seized during the incident at the Kerch Strait in November 2018. Aside from international law aspects of the issue (warships certainly have the immunity, unless there is a war), this step could well look like a goodwill gesture in response to public addresses of president Zelenskyy to president Putin. Moreover, it would generate a positive international reaction.

❖ At the same time, Moscow and Kyiv should reach an agreement (most likely informal) on measures that would allow to avoid similar incidents in the future without harming the opponent’s legal positions on Crimea’s ownership. If this territorial dispute does not allow Ukrainian state-owned vessels and warships to follow the Russian rules for passing the Kerch Strait (which are in principle identical to the Ukrainian rules applied until 2014), the parties should agree on the special procedure for Ukrainian ships (warships above all) to pass through

the strait. On the one hand, this would allow Ukrainian ships to enjoy their right of free passage in line with the 2003 Bilateral Treaty on the Sea of Azov and would not give the Russian authorities any reasons to consider such passage as provocation on the other. In this case, only blatant deviation from the agreed rules would raise questions. And for these questions to be addressed promptly, the Russian and Ukrainian authorities should establish an emergency “hot-link”.

❖ To ease tensions in the Sea of Azov area, Russia and Ukraine should agree on measures to ensure safety of navigation in the Kerch Strait, based on cooperation of relevant services. To minimise the waiting time of civilian vessels lying in the anchorage prior to passing through the strait, the Ukrainian services of navigation could perform the agreed-upon identical measures to inspect these vessels in the Ukrainian ports, thus eliminating the possibility of sabotage in the Kerch Strait area, as it is now done by the relevant Russian services in the Russian ports. It should be borne in mind that the countries’ willingness to rely on the effectiveness of navigation safety measures carried out by another party will require interaction and communication between relevant Russian and Ukrainian services.

❖ For the purpose of improving predictability of the situation in the conflict zone in the East of Ukraine and minimising the risks of unintended escalation, it is necessary to resume functioning of the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC), jointly established by the Russian and Ukrainian military back in September 2014. The Russian military suspended its participation in JCCC in 2017. Renewed operations of the JCCC would help strengthening control over the operational situation in the conflict zone and providing timely and more objective information to the senior military and the civilian leadership of both countries.

### GERMAN EXPERTS

❖ The EU, NATO, the OSCE and other relevant organizations need to formulate a coordinated approach towards the Sea of Azov. Current measures (naval presence, infrastructure development in the Mariupol region, etc.) should be formalised in an agreed package, which is to include short-, medium- and long-term measures. Maximum clarification of the situation from the viewpoint of national and international law should be a part of this approach. In addition, it is necessary to intensify efforts and convince Russia to release sailors imprisoned following the capture of the Ukrainian warships by the Russian coast guard in November 2018.

❖ Germany and France should review the results (or the lack thereof) of the Normandy format and the Minsk process bilaterally with the new Ukrainian

president and the government (after it is formed), and with key figures in the parliament to be elected in July 2019. Following such a review, it is necessary to develop a plan for moving forward, that is, to determine whether the current negotiation formats are sufficient and should continue, or whether it makes sense to set up new or additional formats. In this context, one should remember that Russia is a party to the conflict, but not a mediator. The issue of advantages and problems of the Ukrainian side entering the direct communication with the so-called “separatists” should also be discussed confidentially.

❖ If the West wants to resolve at least Donbas conflict (let alone the Crimean issue), then current sanctions regime should intensify, perhaps significantly. Although this will imply certain losses for some EU members, the ultimate losses for Europe may be much higher, if such measures are not taken. Most Europeans currently perceive the Donbas conflict as a purely Ukrainian problem. However, further continuation or even aggravation of the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation in Donbas can easily develop into a pan-European problem with gloomy consequences not only for Ukrainians, but also for many other Europeans.

❖ We can advise Ukraine not to become overly obsessed with the currently insoluble conflict, but to focus on reforms and national development. While becoming more attractive for its citizens, Ukraine’s position in the conflict with the Russian Federation (which still cannot be won by military means) will become increasingly more advantageous. By and large, this is a conflict for the hearts and minds of people. The more citizens are satisfied with the situation in Ukraine, the lower Vladimir Putin’s shares will plunge.

# A CONFLICT OF MOSCOW AND KYIV: A “WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY”, *THE STATUS QUO OR A NEW ROUND OF ESCALATION?*

---

*Interviews of the Ukrainian, Russian and German experts  
(June 2019)*

---

This virtual roundtable is a prelude to the 10<sup>th</sup> meeting of Ukrainian, Russian and German experts within the standing dialogue, initiated by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in 2015. The present discussion is devoted to the problems and prospects for settling (minimising) the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv in the context of “rebooting the government” in Ukraine.

How will the rise of Volodymyr Zelenskyy, a representative of new political forces, to power in Ukraine and the change in the composition of the Verkhovna Rada affect the dynamics of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict? Are there any new prospects to at least reduce the conflict intensity in bilateral relations? Will the current situation persist, or is another round of confrontation imminent? Should we expect compromises on Moscow’s part?

These issues were reviewed at the virtual discussion involving experts from the three countries. The participants also presented short-term (one to two year) scenarios of the development of Russian-Ukrainian relations, taking into account both the internal situation and geopolitical dynamics.

One cannot but agree that the reality gives no grounds for excessive optimism in forecasts, especially in view of the strong inertia of the confrontation between Kyiv and Moscow, the Kremlin’s hard-nosed position, and the first steps of the new Ukrainian president in the international arena. Experts were rather cautious by not predicting any ground-breaking positive developments in bilateral relations anytime soon. According to some discussion participants, we may expect some local, situational compromises of humanitarian nature.

Most experts agree that the *status quo* will remain both in relations between Moscow and Kyiv and in Donbas.

However, it is also obvious that the efforts of the parties should focus on preventing further aggravation of the conflict, on minimising confrontation and on ending the process of degradation of Russia-Ukraine relations.

## POSITIONS OF UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

### A “WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY” IS MORE ABOUT LOCAL AND SITUATIONAL COMPROMISES

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

The change of power in Ukraine hardly gives any grounds for predicting fundamental, game-changing swings in the country’s foreign policy. At least, the start of Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s presidential term is marked by attempts to renew the administrative establishment, by a clinch with the outgoing parliament, and by rather careful positioning in the international arena within previously established coordinates. The new president’s period of adaptation and self-assertion also includes the parliamentary elections, and much will depend on the balance of power in the new Verkhovna Rada. It is more about changing foreign policy style (which already becomes visible), prolonging of main foreign policy vectors (EU, NATO, the United States), and searching for local compromises on the Russian direction.

On the other hand, the Ukrainian continuum incorporates strong socio-ideological dynamics, as countering the aggressor and resisting the Kremlin’s hybrid intervention became the norm and tradition of political life, supported by current legislation and dominant public sentiment. This is further confirmed by the findings of sociological studies, presented in this publication (however, the picture of regional sentiment is less clear).

Despite public demand and policy priorities articulated in the inaugural speech, it would be a mistake for president Zelenskyy to set specific timeframes for settling the situation in Donbas or to declare peace in the East as the main criterion for his effectiveness as a president. And he does not do it. So far, he enjoys an impressive *carte blanche* of public trust with no specific plan of commitments. Anyway, given current circumstances, it would be more appropriate for president Zelenskyy to repeat Winston Churchill’s famous statement of 13 May 1940 in the House of Commons: “I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat”.



**Mykhailo PASHKOV,**  
Co-Director,  
Foreign Relations  
and International Security  
Programmes

The new Ukrainian government still has rather a narrow “corridor of opportunity” for resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general and the situation in the East in particular. The following factors prevent this from happening.

**First**, Ukraine’s course to European and Euro-Atlantic integration cannot be blocked or curtailed by the new government for many reasons. For example, the prospects of the EU and NATO membership are enshrined in the Constitution. On the other hand, support for this course is dominant in Ukrainian society. The new government hardly wants to blow the country up by abruptly changing its vector from the West to the East – from the EU to the EAEU, from NATO to the CSTO. An eloquent evidence of stability of the new government’s Euro-Atlantic course is the fact that president Zelenskyy proposed a candidature of Vadym Prystaiko, the Head of the Mission of Ukraine to NATO, to take charge of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

It is clear that despite the “remoteness” of Ukraine’s prospects for the European integration, Kyiv’s westward drift is the main irritant for the Kremlin, which views post-Soviet space as the zone of its privileged interests. This is why the first official foreign visit of the new president to Brussels on 4 June 2019 and his statements on invariability of the country’s foreign policy towards the EU and NATO membership, articulated at the briefing with Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, caused corresponding outcry in Moscow.

**Second**, the Kremlin demonstrates a clear reluctance and unwillingness for any compromise. Moreover, the Russian side increases tension, making it clear that it will talk to Kyiv only on ultimatum terms and from the position of strength. Examples include Putin’s “humanitarian” decree on the issuance of Russian passports to the residents of “DPR” and “LPR”, restrictions on the supply of petroleum products to Ukraine, attempts to urgently summon the UN Security Council to discuss the Ukrainian language law, and others.

All this occurs based on proven Russian tactics, when Ukraine undergoes critical government change with a “stripped” national security. This is exactly what happened with Crimea and Donbas. Furthermore, peace initiatives, articulated by Ukraine’s Leonid Kuchma on 5 June 2019 in Minsk, have only led to marked aggravation at the front. Unfortunately, the only compromise for the Kremlin is Kyiv’s capitulation in Donbas, meaning official recognition of “DPR” and “LPR” by Ukraine and the start of formal negotiations with the so-called “republics”, although it is illogical even in technological terms, given the Russian citizenship of the “DPR” and “LPR” leaders and their absolute puppet subordination to Moscow.

**Third**, a fairly active “column” seeking to form a strong faction of “Putin’s friends” in the Verkhovna Rada toed the starting line of the parliamentary campaign. The Kremlin pins certain hopes on the Medvedchuk-Rabinovych-Boyko team, which has a serious information foothold in the Ukrainian media space and is oriented on voters in the South-East of Ukraine. It is obvious that Russia assigned this political group the role of moderator and initiator of steps aimed at minimising the conflict in Donbas, facilitating prisoner swaps and the like. And some concessions on the Russian part may be attributed to this group in order to boost its influence and popularity. By the way, the most recent visits of Viktor Medvedchuk and Yuriy Boyko to Moscow and their “gas negotiations” are presented by Russia almost as an official meeting with the representatives of Ukraine.

**Fourth**, one should take into account the different “weight categories” of Kyiv and Moscow’s military potentials. A well-armed group of 30,000 militants is fighting in Donbas, with roughly one-third of them being Russian mercenaries and regular army officers. It is comparable with the armies of Hungary or Slovakia. Furthermore, Russia has concentrated 80 thousand troops along the Ukrainian border. It also holds a reinforced military contingent in the Crimea. Likewise, the border with Belarus cannot be considered safe. Therefore, under current circumstances, resolution of the Donbas issue by military means is unpromising for Kyiv and is fraught with large-scale escalation. This is why the course towards a political and diplomatic marathon to resolve the conflict in Donbas will continue.

**Fifth**, the turbulence and unpredictability of geopolitical processes increase the uncertainty and multivarience of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and push the occupied Donbas and the annexed Crimea issues to the periphery. At the same time, representatives of the Normandy Four countries – France and Germany – demonstrate their cynical “pragmatism” in PACE, as they actively lobby for the lifting of sanctions from the Russian delegation, totally disregarding the fact that Russia ignored all previous decisions of the GA regarding Donbas and Crimea.

I think that the change of power in Ukraine (as of June 2019, this process is not over yet) will not lead to escalation. Will the window of opportunity open? I believe, there may be some local and situational compromises, mostly of a humanitarian nature, aimed at minimising tensions on the Donbas front. In particular, one can expect some progress in prisoner exchange and peace initiatives in three “pilot sites” (including in Stanytsya Luhanska). Attempts to establish truce along the contact line will continue within the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk. However, all key decisions will be made in the Normandy format.

Apparently, the specific material for negotiations is yet to be elaborated, although the Administration of the new Ukrainian president claims to have some new creative developments...

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

In May 2019, the Razumkov Centre presented a special issue of its journal dedicated to the war in Donbas. Having summarised the results of sociological studies, we can conclude that citizens of Ukraine and members of the expert community alike are very sceptical about future Ukrainian-Russian relations in general and the settlement in Donbas in particular. For example, most Ukrainians believe that relations between Kyiv and Moscow will either worsen (33%) or remain unchanged (also 33%) in the coming years. Moreover, most respondents (59%) do not think any positive changes in Moscow's policy on Ukraine are possible within the next 1-3 years, which is clearly linked to the period of Vladimir Putin's current presidential term.

According to the experts, the continued *status quo* is the most likely scenario of events in Donbas, that is combat activity of low intensity (probability – 4.2 points).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the Ukrainian experts believe that granting a “special status” to the occupied territories within Ukraine pose the most serious threat for the country.

Making predictions is a rather unrewarding task. But in the current situation, one cannot see even the slightest glimpses of possible comprehensive settlement of the Donbas conflict. Quite the contrary, the negative dynamics intensifies.

The Ukrainian policy on Donbas is of dual nature. On the one hand, Ukraine fights and will continue fighting for Donbas at all platforms, understanding the need to protect its territorial integrity and to prevent the “Donbas scenario” in other regions. On the other hand, Kyiv cannot embrace “DPR” and “LPR”, understanding the deadly danger of implanting this “semi-enclave of the Russian world” into the country’s body.

The above-mentioned Putin’s decree on Russian passports for “DPR” and “LPR”, in essence, suggests the Abkhaz-Ossetian scenario. In other words,

---

<sup>1</sup> The experts used a 6-grade scale, where “1” is impossible and “5” is highly likely.

Detailed description of the expert survey is provided in the material “The Conflict in Donbas: Opinions and Assessments of Ukrainian Experts”, included in this publication.

Russia creates the necessary mass of “passportised” Russian citizens in the occupied territories for the purpose of (a) recognising the independence of “republics”, and (b) concluding an allied treaty that would stipulate both “mutual protection against external encroachments” and the deployment of Russian military bases in Donbas. In this case, we can forget about the Minsk Agreements.

It is clear that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict goes far beyond the war in Donbas and annexation of Crimea. Over the past five years, the confrontation affected all areas of interstate relations, from diplomatic contacts to tourism sector. Ukrainian society suffered a tremendous trauma from the conflict with Russia, with mental alienation and the estrangement of citizens of both countries being its most critical consequence. The results of the Razumkov Centre’s studies presented in this publication point at the emergence of a stable matrix of perception of Russia as an aggressor with a consistently negative attitude of Ukrainian society towards the state institutions of the Russian Federation.

Under the given circumstances, we should rather focus on preventing the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, minimising confrontation and reducing the degree of hostility.

I believe that the thesis on temporary “freezing”, proposed at the expert meeting in Berlin in February 2017, remains relevant.<sup>2</sup> The idea is to isolate the first three points of the Minsk Agreements (ceasefire, withdrawal of arms and effective monitoring of the implementation of these actions by the parties), to arrange these items into a separate agreement (memorandum) on armistice, and to approve it in the Normandy format with no preliminary conditions. This will have a positive effect on the atmosphere and productivity of both Minsk and Normandy negotiations.

The scenario of bilateral relations hardly provides for a full-scale, high-level meeting in the near future. Some contacts are still possible in a multilateral (Normandy) format. But this requires new creative initiatives that will be of interest for the other party. Yet, we wonder, what would generate interest for the Kremlin apart from Ukraine’s unilateral concessions?

On the other hand, the lack of contacts, just like the “sleep of political mind,” gives birth to monsters. This is why the dialogue is necessary *a priori*, at least at the expert level. Years of practice and outcomes of our trilateral expert dialogue initiated by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung confirm this necessity.

---

<sup>2</sup> For more detail, see M. Pashkov, The best option in the current situation is “freezing” the conflict in Donbas – The Russia-Ukraine Conflict in the Context of Geopolitical Changes, 2017, p.15.

## KYIV HALF-OPENS A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SETTLEMENT, MOSCOW KEEPS ITS WINDOW SHUT

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

True, it is potentially quite a “window of opportunity” for the partial settlement of the Donbas conflict (but not a systemic conflict between Moscow and Kyiv), rather than a reason for the new round of escalation. However, one should not expect some ground-breaking improvement in relations with Russia after the presidential elections in Ukraine. The Crimean issue remains unsolvable, as Ukraine will not agree to Russian sovereignty over Crimea, and Russia will not return Crimea to Ukraine. In Donbas, the interests of Putin’s Russia and Ukraine (including under the new president Zelenskyy) are also in opposition, but there is still some room for manoeuvre and at least some chance of finding mutually acceptable compromise. But this only partly depends on the new president of Ukraine and his team, the final decision depends on the Russian president Putin.

Mr. Zelenskyy sincerely seeks peace in Donbas, but he lacks both political experience and meaningful competence in order to negotiate in the Normandy and Minsk formats, and therefore he has no real ideas and practical scenarios for implementing his good intentions in Donbas. The situation within his team is also quite controversial in this regard.

The president’s environment, including his inner circle, consists of supporters of an “abstract peace” with Russia and those who favour continuation of the Donbas policy, implemented under president Poroshenko. There are even several hawkish patriots. The new government, including president Zelenskyy himself, gradually came to the understanding of “red lines” that Ukraine cannot cross, otherwise the country will plunge into severe political crisis. Such “red lines” include consent to the Russian plan for Donbas (broad autonomy for the separatist republics) and, conversely, the official rejection of the occupied territories. But the main problem is that at the moment the presidential Administration has no designated person who would be functionally responsible for settling the conflict



**Volodymyr FESENKO,**  
Chairman of the Board of  
The Centre for  
Applied Political  
Studies “Penta”

in the East of Ukraine and for holding negotiations on Donbas. Speaking of the Minsk format, Leonid Kuchma was brought back to represent Ukraine in the Trilateral Contact Group, talks in the Normandy format are a traditional responsibility of the Deputy Head of the presidential Administration on Foreign Policy (currently Mr. Vadym Prystayko). However, the situation was similar under president Poroshenko.

In summary, we can assume that Ukraine will try to intensify the negotiation process on Donbas, but the new Ukrainian leader has no clear and specific peace plan for resolving the conflict. The resistance of hawkish patriots is another problem, as these people stand against any compromises with Russia. Both the sociological research data and the results of presidential elections show that those sharing such political views are in a clear minority. However, their political camp is well organised and much more active, both in social media and on the streets. Even Mr. Kuchma's timid and non-systemic initiatives to intensify negotiations in Minsk caused an avalanche of criticism and a loud rally under the walls of the presidential Administration.

Should one expect changes in Russia's policy towards Ukraine after Volodymyr Zelenskyy was elected as the new Ukrainian leader? For now, we can only discuss the tactics that Moscow uses in relation to the new Ukrainian president, which involves increased pressure and wait-and-see policy at the same time.

The increased pressure manifested itself in the introduction of new economic sanctions against Ukraine, including an embargo on supplies of Russian oil and gas, on the eve of the second round of the presidential race in Ukraine, when Volodymyr Zelenskyy's victory was already in sight. Furthermore, immediately after Mr. Zelenskyy was elected the president of Ukraine, the Russian leader issued a decree that simplified the procedure of granting Russian citizenship to the residents of breakaway “republics”. This decision triggered an extremely negative reaction in Ukraine, including from president Zelenskyy. The most important negative consequence of giving Russian passports to the *ORDLO* residents is the drastic decline in the very possibility of political settlement in Donbas.



The demonstration of force and hard pressure are traditional Putin's tactics. First, he tries to frighten and demoralise his opponents in the negotiations,

and then he begins to talk from a position of strength. He used such tactics against former Ukrainian presidents (Viktor Yushchenko, Viktor Yanukovych and Petro Poroshenko) and some European leaders. However, such tactics with regards to Ukraine has not always been successful for Putin.

The wait-and-see tactics mean that Russian leadership will not rush the resumption of negotiations on Donbas. First, in Moscow they are still trying to figure out Mr. Zelenskyy and his policy, so they are reluctant to give him any political advances. Moreover, president Zelenskyy's statements, in which he rejected any concessions on Donbas and the possibility of granting a special status to the breakaway territories, caused discontent and criticism in Moscow. And second, the Kremlin waits for president Zelenskyy to initiate the negotiations. Only then Moscow will start dictating its terms. It is most likely, however, that the initiative to resume negotiations in the Normandy format will come from Germany and France.

At the moment, the Kremlin shows no signs of readiness for a true compromise with Ukraine. Highly illustrative in this regard is the Centre for Current Policy's report "Scenarios of Russian-Ukrainian relations after the presidential elections".<sup>3</sup> This institution is headed by Alexei Chesnakov – one of Vladislav Surkov's closest advisers and aides, who performed supervision and coordination functions in Donbas and the Minsk negotiations on behalf of his master. The aforementioned report reflects the position of Mr. Surkov's team regarding further development of Ukrainian-Russian relations. Therefore, the "status quo" is the most likely scenario, while the "compromise" is the least likely, almost hypothetical. The main conclusion of this report is as follows: "The space for compromise both in Moscow and in Kyiv in the coming year will be extremely limited." The report further states that the Russian leadership is not ready for any significant concessions to Ukraine.

*Therefore, a certain "window of opportunity" slightly opens up on Kyiv's side to resolve the Donbas conflict and address other crises in relations with Russia. Moscow, however, keeps its "window" tightly shut.* The Kremlin wants one-sided concessions from the new Ukrainian leadership, but these are highly unlikely, primarily because of nonacceptance of such concessions by significant parts of Ukrainian society. Consequently, the possibility of at least partial

---

<sup>3</sup> For more detail see "Scenarios of Russian-Ukrainian relations after the presidential elections" – the Centre for Current Policy", <http://cpkr.ru/analytics/scenarii-rossiysko-ukrainskih-otnosheniy-posle-prezidentskih-vyborov> (in Russian).

settlement of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine still almost entirely dependents on the position and actions of Moscow.

- *What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

My answer to the previous question makes it clear that one should not expect radical changes in the development of Ukrainian-Russian relations, either for the better or for the worse. Parliamentary elections will not lead to the revenge of pro-Russian forces. Moreover, the new president of Ukraine and his team are not ready to settle the conflict on Russian terms.

The *status quo* scenario, however, implies a number of sub-options.

**A more optimal sub-option** includes the intensification of the negotiation process and some decline in the overall tension within bilateral relations. One shouldn't expect breakthroughs, but rather slow progress in cleaning up massive debris that has accumulated over the past 5 years. This course of Ukrainian-Russian relations may be beneficial for the situation in Donbas, with significant reduction in hostilities and, ideally, a complete ceasefire, as well as a full prisoner swap (“all for all”). These expectations, however, are perhaps too idealistic.

**A less favorable sub-option** denotes the ongoing negative dynamics in bilateral relations, with the emergence of new conflict situations, most likely initiated by Moscow. This may include the termination of Russian gas transit across the Ukrainian territory. Moscow may also take advantage of possible aggravation of the domestic political situation in Ukraine to once again meddle in Ukraine's internal affairs. In the Donbas context, this can lead to a relative and limited escalation. If the issuance of Russian passports to the *ORDLO* residents becomes massive, this will irrevocably bury any possibility for a political settlement of the Donbas conflict on the basis of the Minsk Agreements.

**The most realistic sub-option** within the *status quo* scenario implies a certain intensification of negotiations (Donbas, new gas transit agreement, prisoner exchange and release of Ukrainian political prisoners from Russian prisons), followed by freezing and further stagnation both in negotiations and in bilateral relations. As nothing changes for Donbas, the low intensity warfare will continue.

One way or another, the problem of the new gas agreement between Ukraine and Russia will be the central, most controversial and hottest topic in bilateral relations this autumn. Further development of bilateral relations will significantly depend on its successful solution or failure.

## WE SHOULD NOT EXPECT ANY IMPROVEMENT IN RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE NEAR FUTURE

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

The change of power in Ukraine may bring about some novelty to the negotiation process aimed at resolving the conflict, but it will not have a significant impact on the fundamental nature of Kyiv and Moscow's bilateral relations. The situation in Donbas and further relations with Russia were not decisive topics during the 2019 election campaign in Ukraine. Accordingly, Petro Poroshenko's electoral defeat cannot be viewed as evidence of public nonacceptance of his overall foreign policy strategy – his successor did not receive enough credibility for a substantial revision of the course of relations with Moscow.

At the same time, the new Ukrainian government has to respond to challenges associated with the need to end hostilities in Donbas, as this is one of the main tasks in its agenda. It is likely that initially the government's willingness to succeed in resolving the situation, which tended to freeze in recent years, will mobilise it to seek mutually acceptable options for a compromise with Russia.

In fact, the president's rhetoric in the last few days demonstrates his readiness for dialogue and a compromise solution. Recent statements by Leonid Kuchma, the head of the Ukrainian delegation in the Trilateral Contact Group, based on the results of the latest meeting in Minsk (5 June 2019) can be viewed as a “trial balloon”, thrown into the Russian half of the field, and an invitation to a constructive discussion. It is already clear, however, that this process will be neither quick nor easy. Its success does not depend solely on Ukraine: it also requires Russia's readiness to honest and open dialogue on the whole range of issues linked to a peaceful settlement in Donbas, the status of Crimea and the construction of a new post-conflict architecture of Ukrainian-Russian relations.

Obviously, the Russian leadership is not yet ready to take such a step, it prefers the format of the ostentatious “dialogue” with openly pro-Russian



**Kostyantyn  
KONONENKO,**  
Deputy Director,  
the National Institute  
for Strategic Studies

Ukrainian political movements, such as the “Opposition Platform - For Life”, run by Viktor Medvedchuk and Yuriy Boyko. Both of them remain on the margins of modern Ukrainian politics, although, according to sociologists, they do have a chance to improve their representation in the new parliament.

Proceeding from this logic, the new president of Ukraine, who declares the continuation of the country’s pro-European course, is as unacceptable for the Kremlin as the previous one. Thus, one can hardly expect any changes in Russia’s position in the near future and wager on the possibility of compromise. Quite the contrary, evidence suggests that against the background of peaceful rhetoric, Russia takes a tougher stance against the new Ukrainian leadership. Increased shelling of Ukrainian positions and the escalation of hostilities in the conflict zone in the first weeks of Mr. Zelenskyy’s presidency are vivid examples of such behaviour. It is also possible that by doing so Putin wants to test the new head of the Ukrainian state “to destruction”. For now, it is clear that the Kremlin has no intentions to negotiate, but rather seeks to continue its damaging interference in Ukraine’s internal affairs, especially on the eve of the upcoming parliamentary elections. Therefore, the escalation in Donbas will remain one of Russia’s “bargaining chips” to try to achieve one-sided benefits and make peace on its own terms by using Mr. Zelenskyy’s lack of political experience.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

The logic of current situation suggests that we should not expect any improvement in Ukraine-Russia relations in the near future, despite the change of the government in Kyiv.

Judging from the first statements and foreign policy steps by president Zelenskyy, Ukraine’s policy on Russia will not undergo significant changes. Approaches to addressing key issues of Ukrainian-Russian relations remain the same:

- normalisation of bilateral relations is only possible on terms of full restoration of Ukraine’s territorial integrity, with respect for inviolability of its borders and state sovereignty;
- Russia must disengage from interfering in Ukraine’s internal affairs, recognise its sovereign right to choose own path of civilizational development, constitutional structure and the right to ensure its own security;

- international law, rather than unilateral law, based on the rule of force in the interpretation of the provisions of international documents, as practiced today by Russia with regard to Ukraine and other former Soviet republics, must form an imperative basis of bilateral relations;
- in the future, the practice of unilateral action by the Russian Federation, without coordination with partners in matters that affect their fundamental interests, must be excluded from bilateral relations;
- the principle of peaceful co-existence on the basis of a pragmatic approach to each individual matter in bilateral relations is the most acceptable platform for Kyiv. However, it is only possible after the final settlement of the issue of occupied territories, including the status of Crimea.

The use of traditional and globally accepted diplomatic tools in Ukrainian-Russian relations today continues to present a challenge due to unconstructive position of Russia, as it does not want to abandon its imperial approach and recognise the existing reality. Its recent actions, specifically the decision to issue Russian passports to the residents of certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions, show that the Kremlin is not ready for real de-escalation in Donbas. Quite the contrary, Russia continues to use the conflict for creating threats to Ukraine's statehood and to apply pressure on the Ukrainian leadership. For Russia, it is beneficial to fuel this conflict as a tool for destabilising Ukraine. Therefore, it is safe to say that the Russian Federation will continue to pursue its current policy.

Having total control over the occupied territories of Donbas, Putin's regime will continue to supply minimum resources that are necessary to maintain the viability of the so-called "DPR" and "LPR". A large-scale escalation in the conflict zone is unlikely, as at the moment it is better for Russia to utilise "hybrid" methods of influence rather than to rely on military force. However, even under such a "conflict-freezing" scenario, any talks about the prospects of a full-scale settlement of Ukrainian-Russian relations seem untimely.

Also, the Kremlin's recent statements about its willingness to "turn the page" and to restart relations with Ukraine "from scratch" should not mislead anyone. At the moment, Russia's proposal to build bilateral relations with Ukraine within the pre-war paradigm, "as if nothing happened", factoring out the occupation of Ukrainian territories and the proxy war in Donbas – and faulting Kyiv for hostility – looks like complete nonsense. The goal of Moscow's provocation is clear – to drive president Zelenskyy's team into a corner by throwing it into a very

difficult dilemma: either to agree to reconciliation on Russian terms and receive some economic preferences as a bonus, or to continue confrontation with possible new escalation and new victims.

It is likely that in the foreseeable future, Moscow will alternate a rigid pragmatic approach in its relations with Kyiv with gestures of pretentious peacefulness, aimed at “strangling Ukrainians in embraces of brotherly love”, simultaneously torpedoing all Ukraine’s attempts to integrate into the EU and NATO and relying on quick renaissance of the pro-Russian forces in Kyiv. At the same time, it will seek to weaken the West’s support of Ukraine by using a variety of tools and will continue to consistently work towards lifting the sanction regime without fulfilling its obligations in line with the Minsk Agreements.

### NEW UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT DOES NOT HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO END THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

Change of government always presents a “window of opportunity”. However, the likelihood of the efficient use of this “window” for conflict resolution is extremely low because the five years of war have started processes with rather strong momentum. Ukraine will follow its pro-Western path, other alternatives are not being considered. Trade wars and Russian sanctions against Ukrainian business will only reinforce our pro-Western stance.

According to the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade of Ukraine (in 2018) Ukraine’s exports to Russia went 7.2% down (amounting to \$3.7 billion). Russia’s share in the total volume of Ukrainian goods exports dropped to 7.7% compared to 9.1% in 2017, its share in Ukraine’s total imports is also getting smaller (14.5% in 2017 and 14.2% in 2018). Meanwhile, foreign trade in goods and services with EU countries increased 13.4% in 2018 (\$49.3 billion). EU countries made up 41.1% of Ukraine’s trade turnover in 2018.



Lidiya SMOLA,  
Professor at National  
Technical University of  
Ukraine  
“Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”

On 18 April 2019, the Russian government has introduced new economic sanctions against Ukraine (Russia has banned exports of cardboard and paper products, light industry goods, metalwork products and engineering products and has restricted oil and petroleum products supplies from Ukraine). The volume of trade with Russia will keep shrinking. At the same time, confrontation in the information arena and in cyber security will grow. “The window of opportunity” will likely give tangible results in prisoner exchange only.

The US and EU economic sanctions are causing major damage to the Russian economy. Therefore, in case of a drastic deterioration of the economic situation, the Russian government will manifest its commitment to a compromise, however, without any specific action. Moscow will expect results from pro-Russian forces in Ukraine headed by Viktor Medvedchuk’s group, which has already accumulated a sizable media potential. It is also possible that Russian leaders are relying on the new president’s lack of political and military experience as well as his particular mindset.

In the near future, we can expect the *status quo* to remain unchanged with some exacerbations on the demarcation line. The situation will remain like this until Ukraine gets its new parliament and government. Moscow will be waiting to see the results, hoping for stronger pro-Russian representation in the new Ukrainian government and the potential execution of the Minsk Agreements according to the Russian scenario. In case of strong voter support for the Medvedchuk group in the elections, Russia will try to realise the “Georgian (Abkhazian) scenario”.

According to analysts, progress in the Minsk Agreements execution will be a good reason for the EU to lift some of the most burdensome economic sanctions off of Russia, which Europe is having trouble prolonging anyway. Active resistance against Viktor Medvedchuk’s actions or the isolation of the pro-Russian faction in the parliament will lead to a new escalation of the conflict. There is also the possibility of new attempts to destabilise Ukraine from the inside.

Initially, it will probably be a push to force the adoption of legislation on Donbas autonomy. In case this fails, the next step will be an attempt to incite a domestic conflict in Ukraine (via different provocations and acts of violence), which will be interpreted as “civil unrest/war”. A number of messages in the information space regarding the possibility of “another Maidan” should be interpreted as “testing” public sentiment and active groups. The accumulation

of additional reserves of natural gas by European traders is a sign of a future gas war planned by Gazprom. According to Naftogaz management, Gazprom will cut off transit of natural gas through Ukraine’s GTS, blackmailing Ukraine and Europe with a gas crisis.

If the new Ukrainian government progresses towards active reforms and the reinforcement of its army with new types of weapons and equipment (*Vilkha missiles*, *Neptun missiles*, *self-propelled howitzers Bohdana*, *radio intelligence*, *modernisation of special forces*, etc.), the frozen conflict could move into an active phase. This would have a very simple explanation: Moscow is not interested in Ukraine as a strong independently acting state, while such actions could be interpreted as Russia losing its grip on the region.

Even the threat of financial sanctions, to which Russia is particularly sensitive, will not be able to stop conflict intensification in this case. Conflict escalation is also possible in case of drastic deterioration of Russia’s economic situation (an economic crisis, a drop of energy prices) and the growth of protest movement within the country. The desire to fight “a small victorious war” (*similar to 1904, when the Russian Minister of Internal Affairs V.Pleve stated: “...in order to stop the revolution, we need “a small victorious war”*), will inspire a new military campaign, thus drawing the public attention away from crisis and a possible transition of power.

– *What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

I believe that there are no prerequisites for a real reboot of relations between the two countries. As the conflict is based on geopolitical grounds and a difference in values, it will continue, taking different forms, but remaining the same at the core. The space for compromise will be extremely limited. Moscow is likely to try using pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine (Viktor Medvedchuk, Yurii Boyko), who will do their best to lobby through Donbas autonomy, disseminating the narrative about civil strife in Eastern Ukraine. The first foreign visits of the newly elected president of Ukraine and new messages in the rhetoric of French, German and US leaders will have Moscow hoping for a carte blanche to intensify its actions regarding Ukraine. A major focus will remain on international court battles.

Russia-Ukraine relations will progress depending on a number of factors. Most important of them are: parliamentary election results, Ukraine's socio-economic situation and public support of the new president (whether it remains on the same level). At the moment, it is advantageous for both Russia and Ukraine to hold their current ground, which will lead to the conservation of the existing situation of manageable conflict. Even small strategy corrections on either side hold major risks for the domestic political situations in each country. Three scenarios are most likely: a nominal military escalation, nominal peacekeeping operation and the nominal preservation of the *status quo* with Ukraine gradually increasing its military potential and continued pressure on Russia.

The possibility of nominal military escalation in the conflict zone is rather small, although political instability and the change of government in Ukraine may drive Russian leaders to intensify their activity in this area. What is more likely is an upsurge of terrorist threats (mining, high profile assassinations). This scenario is possible if Russia achieves more success in the diplomatic arena (Russia's return to PACE, agreements with France and Germany). The conflict parties have more sanctions in stock for each other, so any drastic action to achieve one's interests may also provoke conflict escalation.

A nominal peacekeeping operation or creating a neutral buffer (5-6 km) along the contact line (as always, parties will be apprehensive of scheming on the part of the opponent) is not accepted by Russia. At the moment, the probability of a peacekeeping operation is low, but with time it may become more likely.

The third, and most likely, scenario of future relations between Russia and Ukraine is the *status quo* scenario. This means further stagnation of the Donbas region, recurring episodes of intensification and shellings, gradual capacity-building of Ukrainian army, and continued international pressure on Russia. Successful implementation of the "People to People" project, the restoration and renovation programme for the destroyed regions in the liberated Donbas territories, may have a certain positive psychological effect on the residents of the occupied territories.



## THE CHANGE OF POWER IN UKRAINE AS SUCH WILL NOT LEAD TO THE CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

Since the conflict in Donbas is a consequence of Russia’s hybrid aggression against Ukraine, its final settlement is only possible with the aggressor’s refusal to continue the war. But this is highly unlikely. Russia shows no real, rather than verbal, signals of goodwill and a constructive approach, as evidenced by the introduction of additional restrictions on hydrocarbons and petroleum products exports to Ukraine from 1 June 2019, the threat of gas transit termination across Ukraine starting from 1 January 2020, and the launch of issuance of Russian passports to citizens of Ukraine. It is necessary to step up the sanctions pressure from the West to force Russia to peace. But Europe’s political will in this regard is weak, and the United States’ readiness is not sufficient.

The change of government in Ukraine as such will not lead to the conflict settlement. The statements of the presidential frontrunner Zelenskyy that “it wasn’t us who started this war, but it is on us to end it”, are pure populism, which has already crashed into the reality that he tasted over the first 100 days of his presidency. So, it is no coincidence that during meetings with the members of the US Administration and the European Commission, president Zelenskyy talked about the need to strengthen Western sanctions against Russia.

Compromises on the Russian side are impossible. The above-mentioned passport issuance initiative for those living in the occupied territories has expanded into “passportisation” for all citizens of Ukraine in a matter of days. And this implies an “escalation scenario” far beyond Donbas. In general, this applies to the entire Ukraine, pointing at preparation for the “protection of compatriots” scenario.

And something that they may call “a compromise” in Moscow will, in fact, mean capitulation for Ukraine, which is unacceptable for Ukrainian society as it was in 2014. Therefore, a new round of escalation is inevitable, especially



**Mykhailo HONCHAR,**  
President of the Centre  
for Global Studies  
“Strategy XXI”

given the fact that the United States did not settle for the Venezuela-for-Ukraine type of exchange.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

By continuing to act within its hybrid war framework, Russia will try to populate the government structures of Ukraine with its acolytes, to raise quislings to the highest offices in executive bodies, and to restart relations “from scratch”, as articulated by Moscow. This became apparent during the election campaigns with media strengthening of the pro-Russian Medvedchuk-Boyko-Lyovochkin group. One should also look at Russia’s activities on the “gas front”, including two visits to Russia by Viktor Medvedchuk and Yuriy Boyko’s tandem, as well as offers of “cheap gas” and a “friendly settlement” by *Gazprom*’s Alexey Miller, while ignoring the payment of \$2.8 billion to *Naftogaz* pursuant to the decision of the Stockholm Arbitration in 2018.

The Kremlin is already elaborating the “winter gas crisis” scenario in order to accuse Ukraine of disrupting the transit of Russian gas to Europe and to dictate its scheme of both gas transit and gas supply to Ukraine to once again get a grip of the Ukrainian gas market and revive its traditional gas leverage over the Ukrainian government (*Naftogaz* is not buying gas from *Gazprom* since November 2015).

The Kremlin’s plot is to recalibrate the new Ukrainian government from the “away from Moscow!” algorithm to the *status quo ante* restoration in bilateral relations according to the Russian plan, in which Ukraine recognises Crimea as Russian territory and restores its water supply, Russia recognises “Ukraine’s territorial integrity” without Crimea and withdraws from Donbas on conditions of implementation of the Minsk Agreements by Kyiv in the Russian interpretation. The latter implies amnesty for militants, the autonomy of Donbas, transformation of the “DPR” and “LPR” army corps into “people’s militia”, the elections, and the arrival of representatives of the newly established autonomy to the Verkhovna Rada. In fact, this is more than a federalisation scenario for Ukraine, but the model of its “Bosnianisation” – transformation into a dysfunctional state entity governed by the quisling regime. According to the Kremlin’s vision, Ukraine should hold a properly “arranged” referendum on NATO and EU membership with a pre-programmed negative result, which will serve as a basis for

abandoning the country’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration course enshrined in the Constitution.

Taking advantage of Europe’s transformation following the election of a new European Parliament and the formation of a new European Commission, Russia will try to “sell” its traditional vision of conflicts in the post-Soviet space to the EU as the weaker link of the collective West. The core of this vision is that said conflicts are generated by the internal problems of Moldova, Georgia or Ukraine, while Russia resists any foreign interference in their internal affairs, stands for preservation of these countries’ sovereignty and integrity, and tries “to help” in every possible way by playing the role of mediator and peacemaker while working together with the West on drawing the new security architecture in Europe.

Russia’s strategy has not changed since the 19th century. It is worth recalling the Lord Palmerston’s famous speech in the British Parliament, when discussing the division of Ottoman Porte on the eve of the Crimean War: “...the Russian Government has always had two strings to its bow – moderate language and disinterested professions at Petersburg and at London; active aggression by its agents on the scene of operations”.

Today, it is safe to say that Russia, through its actions in Moldova, is trying to create a parallel reality of “constructive interaction” with Europe and the United States. This is also projected on Ukraine, particularly to create an illusion that Russia is ready for a constructive solution to the “Donbas conflict” and that it is not a party to the conflict but only a mediator, just like Germany and France.

Therefore, Russia’s actions in the coming months (the period of formation of new government structures both at the central and local levels) will focus on working inside Ukraine to re-transform it into “Yanukovych’s Ukraine” by using media, agents of influence and networks of diverse lobbyists and also taking advantage of the new government’s blatant incompetence, pacifism and ignorance of Russia.

Military action against Ukraine is also possible; moreover, it becomes increasingly more probable in view of the recently launched campaign of issuance of Russian passports to citizens of Ukraine for their subsequent “protection”. A specially planned provocation can serve as an excuse for aggression, e.g. the spread of fake news about the Armed Forces of Ukraine “going rogue” and presenting the threat to all.

In view of more than a mild response of Europe and the United States to Russia's actions in the Sea of Azov that restrict freedom of navigation and the incident near the Kerch Strait on 25 November 2018, endless investigation of the shootdown of MH17 flight by the Russian *Buk-M* system and Germany and France's facilitation of Russia's return to the Council of Europe, Moscow perceives this as a sign of weakness of the collective West and as a new "window of opportunity" to continue its hybrid aggression with military component. And while speaking at the Academy of Military Sciences in February, Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the Russian General Staff, focused on the Syrian experience for good reason. In the event of escalation, Kharkiv, Kherson and Odessa oblasts, as well as the Ukrainian Azov region are likely areas of Russian military action.



In the near future one can expect attempts of some European countries to put pressure on Ukraine regarding the unilateral implementation of the so-called Minsk Agreements. The success of these attempts is unlikely, but if the Ukrainian government does endorse this approach, it will lead to a severe internal political crisis to further aggravate the situation.

Russian diplomacy will continue operating from within the EU, particularly through Germany, France and Italy, by trying to advance the new architecture of European security and cooperation in the format of (**EU + EAEU**) - (**US + Canada + UK**) while ignoring the interests of CEE states. The United States will hardly welcome this approach. Under these circumstances, Ukraine, Poland, Romania, the Baltic states, Moldova and Georgia will have no choice but to shift towards the transatlantic cooperation format (**US + UK**).

Therefore, the likelihood of maintaining the *status quo* in Donbas remains high if no tectonic tremors occur over the next six months in the relations between the West and Russia due to events elsewhere in the world (Middle East, Latin America, Southeast Asia) outside the CEE region.

## POSITIONS OF RUSSIAN EXPERTS

### MOVEMENT TOWARDS MINSK MODEL EXECUTION WOULD HELP TO NORMALISE POLITICAL DIALOGUE

- Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

Ukraine has the new president, yet it is not quite clear how this will affect the future of conflict resolution. Partially, the answer may be given by the parliamentary election results and the character of relations between the president and the parliament that will emerge afterwards. President Zelenskyy is waiting for the parliamentary elections and is assuming a careful waiting tactic regarding negotiations, largely repeating the Ukrainian mainstream interpretation of national interests in the conflict. Even if the president believes in the evolution of this position in the future, it will not be an easy task, as the political track created under Petro Poroshenko’s presidency has its supporters, including the ones with the rather radical disposition.

It is quite possible that election results will not present a majority party, and parties that get the Verkhovna Rada seats will be forced to form a coalition to overcome major differences of opinion. In the worst case scenario, the situation may come to a stalemate, when neither political parties nor the president are able to implement their agenda, as they block each other. Of course, the president hopes for the maximum number of his supporters within the new parliament, and the Russian government hopes for a good result for those people who they see as a “compromise force” (represented by Viktor Medvedchuk). In reality, we can predict that the “compromise party’s” success would only provoke strong opposition from its outspoken opponents, and would ultimately cause the same stalemate and/or yet another destabilisation and street politics triumph. By contrast, the victory of president Zelenskyy’s supporters would mean that the president is given a free hand to implement his ideas.



**Sergey UTKIN,**  
Head of Strategic  
Assessment Section  
at the Primakov Institute  
of World Economy and  
International Relations  
(IMEMO),  
Russian Academy of  
Sciences

All the unknown variables of Ukrainian political scene rebalancing aside, changes in Ukraine's political life create a dynamic which, under a number of conditions, could lead to Donbas conflict resolution. Voters must have preferred overcoming corruption and political system stagnation to the statehood building triad – “army, language, faith” – proposed by Petro Poroshenko. Both Donbas and Russia can be comfortable with the president, who is not ashamed of the traditional Ukrainian bilingualism, is able to reach young people, and is shaking up the old management team.

Moscow still considers the Minsk Agreements the basis for a compromise settlement, which does not sit well with radicals on either side, but is at least not rejected by the mainstream both in Ukraine and Russia. At the same time, the process is clearly influenced by Russian forces that see the value in strengthening connections with Donbas and delivering its residents a guarantee of support, mainly through easing the Russian citizenship procedure. The limitation in the granting of citizenship is usually the unwillingness of the state to undertake responsibilities regarding new citizens too easily. In this case, however, if the state is willing to grant such citizenship, and potential citizens are willing to receive it, it is not easy to obstruct this process.

The Russian leadership will hardly cancel its decisions in this area, to say nothing of taking the granted citizenship away. Dual citizenship situation (Ukrainian and Russian) is easy to imagine and not critical, but many Ukrainian politicians view it as highly undesirable and will do all they can to prevent it. The directly opposite perception of the meaning and significance of the same actions does not facilitate the search for a compromise, but it does not completely exclude the possibility of stabilisation in the conflict area with subsequent political resolution.

Tying together the issues of Donbas and Crimea as done by Ukrainian politicians and some Western partners essentially drives the situation to a stalemate. Apparently, Russian leaders see the standoff in Russian-Ukrainian interactions for decades to come as quite realistic and most likely, albeit not optimal.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

Although president Zelenskyy is taking a very careful approach to changing Ukraine's position in negotiations on the ongoing conflict, he is well aware of

his voters’ demand for the cessation of hostilities and resolution of remaining complicated issues through negotiations. He is likely to attempt to use the existing Normandy format for these purposes.

Russia’s position in this context is well-known: Moscow appeals to decisions previously agreed upon in the Normandy format – separation of forces in the areas near Stanitsa Luganskaya, Petrovskiy and Zolotoy, putting in writing the so-called “Steinmeier formula”, which envisages implementing Ukrainian legislation on a special local self-government rule in some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions on a temporary basis during local elections in Donbas, and on a permanent basis after OSCE/ODIHR assessment of elections as such that satisfied the main requirements.

Given president Zelenskyy’s statements on the need to ensure full ceasefire immediately, progress in this area is possible. This could significantly reduce the risks in the conflict area but would not mean immediate progress in political resolution. Even if the “Steinmeier formula” is turned into an official document, there is still the major issue of negotiating election rules in line with the Minsk Agreements. Reformatting of Ukraine’s political scene during the Verkhovna Rada elections this year (with political forces created from scratch having real chances of winning) may potentially facilitate this process – it is much easier to imagine new forces participating in Donbas elections rather than Maidan-2014 victors.

As time goes by, chances for the execution of the Minsk Agreements are not increasing, at the least. If parties fail to make progress in the coming years, and “separate regions” keep drifting away from Ukraine, friction points between Russia and Ukraine may exacerbate, and other more large-scale consequences may emerge (e.g. in Russia’s relations with Western countries, etc.). There is hardly any solid ground, however, under expectations that these prospects would lead to Russia reviewing its current policy in the near future. If there is movement towards the implementation of the Minsk model after all, even before any substantial results are achieved, we could expect the partial renewal of economic cooperation between Russia and Ukraine and some normalisation of political dialogue.

Despite the difference in political and economic weight, both Russia and Ukraine are capable of delivering significant blows to each other, taking into account Western partners’ stable support for the latter. Ultimately, causing mutual damage does not contribute to resolution of deep socio-economic problems on which both countries had better focus their efforts.

## ANY AGREEMENTS WITH KYIV WILL BE TIED TO AGREEMENTS WITH THE EU AND THE USA

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

Theoretically, the change of power in Ukraine could become the window of opportunity for the conflict resolution. Yet what attracts attention is that right after Volodymyr Zelenskyy's victory in the presidential election, Moscow makes a decision to start the simplified Russian passport issuing procedure for “DPR”/“LPR” residents, justifying it with humanitarian concerns. This cannot be explained in any other way than as the act of pressuring the new Ukrainian leadership. The new Ukrainian president is being sent a signal that Moscow is ready for new escalation in case his behaviour is unconstructive from the point of view of Russian leaders.

Keeping in mind that Mr. Zelenskyy does not have a strong team, that his ideas regarding conflict resolution are, apparently, not yet fully formed, that the West is pushing him (so far, not visibly) to change the approach, demonstrating its weariness of the Ukrainian crisis - Moscow is sending the new Ukrainian leadership a reminder that it holds the potential to escalate the situation.

The inexperienced president of Ukraine has to solve three major problems: resolution of the Donbas issue, internal reforms and preparation for parliamentary elections. Yet even Mr. Zelenskyy's appointments are being blocked by the current Verkhovna Rada.

Moscow is well aware of the subjective and objective complexity of president Zelenskyy's position and thus is not going to make any concessions regarding the situation in the Ukrainian South East.

Concessions are possible however in Moscow-Washington, Moscow-Brussels, Moscow-Berlin, Paris, etc. relations. The relative victory of right-wing populists (by 35 seats) in the European Parliament elections leaves Moscow hopeful about the possibility of the EU sanctions policy review. And although the state of Russia's economy is far from perfect, there is no protest potential in the country.



**Tatiana PARKHALINA,**  
Deputy Director  
of the Institute of  
Scientific Information on  
Social Sciences  
of the Russian Academy  
of Sciences

It is true, surveys show that Russian citizens started realising the connection between the current type of foreign policy and their own economic situation. But this is not enough for them to start pressuring the government to change its foreign policy regarding Ukraine and the West.

Through continued destabilisation of South-Eastern Ukraine, Moscow is achieving its main goal – preventing Ukraine’s NATO integration and maintaining negative influence on the situation in Eastern Europe in the context of its geopolitical confrontation with the West and the USA. Thus, the West is being sent a signal that post-Soviet space remains Russia’s “zone of special interest”, while the conflict in Ukraine is a demonstration of Euro-Atlantic allies’ limited capacity to act.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

I believe that in the next 2-3 years the following scenarios of the Russia-Ukraine relations are possible:

- **Scenario 1.** If in the framework of the Minsk format Ukraine consents to the execution of the Minsk Agreements in the order they are formulated, Russia will insist on federalisation and the special status of “DPR” and “LPR” regions, so that they can influence domestic and foreign policy decisions, and foremost, Ukraine’s neutral status and renunciation of NATO and EU integration. This would make military de-escalation in Donbas possible.
- **Scenario 2.** The so-called “natural gas diplomacy”. At the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum A. Miller speaking on behalf of Gazprom, offered Ukraine to start negotiations on direct natural gas supplies at 25% below the current cost. The offer was made in the presence of Yuriy Boyko and Viktor Medvedchuk. If an agreement is reached, Russia will attain economic leverage and will be able to influence the situation in Ukraine, while pro-Russian forces will get more votes in the parliamentary elections, which could ultimately lead to conflict de-escalation.

There is another aspect in this scenario. Prior to Russia-Europe negotiations on gas transit through Ukraine, the Russian government made a condition for Ukraine to “abandon the endless legal litigations” for a new contract with Kyiv to be made. Kyiv responded with promises of new legal proceedings. However, European gas buyers are not abandoning their attempts to nudge Moscow and

Kyiv towards compromise. It is planned to start a new round of gas negotiations between Russia, the EU and Ukraine on the transit of Russian gas to the European states. If a direct agreement is made on Russian gas supplies to Ukraine, the price of gas for Ukrainian consumers could go down 25% compared to the currently used reverse supplies from the EU.

Naftogaz assumed that the conditions of the special deal could include Naftogaz waiving Gazprom's debt, abandoning any legal litigations and non-application of European rules in the gas sector. This would mean additional revenues for Russia, and losses and almost complete dependence on Russia for Ukraine.

The European Commission proposed that parties sign a contract for over 10 years with such volumes of pumped gas that would be lucrative for investors to be invited for the modernisation of Ukrainian GTS. However, so far, Russia and Ukraine's actions do not show their readiness to negotiate a new transit deal, as there is no readiness to compromise. Ukraine is unlikely to discard its old claims, but if an agreement is reached, it may not file new ones. Maybe a provisional solution is possible that could influence the search for conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine.

- **Scenario 3.** Connected with the decision of the new Ukrainian government to lift the economic blockade used over the past years, namely: pension and social payments to “DPR”/“LPR” residents, opening Ukrainian banks, allowing transit of humanitarian shipments, etc. These actions could have positive consequences if Russia can ease the sanctions arrangements with the EU and the USA.
- **Scenario 4.** The Ukrainian government decides to continue fighting in Donbas and even intensify military action. With Russian passports distributed to representatives of different formations, Russia can use the activation of military action to “protect” Russian citizens in danger of extermination. In this case, conflict escalation is inevitable with unforeseen consequences like another “pocket” with Ukrainian army in need of rescue, resembling the situation after Ilovaysk and Debaltseve.
- **Scenario 5.** Russian leadership finds a political will to make agreements in order to stop the conflict. Responding to a question at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, the Russian president said that he is not opposed to meeting Volodymyr Zelenskyy if his Ukrainian colleague sends

corresponding signals, which are not there at the moment. But what will the conditions be? It is possible they will include a special status for Donbas and a number of economic preferences for Russian companies. But any agreements with Kyiv will be tied to agreements with the EU and the USA.

## ECONOMIC “WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY”

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

The search for political solutions to the existing interstate problems (including relations between Moscow and Kyiv) always factors into the economic situation of the contracting states, and their strengths and weaknesses are inevitably taken into account and used. “We are ready to negotiate with Russia, we are ready to implement the Minsk Agreements, but first and foremost, **we have to be able to protect ourselves and become stronger economically, politically and militarily**”, stated the Ukrainian president Zelenskyy in Germany.<sup>4</sup> In turn, addressing current and future economic issues implies not only competition, but also mutually beneficial cooperation with Russia as an important stage in building bilateral relations in a wider context.

In this respect, **the energy sector** is of particular importance. At the meeting with Germany’s Chancellor Angela Merkel, president Zelenskyy emphasised that “the continued transit of Russian gas through Ukraine, its accumulation in Ukrainian storage facilities is a guarantee of the energy security for both Ukraine and Europe”.<sup>5</sup> He has expressed confidence that after the current contract on the transit of Russian gas across Ukraine expires in 2020, the parties will reach new agreements. In turn, Ms. Merkel stated that the implementation of the Nord Stream-2 project and the continuation of the gas transit across Ukraine are closely linked.



Mikhail SUBBOTIN,  
Senior Researcher at  
the Primakov Institute of  
World Economy and  
International Relations of  
the Russian Academy  
of Sciences

<sup>4</sup> Statement of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the meeting with Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO, on 4 June 2019 in Brussels – *ed.*

<sup>5</sup> Statement of the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the joint briefing with Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, on 18 June 2019 – *ed.*

**The gas transit in Russia-Ukraine relations** has been a perpetual irritant for many years. The time until 31 December is running out. Apparently, neither Nord Stream-2 nor TurkStream will be fully operational by that time, so Russian and Ukrainian business partners will have to negotiate.

For the time being, the parties only embark on such talks and instead engage in “tug-of-war” games, occasionally scaring the European consumers with the threat of a new gas crisis. The Europeans become nervous, although the situation does not look too dramatic due to low European gas prices. In the meantime, all those involved are well aware of the fact that another transit crisis can deal a heavy blow not only to the relations between the two nations, but also to the gas market positions in Europe.

And these positions are far from unconditional. In its most recent *Gas 2019* forecast, the International Energy Agency states that **the gas markets currently undergo a series of profound changes**. Demand for natural gas jumped by 4.8% in 2018, accounting for nearly half of overall demand growth, which is set to be driven by Asia Pacific, forecast to account for almost 60% of the total consumption increase by 2024. China and India will emerge as major liquified natural gas (LNG) buyers along with increasing imports to Europe.

**LNG is an alternative to both Russian pipeline gas and Ukrainian transit.** The total capacity of all European LNG terminals is 200 billion cu m, with more to be built. The European countries are more or less trying to cover their needs by importing LNG from Norway, the United States and the Persian Gulf countries, but apart from Qatar, the trio of major LNG suppliers that are expected to “rule the world” are the United States, Australia and Russia. **Problems with exports of Russian gas automatically entail restrictions of its transit to Europe.** At the same time, Australia and the United States are expected to bypass Qatar in gas volume already by 2022 and 2024, respectively. The shale revolution in America marked a totally new stage for the country, whose gas policy is largely limited to advancing its own LNG.

**Renewables** demonstrate rapid development. Quite indicative is China’s example, where the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC) has already decided to lower feed-in tariffs for onshore windfarms in July 2019 and 2020 and to cancel such tariffs altogether for the similar projects starting from 1 January 2021 – the expected date of grid parity. Last year, similar measures were undertaken for solar energy. Therefore, China consistently reduces subsidies for renewables, as these projects become increasingly more competitive and



can “stand up for themselves” and develop without the government support.

Readiness of the EU countries to tighten their long-term **climate goals** may inflict another blow to the gas transit across Ukraine. Even though it was originally planned to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 80% by 2050, most EU countries, including Germany and France, are

now favouring the idea of reaching climate neutrality (zero GHG emissions) by 2050. This goal was endorsed earlier by the UK government.

Of course, one should distinguish between short- and long-term goals. The Oxford Institute for Energy Studies has recently released a study on the prospects of gas demand across all industries under the decarbonization policy. The authors note that about 43% of the industrial gas demand in low-temperature applications can be quite easily displaced by renewables and heat pumps in the coming decade. Conversely, high-temperature heat processes and gas used as a raw material are more complicated to decarbonize as it would necessitate dramatic investment and innovations, so the impact of these processes on gas demand are likely to be felt only in the 2030-2040s.

As long as *Gazprom* responds to all challenges by increasing investment in European projects, Ukraine does have a bargaining chip, but what if pipeline gas from Russia to Europe loses the competition to renewables and LNG? This is the basis for developing a joint Russian-Ukrainian strategy of action...

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

In his interview to the German paper *Bild*, Volodymyr Zelenskyy stated that Ukraine’s priorities are to develop good relations with the IMF, as well as the EU integration and NATO membership. He also emphasised that “our economic priorities are the establishment of the rule of law, currency liberalisation and privatisation, land reform, tax administration and coping management, reducing the administrative burden on business and creating incentives for small and medium businesses”.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See: <https://www.bild.de/politik/international/bild-international/interview-with-ukraine-president-zelensky-i-will-tell-putin-crimea-is-ukraine-62694806.bild.html>.

This selection of priorities is not accidental, as **Ukraine is ranked 83<sup>rd</sup> among 140 economies** in the World Economic Forum's **Global Competitiveness Index 2018**, falling behind the Russian Federation (43<sup>rd</sup>), Kazakhstan (59<sup>th</sup>), Georgia (66<sup>th</sup>), Azerbaijan (69<sup>th</sup>), Armenia (70<sup>th</sup>), and surpassing only Moldova (88<sup>th</sup>), Kyrgyz Republic (97<sup>th</sup>) and Tajikistan (102<sup>nd</sup>). Major problems are linked to:

- **Institutions (ranked 110<sup>th</sup>)**, due to high level of crime and terrorism incidence, poor judicial independence, inefficient legal framework, high burden of government regulations, lack of transparency of government decisions, high incidence of corruption, poor protection of property rights, etc.;
- **Macroeconomic stability (131<sup>st</sup>)**, high inflation and debt dynamics;
- **Financial system (117<sup>th</sup>)**, which has been significantly disrupted by the banking sector crisis of 2014-2017. Ukraine is sixth-worst among 140 countries by the soundness of banks.

During his visit to Germany, president Zelenskyy claimed that Ukraine was already working on **a development project for Donbas**, "and Europe can help us here". In fact, this could be an even bigger international project, and not only in terms of costs necessary for the region's economic recovery, but also in terms of experience of overcoming the consequences of "hybrid wars" and thawing of "frozen" conflicts that are already plentiful around the world.

At the same time, proper treatment requires accurate diagnosis, that is, the ability to see the problem in its entirety, to understand its complicated structure and to be able to split it into smaller components. Nowadays they talk a lot about oil and gas wars and their political or even geopolitical nature. However, the history of the Nord Stream-2 project points to at least three main elements:

**1. Politics** (it is primarily about the sanctions regime and its root causes). In the case of hydrocarbons, it was Russia that initially introduced sanctions against foreign companies in 2007 in the form of the law on so-called "strategic industries" and amendments to the legislation on the continental shelf, while all sanctions after 2014 were, in fact, counter-sanctions... Over the past six years the United States imposed many sanctions against Russia. In March 2014, the first anti-Russian sanctions were linked to the annexation of Crimea, and

a number of sanction initiatives have emerged in the past few months for many different reasons;

**2. Monopoly** (the EU is building a system of legislative and enforcement practices – universal, yet quite pragmatic approaches that take into account changing economic conditions). Back in 1878 *Standard Oil* responded to the decision on the construction of the Riverside Pipeline (which could destroy John F. Rockefeller's monopoly) by building four pipelines of its own. Four! Bypassing and in parallel to the Riverside Pipeline! And no politics...;

**3. Corruption and ineffective corporate decisions** (anti-corruption and anti-kleptocratic legislation is being rapidly introduced around the world). In May 2018 *Sberbank CIB* was in the midst of high-profile scandal after firing the analyst Alexander Fak, who criticised *Gazprom* management for ineffective decisions and predicted the company's huge losses due to the construction of gas pipelines Power of Siberia (to China), as well as Nord Stream-2 and TurkStream.

In October 2016, Alexander Branis, the director of *Prosperity Capital Management* (a minority shareholder in *Gazprom*) addressed Vladimir Putin at the VTB Capital forum: “We sometimes get the impression that the company works not for its shareholders, not for the consumers or for the state, but for the subcontractors, who build various facilities for them”. At that time Mr. Putin acknowledged that this was a “very serious matter” and promised to meet the representatives of the largest companies with state participation and then “assess the effectiveness of these companies”. Earlier, the *Vedomosti* paper (29 July 2015) wrote that *Gazprom* could have spent on unclaimed projects at least 2.4 trillion roubles, which at that time was roughly equal to the capitalisation of *Rosneft*.

It is clear that business risks in the oil and gas sector are high, and when decisions were made to increase production, it was hard to predict the simultaneous effect of new factors, including updated European market regulations, the emergence of new suppliers, the shale revolution in the United States, the progress of renewables, the competition with independent producers in Russia and the aggravation of the political situation in the world. And today the future is just as unpredictable...

At the same time, Russia needs to sell its product to Europe, but relations with the transit countries – Belarus, Ukraine, Turkey – are consistently

challenging... This is a subject for serious analysis and an incentive to build relations based on new principles. However, this also applies to more general issues such as Europe's energy security or lifting of anti-Russian sanctions, which are directly linked to normalisation of relations between Russia and Ukraine.

The Ukrainian economy has not been in its best shape recently. But over the past decade, Russia has been growing at less than 1% of GDP annually... Politics took a heavy toll on the economy, but this will not last forever.

### THE “WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY” DOES EXIST, YET NEITHER PARTY IS JUMPING AT THE CHANCE

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

Change of government in any country usually creates “opportunity windows” for changes both in a country’s national and foreign policy, given that there is demand for such changes in the society and in the political establishment (elite). The process is not automatic, though, and the opening “windows” are not always used efficiently. In order to be fully used, these opportunities most often require action by the new government, the ability and commitment to agree to some compromises that are unpopular among political elites, and, also, which is a major factor, the readiness of foreign counterparts to accept the proposed compromises.

It seems that there is a “window of opportunity” in Russia-Ukraine relations after the presidential election in Ukraine. Yet neither party is jumping at the chance. President Zelenskyy has yet to establish his standing in the country’s political arena and prove his ability to act in the situation when “old powers” can undermine his decisions, creating difficulties in their implementation or just blatantly continuing their previous act.

The new president’s ability to carry out his policy, which is apparently still under development, will largely depend on the Verkhovna Rada’s support.



**Andrei ZAGORSKII,**  
Head of the Disarmament  
and Conflict Settlement  
Department  
at Primakov Institute of  
World Economy and  
International Relations,  
Russian Academy of Sciences

The forthcoming parliamentary elections will add some clarity. As his predecessors, president Zelenskyy prefers international negotiations as a method of resolving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine to a direct dialogue with Moscow. This is not helping open new “windows of opportunity” in Russia-Ukraine relations.

Moscow is waiting. So far, it does not understand either president Zelenskyy or who to talk to, who will be able to implement joint decisions, in case parties arrive at them. Before Ukraine’s political arena is fully formed after the parliamentary elections, president Putin is unlikely to make a decision regarding these issues and will probably not speed up any high-level meetings in the Normandy format, as he will wait to see what political signals will come from Kyiv.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

In the coming months, the most likely scenario is the conservation of the *status quo* of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Later on, I would not write off the possibility of local escalation as a response to Kyiv’s actions that Moscow deems unfriendly. At the same time, Moscow is hardly interested in a major escalation of the situation in Eastern Ukraine, although there are supporters of this course of events in Russia, and probably in Ukraine as well.

In this situation, we can hardly expect any breakthrough solutions regarding the conflict in Ukraine in the near future. The parties could, however, make some use of the window of opportunity that is still open in order to minimise the possibility of dangerous incidents, strengthen control over the situation in the conflict zone, make it more manageable and restore and strengthen bilateral communications.

## POSITIONS OF GERMAN EXPERTS

### NO SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN RESOLVING THE CONFLICT IS EXPECTED SO FAR

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

When it became clear, in spring 2019, that Ukraine's leadership would soon fundamentally change, this gave reason for hope that the Donbas conflict may get closer to a solution. Not only has Ukraine since gotten a new and less demonstratively nationalist president Petro Poroshenko who by the end of his turn – much like former Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko had done ten years earlier – turned to the right. It became also clear that parliament and government would also change radically. As it looks now, Ukraine will soon reconstitute itself with a largely rejuvenated, less ardently anti-Moscow, and more cosmopolitan political elite.

The expectation, to be sure, was not so much that Ukraine will principally change its position and course vis-à-vis Russia. Given the clear fronts and iron logic of the Donbas conflict, there is little what Volodymyr Zelenskyy can, in substance, do differently from Petro Poroshenko. In spite of the Kremlin's wishes, Zelenskyy can neither give away Ukrainian territory nor sacrifice Ukrainian sovereignty in Donbas and Crimea, as a mean to achieve peace with Russia.

The issue of decentralization raised in the February 2015 Minsk Agreements, as a, sometimes, presumed solution to the Donbas problem, is also a non-starter. Since April 2014, Kyiv has been conducting a far-reaching all-Ukrainian decentralization independently from the conflict of Donbas, and unrelated to the negotiations with Moscow. This ongoing devolution of power from the center to municipalities, however, has not helped Poroshenko to solve the Donbas conflict, nor will it help Zelenskyy in his attempts to do so.



**Andreas UMLAND,**  
Senior Fellow, Institute  
for Euro-Atlantic  
Cooperation in Kyiv

In general, there is little that Zelenskyy can come up with to help solving the Donbas conflict. Rather the hope was that Putin may take advantage of the more Russia-friendly image of post-electoral Ukraine in order to justify, to his various domestic audiences, a less confrontational approach vis-à-vis Kyiv. Such an expectation was built on the assumption that the EU’s sanctions may have done their job. Moscow, such was the assumption, would be seeking a reset of Russian-Western relations, via solution of the Donbas conflict, less out of sympathy for Ukrainian sovereignty or concern for European stability.

Rather, one hoped that the Kremlin would become more accommodative, out of long-term self-interest – namely, in view of its need for the EU as a foreign investor, modernization collaborator, and trading partner for Russia. With a Russian-speaking new president in Ukraine, such was the supposition, this would be easier to do than with the loudly anti-Putinist Poroshenko. The former Ukrainian president’s rhetoric had ever more hardened over the five years of his presidency. Poroshenko’s reputation among Russians has been thoroughly damaged by relentless defamation in Kremlin-controlled mass media. Zelenskyy, in contrast, is a well-known and sympathetic entity not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia where the former showman and actor has performed in numerous Russian popular television programs and cinema movies.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

The seemingly encouraging new circumstances after Ukraine’s presidential elections notwithstanding, there is no substantive progress in sight so far. On the contrary, Moscow announced, shortly after Zelenskyy won with a spectacular margin, a significant easing of rules, for the Donbas’s Ukrainian population, to obtain Russian citizenship. This implicitly irredentist strategy had already, with regard to Moscow’s approach to the Russia-controlled territories of Georgia, become known under the label of “passportization.” The Kremlin’s sharp and demonstrative policy change, during the election period, is not only an affront to Ukraine and its new president. It also undermines the logic of the agreed upon plan of returning the currently occupied territories under Kyiv control, as outlined in the Minsk Agreements of 2014 and 2015.

A new situation in which a large part of the Ukrainian Donbas’s population will have become Russian citizens needs to be seen, moreover, within

the context of Moscow's immoderate public foreign policy doctrine. Various official Russian documents explicitly allow and even prescribe Moscow's active "protection" of its citizens abroad. Russia's unapologetic approach to furthering the supposed interest of its foreign "compatriots" will also apply, in full, to the newly minted Russian citizens in Ukraine. It would thus – even in the best-case scenario of a successful implementation of the Minsk Agreements – remain unclear whether the Kremlin will actually let the currently occupied East Ukrainian territories go, if many of their inhabitants are Russian citizens. That such a far-reaching modification of the status quo occurred when it was already clear that Poroshenko and his government will soon be gone does not bode well for the future of conflict-solution in Eastern Ukraine.

### THERE IS A "WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY" IN UKRAINE ITSELF

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a "window of opportunity" for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

At this point it looks most like a continuation of the *status quo*, primarily because the Russian side has not altered its major goals. While it would like to expend fewer resources on the occupied parts of Donbas, the Russian leadership is still willing to keep supporting the so-called separatists in order to keep being able to destabilize Ukraine from within. It can also be assumed that the Russian elite would not like to create a situation which could present the new Ukrainian president in a positive light. Rather, they want to preserve the possibility of demonizing the Ukrainian leadership as they did with Poroshenko, in case that should serve their aims in the future.

So while the Russian side is still sizing up Zelenskyy and is also waiting to see the results of the early parliamentary elections in Ukraine, it is nonetheless not likely to change its approach radically any time soon. And without a willingness to change on the Russian side, it appears highly improbable that any major improvements in the situation can occur.



Susan STEWART,  
Deputy Head of Eastern Europe  
and Eurasia Research Division,  
German Institute  
for International and Security  
Affairs, SWP

Where there is a window of opportunity in Ukraine itself. Judging from Zelenskyy's rhetoric during the election campaign and since becoming president, he sees the population of the occupied areas differently from Poroshenko. It would be very important to continue sending the message Zelenskyy began with, that the people in those areas are citizens of Ukraine, that the Ukrainian state is concerned about their welfare, and that measures will be taken to try to improve certain aspects of their lives.

This message could be reinforced by strengthening the opportunities for Ukrainian media to broadcast to the occupied territories. Also, efforts within the subgroups of the Trilateral contact group in Minsk should be increased in order to make incremental change in some areas possible, such as the number and state of checkpoints, the infrastructure serving both the controlled and the non-controlled areas, and the bureaucracy involved in obtaining Ukrainian documents and pensions. As Jana Kobzova<sup>1</sup> has called for, one-stop administrative centres could be set up on the Ukrainian-controlled side of the contact line for those crossing over from the occupied areas to deal with bureaucratic issues. Finally, the ongoing attempts to organize further prisoner exchanges should be continued.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

This depends on a number of factors. If Russia continues to issue passports to an increasing number of people in the so-called people's republics, then there may be significant emigration from those areas to Russia for work and study, leaving an even smaller and more vulnerable population behind. If the socioeconomic situation there becomes untenable and the Ukrainian side manages to reach the population with its messages of support and to implement humanitarian measures, then the attitude of the population in those areas may become more positive towards Kyiv and more critical of the so-called separatist leaders.

Also, it will be important to see which types of positions are represented in the new Ukrainian parliament. They may be more conciliatory with regard to Donbas than the 2014-2019 parliament. It is also possible that there will be a significant number of more or less pro-Russian forces in the Verkhovna Rada, and that their influence in politics and society will increase somewhat. Finally, it seems likely that the current trend in the population, which is toward an ever stronger desire for peace, and which was encouraged by Zelenskyy's campaign

---

<sup>2</sup> Jana Kobzova Zelenskiy in Donbas, 11<sup>th</sup> June, 2019, [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_zelenskiy\\_in\\_donbas](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_zelenskiy_in_donbas).

rhetoric, will continue, and that the high expectations raised in this area will lead to a correspondingly high level of disappointment assuming that no significant progress on the peace agenda is made.

These developments and trends are partly complementary and partly contradictory, so it is difficult to draw conclusions from them. Combined with the above analysis of the Russian agenda, it would seem likely that the demand for some kind of arrangement between Ukraine and Russia will increase, and that there will be a danger of pressure from some segments of Ukrainian politics and society to accept certain Russian conditions which could be harmful for Ukraine in the medium to long term.

Such a development would no doubt provoke a strong backlash among those forces in Ukraine which are against any kind of arrangement with Russia, and that in turn could negatively affect societal cohesion. In this situation the willingness of the EU and NATO to offer Ukraine a concrete perspective of integration into Western structures (whether on the basis of membership or in a different format) could become a decisive factor in determining key choices made by Ukrainian politicians and society. The degree of support the EU and NATO are willing to provide to Ukraine in the short term, in particular regarding Ukraine's relationship with Russia, will no doubt also affect these choices.

### **THE CONFLICT WILL SIMMER, OCCASIONALLY DISTURBING THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*



**Dr. Eckart D. STRATENSCHULTE,**  
The German National Foundation,  
Hamburg

Yes and no. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine cannot be resolved by the efforts of these two countries unless Ukraine abandons its European integration ambitions and joins the Eurasian Economic Union. And the likelihood of such a U-turn is extremely small. Donetsk and Luhansk are no goals of Russian policy – rather they are means for the Russian Federation to stay in the game.



There are several possibilities for settling the conflict.

1. The West provides military support (troops) to Ukraine, helping it to win back the occupied territories and Crimea from Russia. Nobody will ever go for it, even if this involves the participation of the entire NATO alliance, including the United States.

2. Through sanctions, the West raises the cost of the conflict for Russia so high that the continuation of open and hidden aggression becomes meaningless. This is the current path of the Western policy. Its correctness,

however, becomes increasingly more dubious. The question of how long the EU (and Germany) will be able to adhere to this policy remains open. Perhaps Mr. Putin should simply be a little more patient.

3. The West offers Russia something different that will significantly outweigh the value of keeping Ukraine within its sphere of influence. Today it is hard to say what this could be. First and foremost, one can think of some economic incentives, e.g. redirection of sanctions. In other words, Russia pays nothing for intervention, but receives something for withdrawal. The price of such a withdrawal should be so high that Russia cannot resist the offer, while Mr. Putin gets an opportunity to significantly improve his authority among the population.

But all this does not apply to the new president of Ukraine. He will be of interest for Russia only if he allows it to change its policy without losing face, like “it was impossible to negotiate with Poroshenko, but now...”.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

Most likely, nothing extraordinary will happen, and the conflict will simmer, occasionally disturbing the international community (and claiming human lives almost every day). Russia and Ukraine will live in a “frozen conflict”, which in reality is quite “hot”.

## OVERALL RUSSIA-UKRAINE RELATIONS WILL REMAIN TENSE

*– Does the change of power in Ukraine mean a “window of opportunity” for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, maintaining the status quo, or expecting a new round of escalation? Can one anticipate compromises on the part of Moscow?*

On the one hand, the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as Ukraine's president may turn out to be a window of opportunity if the president focuses his policy on containing hostilities along the contact line, gradual ceasefire achieving and stabilisation of the situation, as well as gradual implementation of the certain initiatives for removing economic barriers between the occupied and Kyiv-controlled Donbas territories, without undermining Ukraine's security or threatening the country's sovereignty. If Russia chooses to block the security-related and political decisions (counterproductively to Ukraine's humanitarian initiatives), its policy will only contribute to strengthening of Ukraine's diplomatic stance, as it will destroy the Russian propaganda message promoted both in Russia and in the occupied territories that Ukraine “represses” its Russian-speaking population after the Revolution of Dignity.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy has received significant support of the Eastern and Southern Ukraine constituents. Also, in the course of his campaign, he stated that should he be elected, Kyiv will treat people in the occupied territories as full-fledged Ukrainian citizens – regardless of their political preferences and a number of proposals will be made to them. He also said citizens in the occupied territories should get their pension payments. However, both the new president and his team need to clearly understand that the devil is in the details. And even small missteps or rash decisions in the implementation of the promised measures (e.g. lifting of economic barriers between the occupied territories and Kyiv-controlled oblasts) may cause security and internal policy risks.

On the other hand, without a political settlement, i.e. without the return of the occupied territories to sovereign Ukraine (as stated in the Minsk Agreements) and without Kyiv regaining control of its borders, achievement of the stable peace in the near future is unlikely. It will be impossible to achieve progress on important issues besides ceasefire without Moscow's political will and its



**Wilfried YLGE,**  
Expert at  
the Robert Bosch Centre  
for Central and Eastern Europe,  
Russia and Central Asia

constructive influence on the separatists. Whether Russia is interested in the full execution of the Minsk Agreements, which means returning the territories to Ukraine, remains unclear.

The current situation is advantageous to the Kremlin. It creates all the necessary conditions to continue its destabilisation efforts. Moscow does not need Donbas to become a part of Russia, it simply wishes to control it, using as leverage to influence Ukraine’s policy. So until Kyiv agrees to give the occupied territories a broad autonomy, Moscow will control them, maintain its presence there, supporting separatists and controlling the Russia-Ukraine border in the East of Ukraine. Until Kyiv agrees to major concessions, targeted escalation and aggression, like the Azov Sea incident or Russian passports issuance, will be used to expand the conflict and curb any constructive developments of the Minsk process.

Obviously, the conflict development after the change of government is hard to predict. Progress in certain humanitarian issues and ceasefire may be followed by Moscow’s actions aimed at the permanent escalation in other areas.

The Kremlin has three main goals regarding Ukraine. **First**, it is showing the new president that **Moscow is ready to talk to Kyiv only from the position of strength**, and also that Moscow is not going to make any concessions for peaceful regulation of the situation. On the contrary – it is expecting concessions from Kyiv. However, this does not eliminate the possibility of small compromises in the framework of the Minsk negotiations (e.g. the recent disengagement of troops in Stanitsa Luganskaya), especially regarding humanitarian aspects, which Moscow will have a hard time refusing to implement.

Along with issuance Russian passports to Ukrainian citizens, Putin has sent another two strong signals to Ukraine. Between the two rounds of the presidential elections in Ukraine, the Russian government approved the order to terminate oil and petroleum products exports to Ukraine, covering 40% of the Ukraine’s consumption. Also, at the end of April, Putin said that should Russia terminate its natural gas transit, Ukraine may find itself completely cut off from gas supply. Thus, he made it clear that prolongation of the contract for Russian natural gas supply (which will terminate at the end of 2019) may cause an intensification of tensions between Russia and Ukraine.

**Second**, the abovementioned signals show that **the Kremlin will continue implementing its “Russian World” policy**, by which the annexation of Crimea and Donbas aggression were justified. The passport issuance (in Donbas) is the extension of the “taking care of fellow countrymen” policy, which is a part of the “Russian World” concept. According to the respective Russian law,

the Kremlin acts as the defender of its (Russian-speaking) “compatriots” in the former Soviet Union states. The law allows to interfere with these sovereign states’ policy, if “the fellow countrymen’s” rights are about to allegedly be impaired. This especially goes for “fellow countrymen” with Russian passports. In 2008, Russia sent its troops to Georgia to protect Russian citizens, having issued Russian passports in rebellion-prone regions in advance.

Thus, the law on passports issuance is the act of aggression that violates the law of Ukraine (On Prohibition of Dual Citizenship) and thus goes against Ukraine’s sovereignty and the Minsk Agreements. At the same time, this order stresses Moscow’s stand regarding Kyiv: Ukraine is a second class sovereign state, and Ukrainians – a deficient nation. In the context of the passport issuance debate, Putin restated the message voiced in 2014 for the first time: Ukrainians and Russians are essentially “one and the same people”. This idea is meant to justify the main goal of the “Russian World” – to keep Ukraine within Russia’s zone of influence and prevent its movement towards European and Trans-Atlantic integration.

**Third**, the goal of Putin’s policy is to **strengthen Russian influence on Ukraine’s domestic policy**. This goal is achieved, among other things, by the support of pro-Russian political parties in Ukraine. The most pro-Russian party in Ukraine at the moment is the “Opposition Platform – For Life” created in December 2018. It is led by Viktor Medvedchuk, who is close to Putin. This party also includes politicians and oligarchs that used to be key actors during the rule of Yanukovych. According to polls, election results can turn out at 10-11% for the platform, and 12-15% for pro-Russian parties in total.

“Opposition Platform’s” position regarding Donbas is identical to the Kremlin’s demands: full autonomy for the occupied Donbas territories, which goes beyond the “special status” agreed upon in the Minsk format, Ukraine’s direct negotiations with “people’s republics”, as well as “Ukraine-“DPR”-“LPR” negotiations, which will devalue the Normandy format and weaken Western partners’ positions (France and Germany) and thus – Ukraine’s position as well, complete renewal of economic relations with Russia.

Putin and politicians with close ties to the Kremlin spoke in favour of this “Medvedchuk plan” during the presidential election campaign, as the Kremlin promised to revise the natural gas price for Ukraine in case of its adoption. At the same time, with his “passportization” policy, Putin made the new Russian-speaking president of Ukraine to speak from a position of strength. Therefore, Zelenskyy’s rhetoric is getting similar to that of Petro Poroshenko. This can cost him the votes of Eastern Ukraine constituents, who are longing for peace.

If Zelenskyy is unable to fulfil his election promises, his supporters in the Eastern and Southern Ukraine may turn away from him refocusing on the “peace party” – “Opposition Platform – For Life” – in the local 2020 elections.

The strengthening of the “Opposition Platform” position does not necessarily mean the “anti-Western” pro-Russian revenge. However, a strong opposition block or a stronger position of pro-Russian forces may delay the pro-European reforms and their full legitimization in the Eastern regions.

*– What is the most likely scenario of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the short term (one-two years)? How will the situation in Donbas develop over this period?*

Given the abovementioned goals of the Russian government regarding Ukraine, the radical progress in political resolution of the conflict is not to be expected. Moscow will not be ready to seriously discuss the main controversial issues before the end of the Ukraine’s electoral campaign and formation of the new Ukrainian government. Besides, the Kremlin is waiting to see what influence opportunities will emerge as a result of reorganisation of pro-Russian forces. Due to the decentralisation reform local elections in the spring of 2020 will have more impact than before. Thus, Moscow may be interested to further exploit the conflict in the East of Ukraine to strengthen pro-Russian parties. Overall, Russia-Ukraine relations will remain tense also due to the upcoming complicated negotiations on the new natural gas contract. So, the situation in the East of Ukraine will remain rather unstable.

Russia might change its policy (towards Donbas) in the future if the resolution of Russia’s domestic economic problems becomes urgent and already present dissatisfaction of Russian citizens with their leadership increases.

However, at the moment Russia does not feel the need to change its stance towards Ukraine because of the Western partners’ position. Germany continues to support the completion of the Nord Stream-2 Project. There were no firm statements from the European partners of Ukraine either on passport issuance problem or on the escalation in the Black Sea. Besides, most European countries including Germany and France supported Russia’s return to PACE, with no additional demands for Moscow to fulfil any conditions or make any concessions, despite its continuing aggressive policy. Thus, at the moment, there is hardly any reason to believe that the Russian government will make any substantial changes in its policy regarding Ukraine.

# CONFLICT IN EASTERN UKRAINE: POST-2019 ELECTIONS PROSPECTS

**Vladislav INOZEMTSEV,**  
*Doctor of Economic Sciences,  
Director of the Centre for Post-Industrial Studies  
(Moscow, Russia)*



*In the spring of 2019, against the backdrop of Ukraine's unfolding presidential campaign, the bloody conflict instigated by Russia in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts marked its fifth year. Despite the incredible amount of agreements and peace talks, no resolution has been reached – I would even say that the situation has reached its ultimate stabilisation point and moved into a phase that can linger as it is for years. This scenario, as I mentioned before,<sup>1</sup> has been was easily discernible since the Minsk Agreements, which no party intended to honour.*

The two election campaigns in Ukraine in 2019 were viewed both by the conflicting parties and outside observers as a crucial factor that could change the course of events (at any rate, nothing more significant is expected to happen before 2024). At the moment, based on the results of the presidential election, and with snap parliamentary election results not too hard to foretell, first predictions about further progression of events can already be made. I am making these on the grounds that the issues in Donbas stem from the underlying conflict between Kyiv and Moscow, and that “the people’s republics” formed on its territory are not independent entities.

Over the last year, Moscow was demonstrating a tough stance on its relations with Ukraine, with Donbas being the bargaining chip (and a potential “prize”).

<sup>1</sup> See: Inozemtsev V. Conflict in Eastern Ukraine: Are There Hopes for Coordinated Effort? – The Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Prospects and Parameters of a UN Peacekeeping Mission in Donbas, The Razumkov Centre, 2018, p.88-94.

The Kremlin had no problem dealing with the challenge of Ukrainian navy vessels sailing through the Kerch Strait and even ignored international court rulings.<sup>2</sup> It severed contacts with the previous Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko,<sup>3</sup> introduced several stages of new economic sanctions against Ukraine,<sup>4</sup> pointedly supported nonwinning and separatist candidates in the presidential election,<sup>5</sup> and in April 2019 started issuing Russian passports in Donbas.<sup>6</sup> It is obvious that Moscow keeps insisting on “honouring the Minsk Agreements” in view of their catastrophic consequences for Kyiv. Vladimir Putin demonstrates that he is prepared to wait, as even though now the issue of Ukraine sparks much less interest in Russia than before, it remains vital in the overall context of the government’s anti-Western course and creating the “besieged fortress” sentiment in regular Russian citizens. Despite the belief of many Ukrainian analysts, Russia’s expenditure on Crimea and economic assistance to Donbas does not have a major effect on the economic situation in the country (we often hear about an annual of \$6 billion spent to support “people’s republics”,<sup>7</sup> yet this number seems quite overestimated). The latest, rather indifferent attitude of Russian citizens towards events related to Ukraine and Donbas allows the Kremlin to stall the resolution of corresponding issues without any negative consequences for its political course.

By contrast, in Ukraine these topics are critically important and were at the forefront during the election campaign, because while the Crimea issue has moved to the periphery of the public eye, no politician can ignore the ongoing conflict in Donbas. In my opinion, Petro Poroshenko’s defeat should not be interpreted as the failure of forces supporting a tough opposition against Russia (as is often portrayed in Moscow<sup>8</sup>): pro-Russian candidates have had a total of below 16% of votes.<sup>9</sup> Voters rejected the previous leader due to his inefficient decision-making in many internal areas and due to his alleged corrupt activities – yet no one authorised the new president to capitulate to Moscow. Thus, Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s first statements – on having a plan to reclaim Crimea,<sup>10</sup> on the inalterability

---

<sup>2</sup> The Kerch Incident: Trial by Court Martial for Russia. – Gazeta.ru, 25 May 2019, <https://www.gazeta.ru>.

<sup>3</sup> Komarov A. Putin Officially Severed Contacts with Poroshenko. – Dni.ru, 3 December 2018, <https://dni.ru>.

<sup>4</sup> Chunova A., Petlevoi V., Bocharova S. Medvedev Introduced New Sanctions Against Ukraine on the Eve of Elections. – Vedomosti, 18 April 2019, <https://www.vedomosti.ru>.

<sup>5</sup> Medvedev Met With Ukrainian Politicians Medvedchuk and Boiko. – RIA News, 23 March 2019, <https://ria.ru>.

<sup>6</sup> Dergachev V., Khimshiashvili P. Donbas Embarked on the Trans-Dniester Path. – RBC-Ukraine, 15 April 2019, <https://www.rbc.ru>.

<sup>7</sup> Kremlin BezBashennik (lost-turret-man, i.e. crazy). – Telegram, <https://t.me/kremlebezBashennik/7546>.

<sup>8</sup> Lenin A. Poroshenko’s Defeat in the Elections Due to Anti-Russian Policy. – Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 25 April 2019, <https://rg.ru>.

<sup>9</sup> 2019 Presidential Election Results. – Channel 24, [https://24tv.ua/ru/rezultaty\\_viborov\\_tag3412](https://24tv.ua/ru/rezultaty_viborov_tag3412).

<sup>10</sup> Misnik L. “There Will Be a Strategy”: How Zelenskyy Will Reclaim Crimea. – Gazeta.ru, 4 June 2019.

of Ukraine's EU integration course,<sup>11</sup> on advancing to NATO membership,<sup>12</sup> together with sharp remarks on Russia's involvement in the conflict<sup>13</sup> – give reason to believe that Kyiv is not going to make any serious concessions to Moscow. What seems to be the most realistic scenario in this situation?

I think that in the near future the Kremlin intends to somewhat raise the stakes in its Donbas play. Following the issuance of Russian passports Moscow will likely start probing for the possibility of recognising "DPR" and "LPR" as independent states. This step seems very logical at the moment – as a result the Kremlin will send Kyiv a message that it should not delay resolving the situation if Ukraine does not want to lose control over the occupied territories completely, formal recognition of the new "states" by only Russia will not change their international status, but it will support Moscow's claim that the Minsk negotiations are taking place between Ukraine and the new independent states instead of between Ukraine and Russia. Repetition of the Crimea scenario does not seem likely, Russia needs a puppet regime in Donbas, the expansion of the "Russian World" through distributing its citizenship and even new independent states – yet it is not going to take on the entire region and support it, as well as provoke additional sanctions of the international community (regarding the current sanctions, I think they will not be toughened without serious military [not even political] provocations by Moscow).

At the moment, Donbas has two assets of value for Moscow. On the one hand, the unresolved situation allows Russia to blackmail the Ukrainian government, which cannot give up its claim to this territory, the Kremlin hopes to "give Donbas back" to Ukraine on its own conditions, having "federalised"<sup>14</sup> the country and shuffling off the burden of restoring the region's destroyed economy on Ukraine's budget. On the other hand, in its present state Donbas is an economic "black hole" that brings enormous dividends to those using it as a "customs window", which allows huge volumes of smuggled goods to pass through. In 2017, Russia has purchased over \$1 billion's worth of products in these territories;<sup>15</sup> "people's republics" also act as intermediaries for continued trade with Ukraine. I would even say that both the status of these formations unrecognised by Russia and the proclaimed (but not really observed) by the Ukrainian blockade regime are

---

<sup>11</sup> In Brussels Zelenskyy Confirmed the Inalterability of Ukraine's EU Course. – RBC-Ukraine, 4 June 2019.

<sup>12</sup> NATO Course Remains Inalterable: Zelenskyy's Remarks After Stoltenberg Meeting. – Channel 5, 4 June 2019, <https://www.5.ua>.

<sup>13</sup> Zelenskyy Publicly Called Russia the Aggressor. – TSN, 23 May 2019, <https://ru.tsn.ua>.

<sup>14</sup> Petrov V. Federalism: Medicine, Not a Disease (Chairman of the Federation Council Valentina Matviienko on federalisation as the best possible option of Ukraine's development). – Gazeta.ru, 6 May 2014.

<sup>15</sup> Kushch A. Deceitful Statistics. How "DPR" Almost Legalised Metal Supply to Russia. – Delovaya Stolitsa, 10 June 2019, <http://www.dsnews.ua>.

helping to criminalise economic life in these territories, which greatly profits Russian and Ukrainian entrepreneurs close to both countries' leadership.

I think that both these facts will likely drive Moscow to preserve the *status quo* for as long as possible. There are no obvious political solutions to the Donbas problem except for Ukraine's readiness to "go federal" and pay for the restoration of these territories under their current leadership. There is also no military solution so far. If president Zelenskyy is planning to "shake the situation loose" in any way, the best decision would be to lift the blockade introduced in 2017<sup>16</sup> between Ukraine and the occupied parts of Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, attempting to incorporate these territories into Ukraine's economic space (which would be lucrative for many Ukrainian businesses). The most important task then would be to legalise the flow of goods and money, strengthen contacts and connections between different parts of Ukraine, and decriminalise a part of Donbas business. Note that this would not require the "people's republics" to sever their economic ties to Russia, remember how in the 2010s, Moscow used to direct over 1.5 bn cu m of natural gas per year to Trans-Dniester consumers<sup>17</sup> despite their accumulated debt (not recognised by Moldova) of over \$6 billion,<sup>18</sup> which however does not prevent Trans-Dniester companies from performing export and import operations as Moldova residents thus bringing revenues to Moldovan budget.

I think that Kyiv needs to thoroughly study the Moldovan situation as a whole, as there is a much larger possibility that the Russia-Ukraine conflict will be frozen for decades than believed by most. Meanwhile, what ultimately led to a rather stable peace in the region, mutual cooperation between political elites and free movement of citizens were the economic contacts between Chisinau and Tiraspol. By lifting the blockade, the Ukrainian government can gradually remove the "black hole" status from its eastern oblasts and bring down the illegal businesses of Ukrainian oligarchs involving representatives of the aggressor. I am convinced that this course of events would lead to a major drop of the Russian government's interest in Donbas, which at the moment is propelled by businesses close to the Kremlin with financial interests in the region. Volodymyr Zelenskyy's initiatives in this area,<sup>19</sup> even though not turned into official regulations yet, are in my opinion right on target.

---

<sup>16</sup> Poroshenko Introduced Transport Blockade of Donbas. – Vesti.ua, 16 March 2017, <https://vesti-ukr.com>.

<sup>17</sup> Trans-Dniester Increased Consumption of Russian Gas by Almost a Third in 2014. – Point.md, 26 February 2015, <https://point.md>.

<sup>18</sup> Gazprom and Trans-Dniester: 2018 – Year of Change. – Information Agency "REGNUM", 28 December 2017, <https://regnum.ru>.

<sup>19</sup> Lift the Donbas Blockade: Zelenskyy Administration Voiced a Condition for "LPR"/"DPR". – Obozrevatel, 6 June 2019, <https://www.obozrevatel.com>.

Another important factor is the obvious inability to achieve success through multi-lateral negotiations involving Russia. Excluding Mr. Medvedchuk from the Minsk negotiations and replacing him by Leonid Kuchma<sup>20</sup> can be welcomed as Ukraine's expression of political will aimed at getting rid of a traitor in its camp (Mr. Medvedchuk's business interests in Russia<sup>21</sup> and in annexed Crimea,<sup>22</sup> to say nothing of his admiration for Vladimir Putin and Russia<sup>23</sup>, are well-known), but I would not tie any major expectations to this step, as Moscow is still waiting for Kyiv to make concessions that none of the Ukrainian leaders will be able to make. The numerous proposals to change negotiators and even expand the "Normandy format" to the "Budapest format" seem unrealistic, neither the UK, which will be dealing with *Brexit* consequences in the next 4-5 years, nor the USA, which will be holding its own presidential election in slightly more than a year, have an incentive or the capacity to get seriously involved in resolving Ukraine's problems. However, another fact is even more important: I may be mistaken, but Vladimir Putin's readiness to involve Germany and France in the negotiations at the time was due to his contempt towards these countries, which he believed to have long lost their sovereignty to the EU and turned into pygmies on the geopolitical map. Thus, US involvement in the process would most likely be perceived by the Kremlin as an attempt by the top superpower to meddle in the situation within Russia's "zone of influence", which could cause extra problems.

Thus, drawing a preliminary summary, I would like to note that Russia has a wide freedom of action in the Donbas situation at the moment (Putin can "return" these territories to Ukraine, as well as tear them apart once and for all), yet there is no strategy that would determine the next moves. I.e. Russia has almost every possibility, but no desire for anything. Ukraine is in the opposite situation: Kyiv politicians have very limited freedom of action due to fear of potential accusations of defeatist attitude and treason, yet the Ukrainian side is ready to go above and beyond if Russia provides guarantees of honouring commitments both parties agree to undertake. In other words, there is a desire to try out many options, but no real possibility to do it. As a result, the occupied territories will be drifting away from Ukraine politically, and Kyiv's only hope is their partial economic reintegration.

---

<sup>20</sup> Zelenskyy Appointed Kuchma Ukraine's Representative in Minsk. – TASS, 3 June 2019, <https://tass.ru>.

<sup>21</sup> Medvedchuk on His Wife's Petroleum Business in Russia: I Am the Manager. – Gordon, 18 September 2018, <https://gordonua.com>.

<sup>22</sup> Occupants Returned a Seized Crimean Gas Field to a Company Tied to Medvedchuk. – Bez Tabu (No Taboo), 26 October 2018, <https://beztabu.net>.

<sup>23</sup> Putin Talked About Russia's Friend Medvedchuk. – Vedomosti, 15 June 2017, <https://www.vedomosti.ru>.

Stepping out of the Donbas situation, Russia-Ukraine relations in general will remain critically important for both countries in the near future. Russia's post-2014 agenda has been quite peculiar and has ultimately made Russia hostage to the situation in Ukraine. Over the past several years, Russian propaganda has been talking about its neighbour almost more than about Russia's own events. Moreover, the rhetoric is not limited to savouring Ukraine's failures and its "uselessness" to the West – it is aiming to convince Russians that Ukrainian politics took a turn by accident, and the country will eventually return to Russia's zone of influence. However, the last five years have seen a lot of change within Russia itself – this has been the period of a steady drop of living standards and growth of political rampage and in this situation the public is unlikely to wait for the prodigal son's return. Kremlin has placed too many of its bets on Ukraine's return and has had excessively high hopes for renewal of dialogue after the 2019 elections. Although it is too early to make final conclusions, it seems that for Moscow Volodymyr Zelenskyy's victory can turn out similar to Donald Trump's victory in 2016: initial euphoria (which in this case was not even demonstrated openly) followed by quick realisation that nothing has changed.

In this situation, Ukraine's most important task in its confrontation with Russia is to play "the long game". Instead of trying to convince its friends in Brussels and Washington D.C. to impose more radical sanctions against Russia or torpedo Nord Stream-2, the Ukrainian government should focus on more active EU and NATO integration, economic reforms and overcoming corruption, firmly establishing a rule of law independent of oligarchs and civil society development. I believe that in many European countries a more pragmatic approach to building relations with Russia may prevail rather soon, which will require extending economic interactions with Moscow. In the next 1-2 years it is critical that Kyiv presents a clear plan for rapprochement with Europe, which could produce tangible results and make integration, if not final (I would not be expecting EU membership in the next 15-20 years), then at least irreversible and sustainable.<sup>24</sup> In other words, I would recommend Kyiv to focus on developing Ukraine instead of confronting Russia with the help of international allies.

I think this approach is the most preferable for two reasons. On the one hand, relatively small strikes against Kremlin (and the West will hardly bring itself to introduce tougher sanctions than those already in place) go largely unnoticed for the Russian economy (Vladimir Putin's policy of demotivating investors with increased taxes and "clamping down on businesses" is affecting it much more

---

<sup>24</sup> For proposals on the topic, see: Inozemtsev V. "Ukraine's next EU moves". – Kyiv Post, 19 July 2016, <https://www.kyivpost.com>; Inozemtsev V., Kukhar M. "Potential Influence of Brexit on EU-Ukraine Relations". – RBC, 13 March 2019, <https://www.rbc.ru>.

than international sanctions) and do not alter people's support for the current leadership's course. Taking this into account, the radical failure of Russia's entire plan to return Ukraine under its orbit of influence will affect it much more than bringing to a halt the Nord Stream-2 project, which Gazprom managers mostly need as another excuse to carve-up this state company's funds. On the other hand, Kyiv today has a much wider plan for action than the one it had 5 years ago. No matter how painful, the conflict in the East of the country has no chance of becoming an existential challenge for Ukraine. Russia's aggression has brought the Ukrainian nation together, strengthened its identity, made all the top countries of the world Ukraine's allies. Today Russia's further offensive into Ukrainian territory is out of the question. Russia has no economic capacity for waging a war, it cannot add to Putin's popularity anymore. Besides, everyone has realised the scale of sanctions that followed 2014-2015 and understand that they stopped "just one millimetre away" from Russia's most sensitive areas. Russian oligarchs are too displeased with president Putin and his course for the Kremlin to attempt to engage in yet another military gamble.

I believe that all of this makes it possible for Ukrainian leadership to build a serious prospective strategy based on two main principles.

*First*, the quick and comprehensive reintegration of Donbas into Ukraine is impossible, as Russia will do everything in its power to prevent this, and the "people's republics" have no independence in their decision-making. This requires Ukraine to use economic methods of cooperation with Donbas and structure its relations with the region based on the Moldova-Trans-Dniester model. Because Russia will keep rolling backwards to the "pre-modern" state, and Ukraine will keep moving towards the West one way or another, the Donbas people will ultimately choose Ukraine (if Kyiv stops treating the region as "strangers, who do not belong"). This process can take several decades, but in my opinion, there is no other way.

*Second*, future relations between Russia and Ukraine should be viewed only in the context of Ukraine's "Westernisation" and not the "isolation" of Russia. Ukraine should stop perceiving itself as an outpost for Europe's defence against Russia – it needs to aspire to become a modern European state, where Russia would not dare even think to orchestrate a programme of aggression. Ukraine must focus on becoming Europe, instead of preventing Russia from going to Europe, particularly, as the latter is not eager to do so. In this context, it is especially important to understand that Ukraine has much more time than Russia, as with each new "circle" civil society and political competition grow stronger in Ukraine, while the Russian model looks dead in the water.

# CITIZENS OF UKRAINE ON KYIV-MOSCOW CONFLICT

**F**indings of the Razumkov Centre's sociological studies conducted during 2019 – 2014 illustrate the steady trend of Ukrainian citizens' estrangement and alienation from Russia.<sup>1</sup> This public opinion trend first emerged in 2014 in connection with Russian aggression, and over the five years of war it transformed into a certain stereotypical attitude of Ukrainians towards Russia's "Kyiv policy", towards the state institutions of the Russian Federation, and towards the prospects of contacts with Moscow.

It is clear that the overall picture of assessments (especially in the regional dimension) is more complex and controversial. However, the results of the Razumkov Centre's years-long studies give reason to talk about a relatively stable "matrix" of attitudes towards Russia.

The results of public opinion research on the "Ukrainian-Russian issue" present additional interest, as shortly after taking the office Mr. Andriy Bohdan, the new head of the presidential Administration of Ukraine, has stated that the country's new leadership will be guided by sociological polls reflecting the opinions and positions of citizens in developing Russia-related decisions.

During the most recent (March 2019) sociological survey, citizens assessed the state of bilateral relations, described causes and consequences of the conflict, expressed their attitudes towards Russian state institutions, and predicted further development of relations between Moscow and Kyiv.

---

<sup>1</sup> Based on results of sociological surveys by the Razumkov Centre over the past years. The most recent survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre's Sociological Service on 1-6 March 2019 in all regions of Ukraine excluding Crimea and occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. 2,019 respondents aged 18+ were polled, with theoretical sampling error not exceeding 2.3%.

## CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE CONFLICT

Since April 2014, a stable majority of Ukrainian citizens have viewed the Russia-Ukraine relations as hostile (42%) or poor (34%). Respondents in the West and the Centre are the most critical about the state of bilateral relations, while people in the South and the East of Ukraine are generally more conservative.<sup>2</sup> Respondents in the East are more likely to view relations between Kyiv and Moscow as “poor”. This statement can be explained by a long period of undeclared war and uncertain prospects for peaceful settlement of the conflict that affected all areas of bilateral relations, from political and diplomatic contacts to humanitarian and information spheres.

What are the causes of the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv? According to respondents, these include Ukraine’s attempt to escape Russia’s sphere of influence, Moscow’s inability to accept Ukraine as an independent state and its course towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Only one in five (20%) respondents believes that the nationalist forces coming to power in Ukraine are the cause of the conflict, with a small portion of the respondents mentioning violations of rights of the Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine. (These are exactly the theses used in the Russian official discourse). Although these causes are mentioned in the South and the East somewhat more frequently, they are by no means the main explanation for the confrontation between two countries.

Citizens traditionally refer to the economic (destruction of economic ties), political (deterioration of political relations) and humanitarian (growth of mutual adversity between citizens of both countries) aspects as the most negative consequences of the conflict. A similar picture is observed in the regional context.

As it turns out, worsening of relations between Ukrainians and Russians is yet to reach the bottom. Most respondents (61%) believe that relations between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia deteriorated over the past year, as it has been regularly reported by the Ukrainian citizens from April 2014 through March 2019. Meanwhile, the number of those who note that the Russia-Ukraine relations have not changed (that is, they are consistently hostile or poor) has doubled. The conditional group of those who see some improvements (2%) is within the statistical error.

---

<sup>2</sup> The following regional division is used: **West**: Volyn, Zakarpatsya, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi oblasts; **Centre**: city of Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv oblasts; **South**: Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kherson oblasts; **East**: Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhya, Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (excluding the occupied territories).

Ongoing alienation between citizens (societies) of Ukraine and Russia is a critical consequence of the conflict. The stable majority of Ukrainians (54%) feel such alienation. At the same time, about one-third of respondents hold the opposite opinion. At the regional level, this feeling of alienation prevails in the West and the Centre, while in eastern Ukraine most residents (58%) do not feel it.

Over the years of war, the citizens of Ukraine have developed a rather stable negative attitude towards the president of Russia and the state institutions of the Russian Federation. In March 2019, 71% of respondents expressed their negative attitude towards president Putin; 17% remained neutral; and 8% of respondents treated the leader of a neighbouring state positively. Most respondents had negative attitudes to the Government of the Russian Federation (66%) and the State Duma (64%).

According to the Razumkov Centre's surveys conducted during the period of Russian aggression in 2014-2019, Ukrainian society developed a consistently negative attitude towards the main institutions of power in Russia. Therefore, the level of negative attitudes to the president of Russia falls between 71-79%, to the Government of the Russian Federation – 66-76%, and to the State Duma – 64-75%.

The reasons for treating the leadership of the aggressor state negatively are obvious – the Russian Federation has illegally annexed the Crimea; the five-year Russian intervention in Donbas has already killed 13 thousand and wounded 28 thousand Ukrainians, with more than 1.5 million citizens being displaced by the conflict. Ukraine has suffered significant economic losses.

Attitudes towards citizens of the Russian Federation seem to be more reserved, but the share of positive-minded respondents has decreased significantly over the years of war. If in April 2014 as many as 45% of Ukrainians had positive feelings towards the citizens of the neighbouring country, in March 2019 their proportion dropped to 32%, in their attitudes to Russians, 36% of Ukrainians were neutral and 23% were negative.

The respondents' assessments vary in the regional context. Residents of the Western and Central parts of Ukraine are the most critical about the Russian leadership, with the level of negative attitudes towards Vladimir Putin reaching its maximum at 90% in the West. In South-Eastern Ukraine, the level of negative assessments is noticeably lower.

## PROSPECTS OF UKRAINE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Most Ukrainians support either curtailment (29%) or reduction (27%) of cooperation with Russia, which has been the trend since April 2014. It is worthy to note that the idea of deepening cooperation with Moscow was quite dominant in Ukrainian society in the pre-war period.

Regional differences in respondents' positions are fairly traditional, with western and central regions seeking to reduce contacts with Russia. In the South and the East of Ukraine, the picture is less certain, but the number of those supporting greater cooperation with Russia is notably higher in these regions.

Citizens of Ukraine are very sceptical about the prospects for relations between Kyiv and Moscow. Equal parts of respondents (33% each) believe that relations will either remain unchanged (which can hardly be viewed as positive in the situation of ongoing conflict) or deteriorate (which means escalation of the conflict). Therefore, a rapid drop in optimistic expectations with the onset of Russian aggression should come as no surprise. The most pessimistic are the residents of western regions, while those living in the South and the East are more reserved.

The respondents are quite cautious in assessing the likelihood of changes in the Kremlin's policy on Ukraine. Most respondents (59%) do not think any positive changes are possible in the short-term (1-3 years). For reference, the number of respondents sharing this view in June 2018 was 72%. 44% of citizens have doubts about such changes within 3-5 years. Perhaps this is linked to the period of Vladimir Putin's current presidential term. In longer-term perspective (5-10 years), slightly less than half of respondents (40%) admit the possibility of positive changes in the Kremlin's foreign policy.

## BLUE HELMETS IN DONBAS: POSITIONS OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

The idea of deploying a UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas has been widely discussed internationally. In particular, this issue received a great deal of attention at the last year's meeting of Ukrainian, German and Russian experts in August 2018 in Italy. Amidst the long-lasting bloody conflict in the East of Ukraine, the idea of a peacekeeping operation under the UN aegis is one of the optimal political and diplomatic ways to settle the conflict. However, fundamental differences in the positions of Ukraine and the Russian Federation regarding the parameters of the UN mission's mandate is a major stumbling block. And what do the citizens of Ukraine think about it?

Most Ukrainians (58%) support the deployment of the UN peacekeepers in the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Most residents of the western and central regions of Ukraine (68% and 65% respectively) welcome the arrival of peacekeeping forces. In the South, 49% of respondents also agree with this idea, while in the East of Ukraine opinions split, with 41% being “for” and 40% “against” the deployment of the UN mission.

There is no consensus among Ukrainians on whether the deployment of the UN peacekeepers should be coordinated with “DPR” and “LPR”. 41% of respondents are against such consultations with the “republics”, yet 35% support this idea. It should be noted that the issue of official Kyiv’s direct negotiations with the “DPR” and “LPR” (on which the Russian side insists) is the most challenging and conflicting element of the Ukrainian-Russian dialogue on resolving the situation in Eastern Ukraine. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that current Ukrainian legislation views “DPR” and “LPR” as occupation administrations and their decisions deem illegal.

Most residents of the western and central regions share the view that there should be no talks regarding peacekeepers with so-called “republics”. The number of supporters and opponents of such negotiations in the East is roughly equal. In the South, 39% of respondents support such consultations, and 31% are against them.

The largest share of respondents (41%) believe that the UN forces should take the entire occupied territory, including uncontrolled sections of the Ukrainian-Russian border, under their control. 16% agree with the Russian position, according to which the UN mission should be stationed along the contact line, ensuring protection of the OSCE monitors.

The supporters of the idea of the UN forces controlling the entire occupied territory and parts of the state border prevail in the Western, Central and Southern regions, while in the East, the positions of the respondents are more ambiguous.

## MATRIX OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS RUSSIA

Russian aggression triggered fundamental changes in Ukrainians’ attitudes towards its neighbour, its policy and leadership.

Such psychological, mental changes in public consciousness can be hardly viewed as some “seasonal” mood swings or “momentary outbursts” of alienation and distancing from Russia. Instead, this is steady response to the five-year “hybrid” war, which began in 2014 with illegal annexation of Crimea

and military intervention in Donbas and continues today. Ukrainian society gained an unprecedented traumatic experience from its neighbour's aggression.

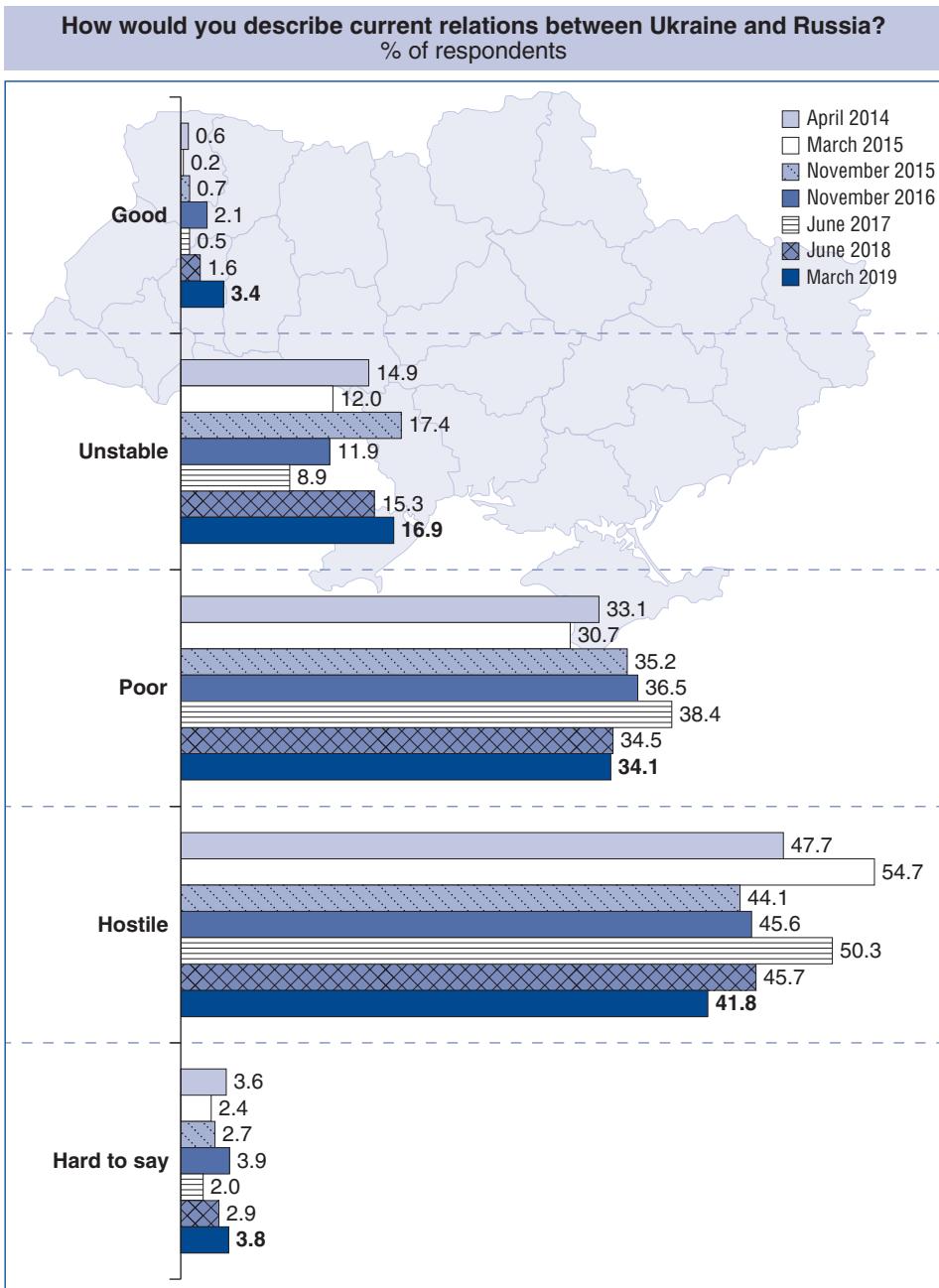
Moreover, the current situation – “simmering” military conflict in the East, frozen “Crimean issue”, ongoing degradation of bilateral relations in various fields – does not give grounds for optimistic expectations in the near future. More importantly, further escalation between the two countries cannot be ruled out. Obviously, this affects the mood and assessments of the respondents.

Summarising the positions of Ukrainians, we can single out some conceptual components of their attitudes to present-day Russia (Diagram “*Do you agree with the following statements?*”, p.216).

In a generalised form, this matrix boils down to the following statements that have been supported by the stable majority of Ukrainians from November 2015 to March 2019:

- Russia is the aggressor. Its goal is to destroy Ukraine's independence and sovereignty. Normalisation of relations with Russia under Vladimir Putin's presidency is impossible;
- It is possible to minimise, but not to completely neutralise, the Russian threat. Effective resistance to this threat is only possible through joint international effort;
- Ukraine will not participate in any integration projects in the post-Soviet space led by Russia. European integration is the only and irreversible option;
- Strategic partnership”, “good neighbour relations”, “sister nations” formulas are unacceptable, similar to Russia's model of social and political structure;
- There are a number of issues, in which any compromise with Russia is impossible. These include Crimea, Ukraine's political structure, its European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
- Kyiv-Moscow relations can be normalised on the following terms: Russia ends its aggression against Ukraine, returns the occupied territories, compensates damages to Ukraine caused by the annexation and military acts, and refrains from interfering with Ukraine's internal affairs.

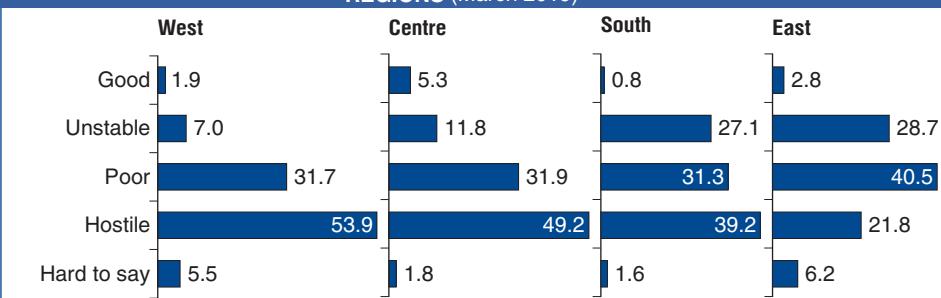
There are reasons to believe that this “mental divide of alienation” formed over the period of Russia's aggression will continue to determine the nature and climate of bilateral relations, at least in the near future.



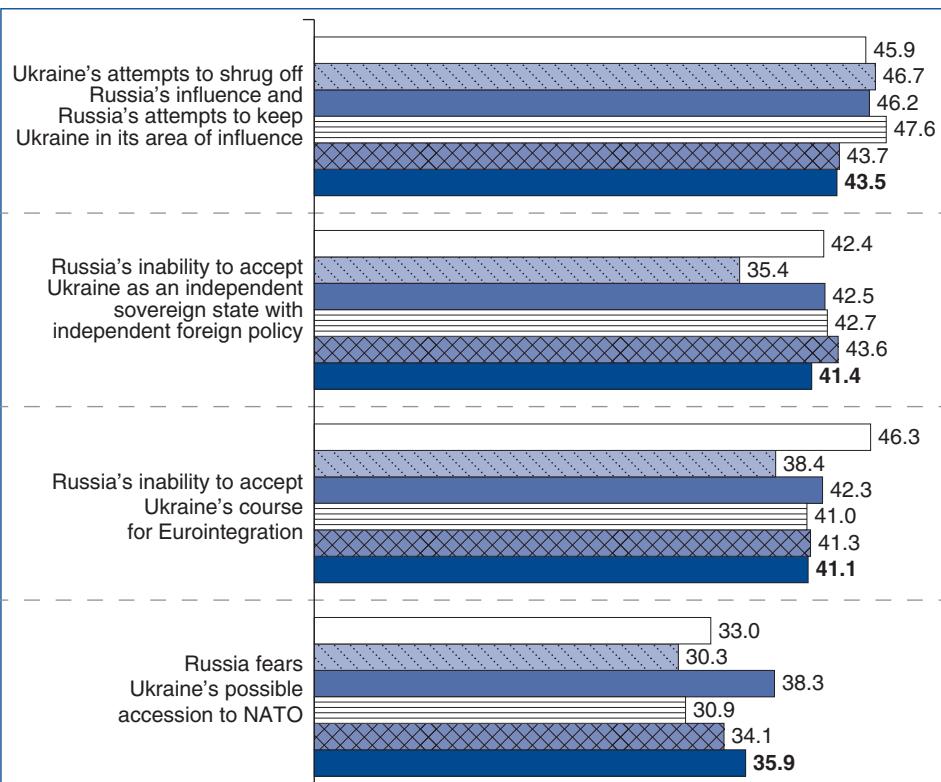
**How would you describe current relations between Ukraine and Russia?**

% of respondents

(continued)

**REGIONS (March 2019)****What are the main reasons for the Russia-Ukraine conflict?\***

% of respondents



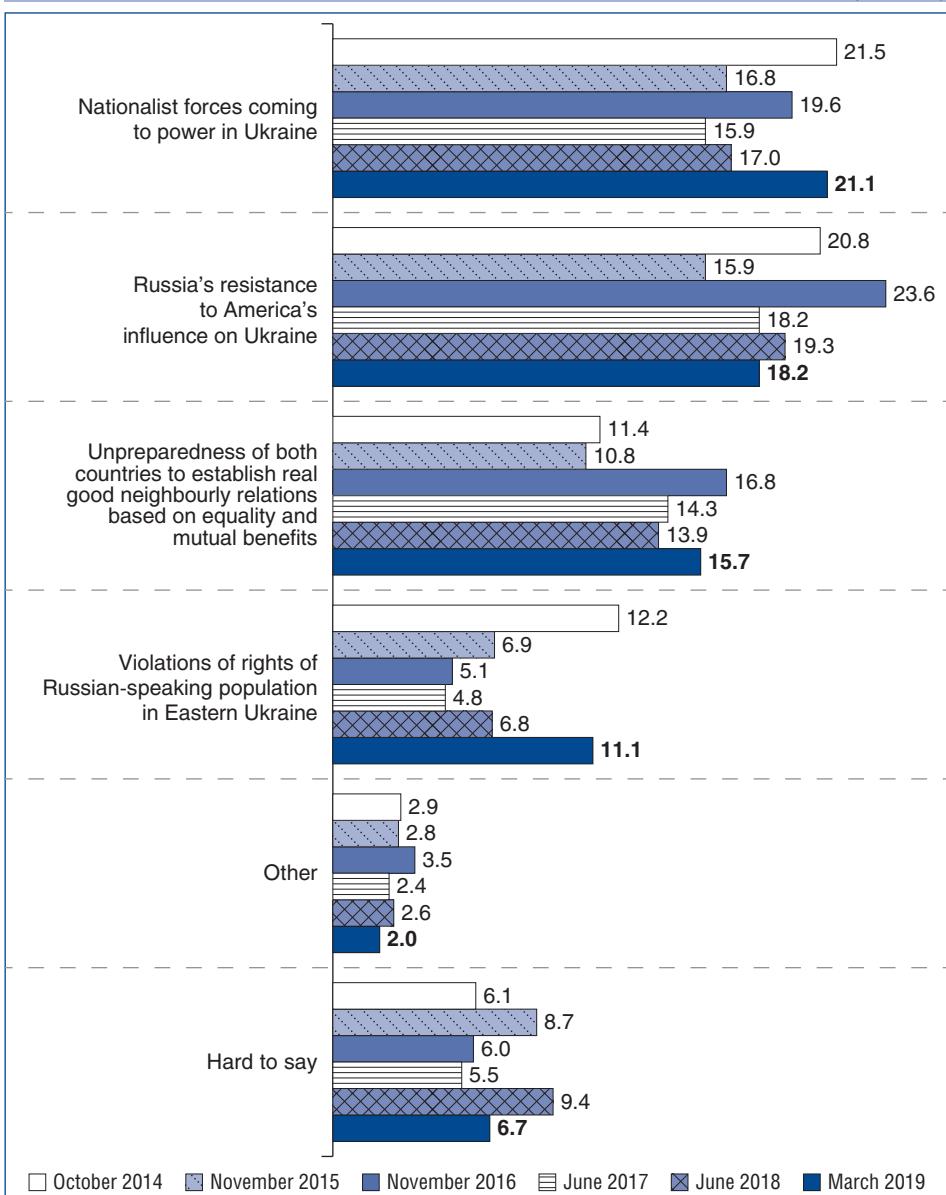
□ October 2014   ■ November 2015   ■ November 2016   ■ June 2017   ■ June 2018   ■ March 2019

\* Respondents were asked to select all acceptable answers.

**What are the main reasons for the Russia-Ukraine conflict?\***

% of respondents

(continued)



□ October 2014   ■ November 2015   ■ November 2016   ■ June 2017   ■ June 2018   ■ March 2019

\* Respondents were asked to select all acceptable answers.

**What are the main reasons for the Russia-Ukraine conflict?\***

% of respondents

(continued)

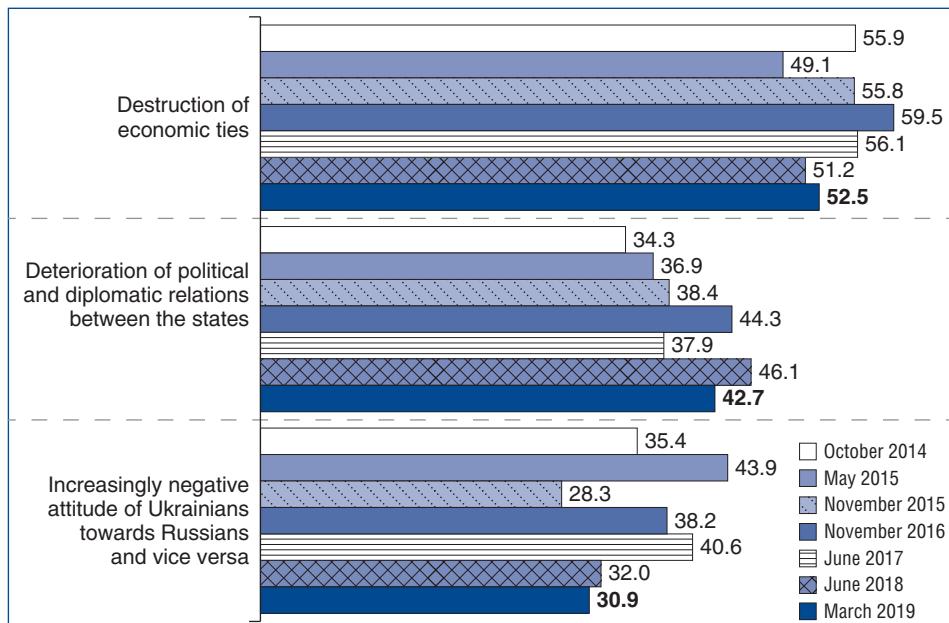
**REGIONS (March 2019)**

	West	Centre	South	East
Ukraine's attempts to shrug off Russia's influence and Russia's attempts to keep Ukraine in its area of influence	57.7	52.1	37.3	21.4
Russia's inability to accept Ukraine as an independent sovereign state with independent foreign policy	58.2	42.0	29.0	31.3
Russia's inability to accept Ukraine's course for Eurointegration	52.6	43.4	28.9	33.0
Russia fears Ukraine's possible accession to NATO	34.7	41.9	44.8	24.2
Nationalist forces coming to power in Ukraine	11.0	17.3	35.7	29.1
Russia's resistance to America's influence on Ukraine	12.7	18.8	27.0	18.0
Unpreparedness of both countries to establish real good neighbourly relations based on equality and mutual benefits	5.7	10.9	41.5	19.9
Violations of rights of Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine	1.9	5.2	27.0	20.8
Other	0.8	1.3	1.2	4.5
Hard to say	7.2	4.9	9.5	7.7

\* Respondents were asked to select all acceptable answers.

**What are the most negative consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict for bilateral relations?\***

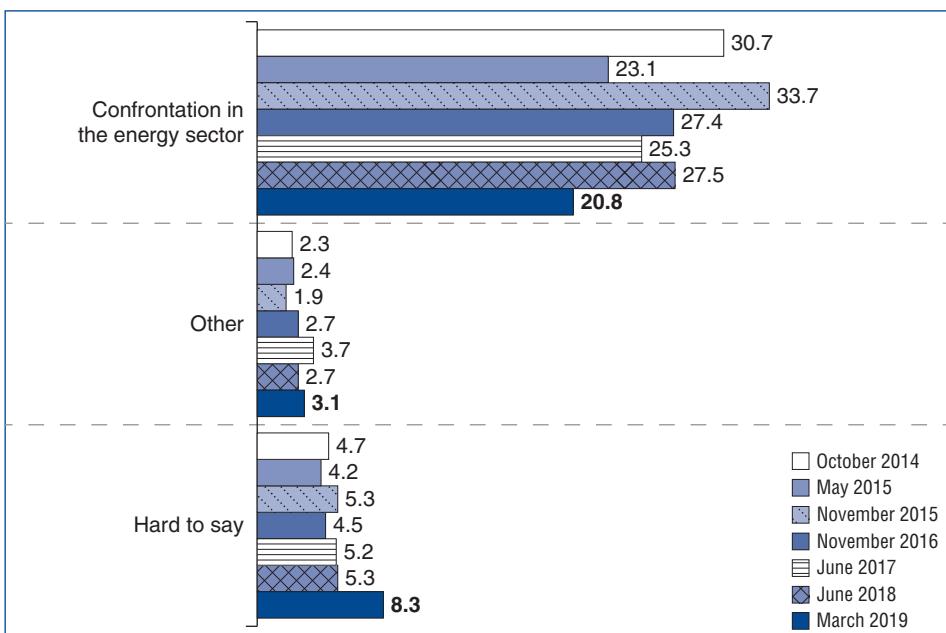
% of respondents



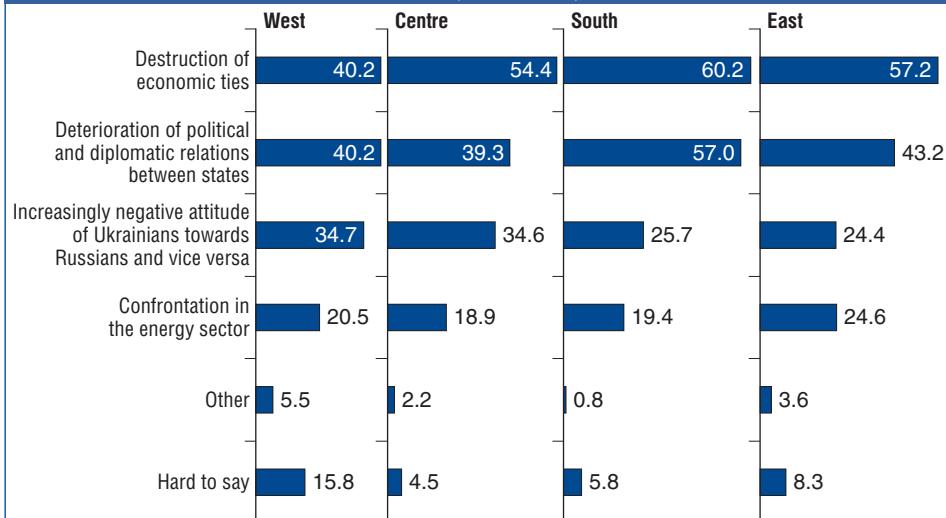
\* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.

**What are the most negative consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict for bilateral relations?\***  
 % of respondents

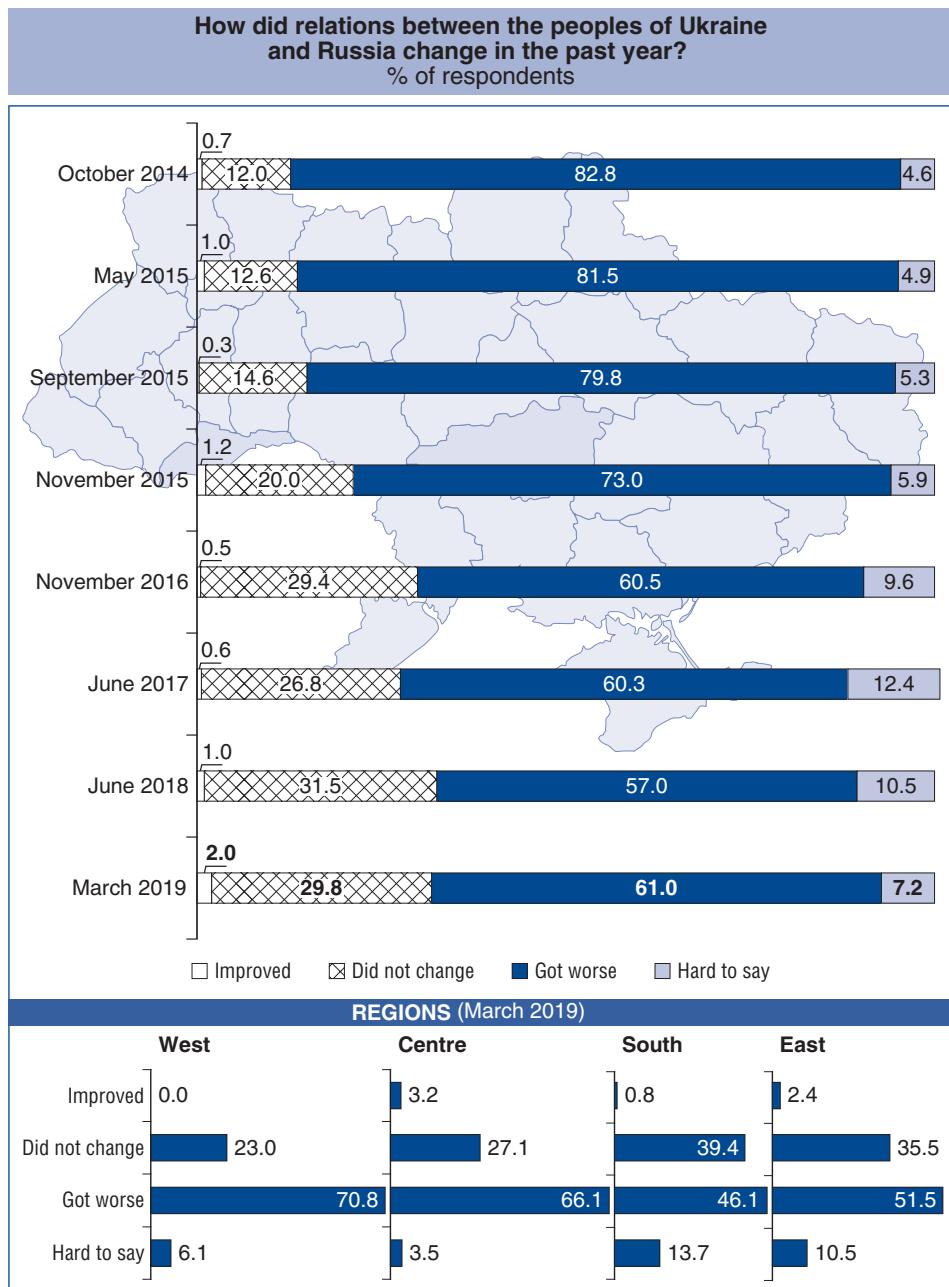
(continued)



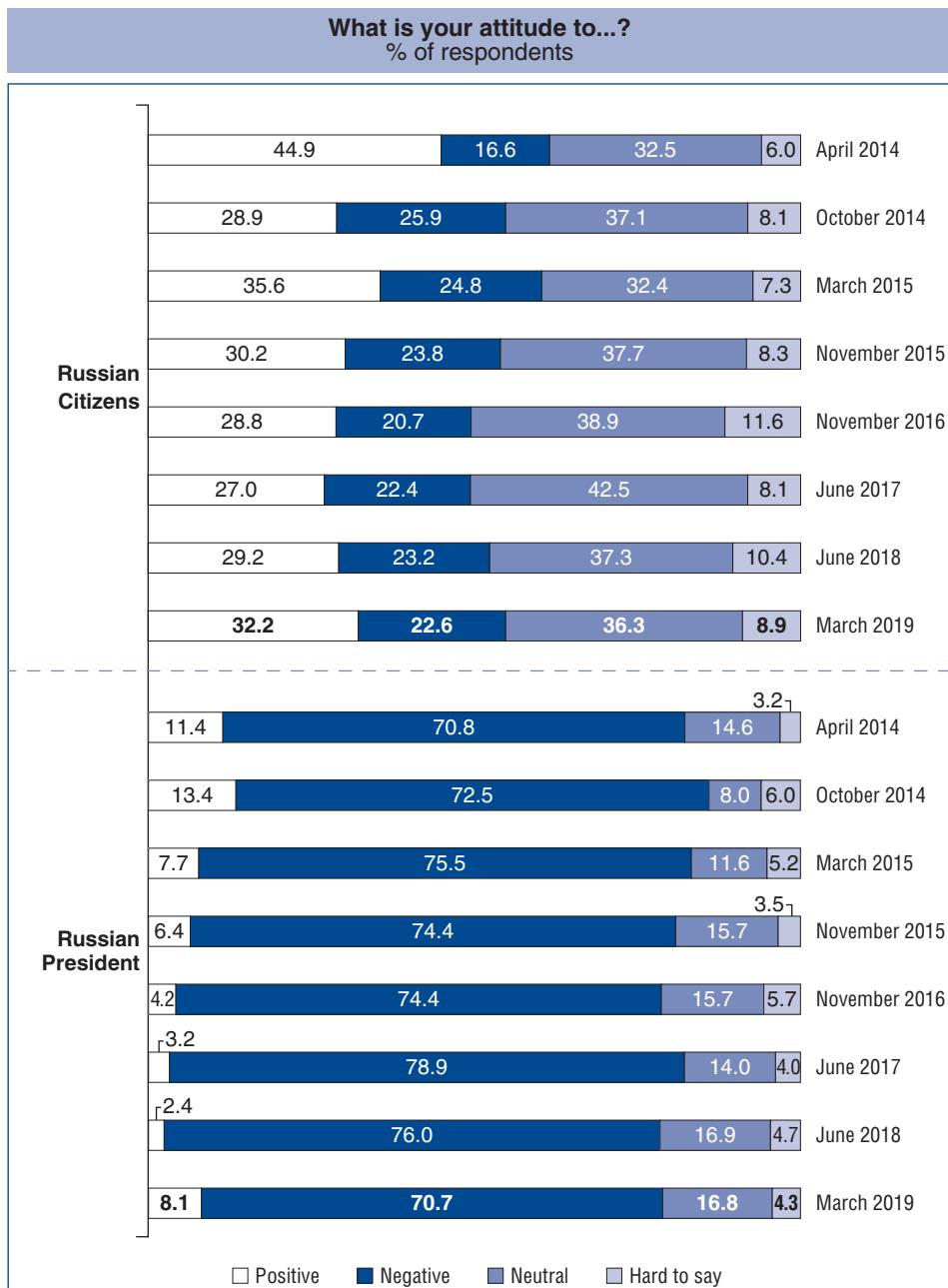
**REGIONS (March 2019)**



\* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.



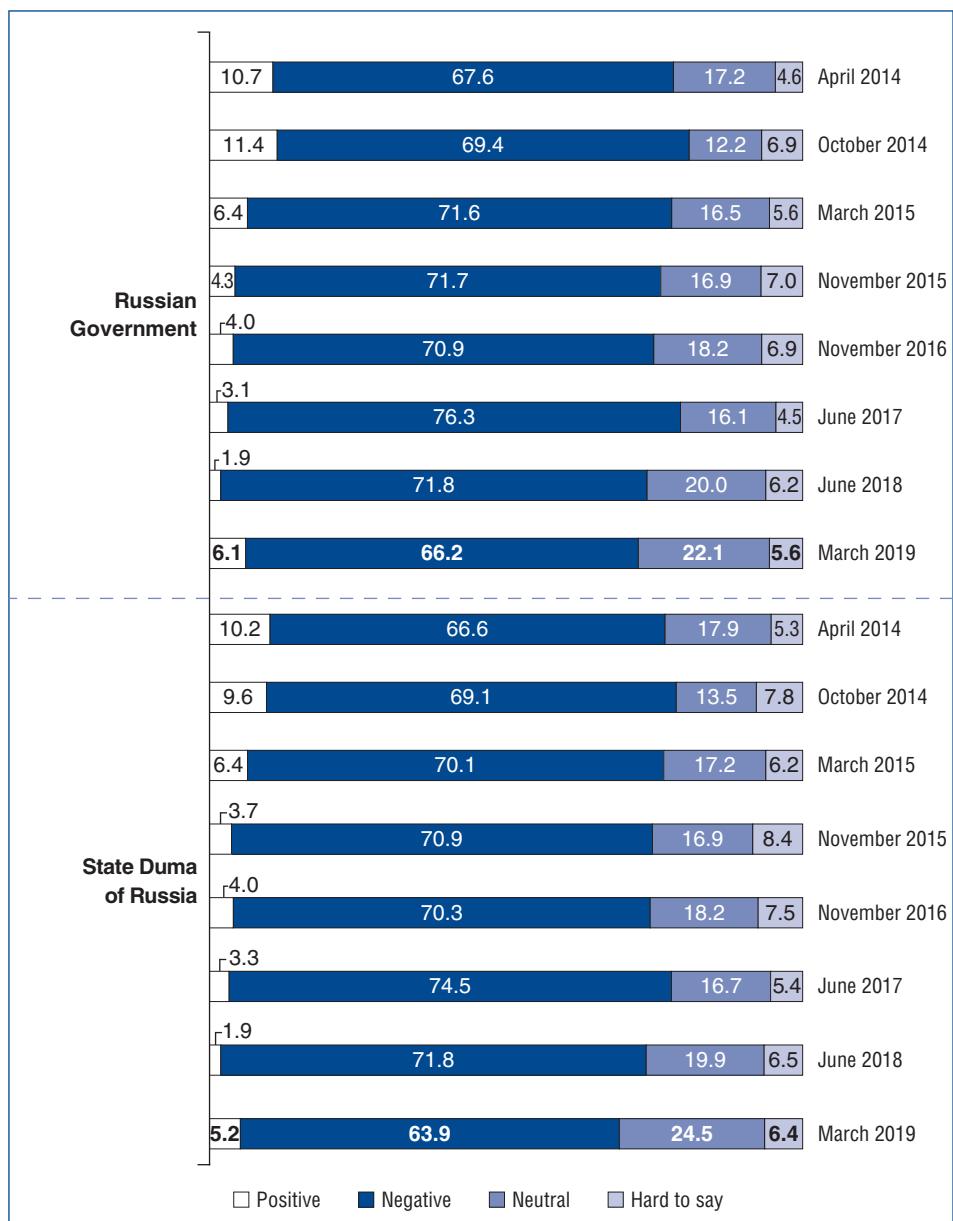
■ CITIZENS OF UKRAINE ON KYIV-MOSCOW CONFLICT



**What is your attitude to...?**

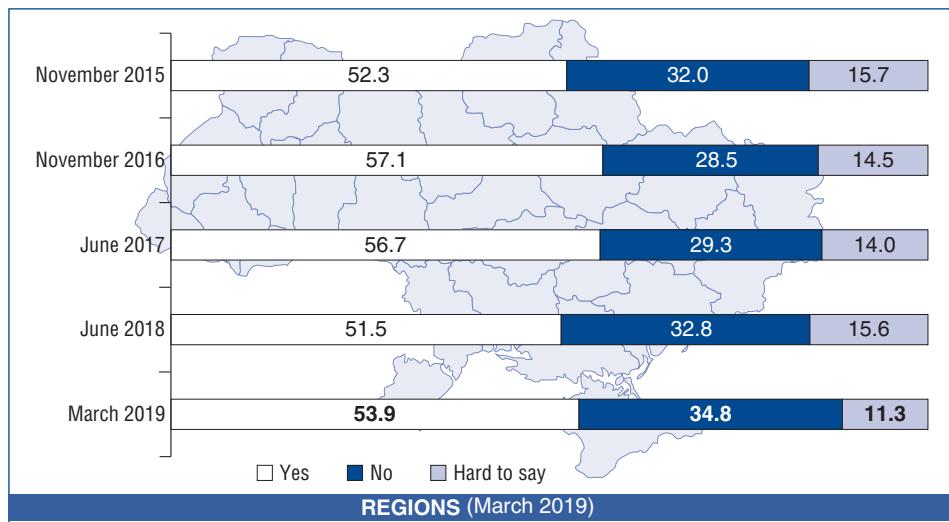
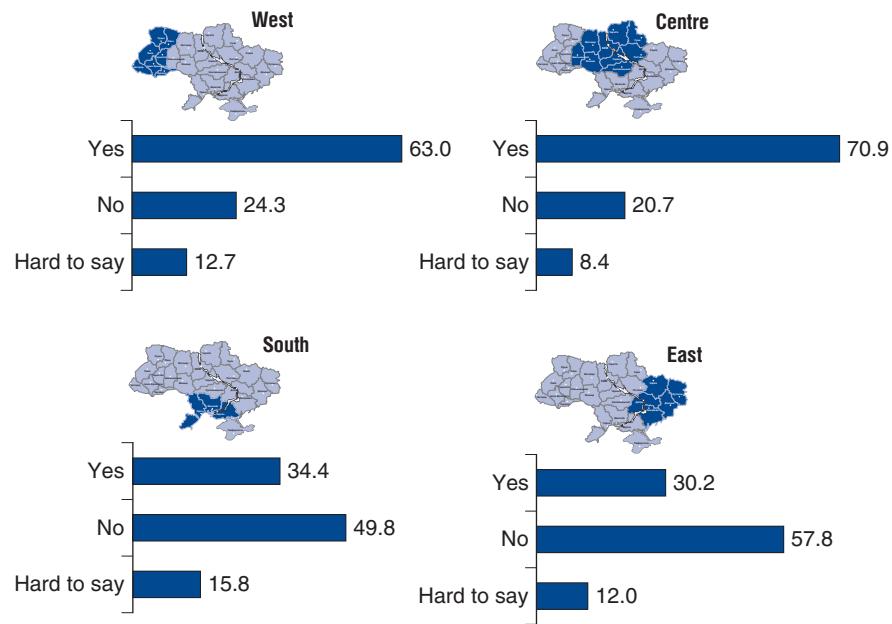
% of respondents

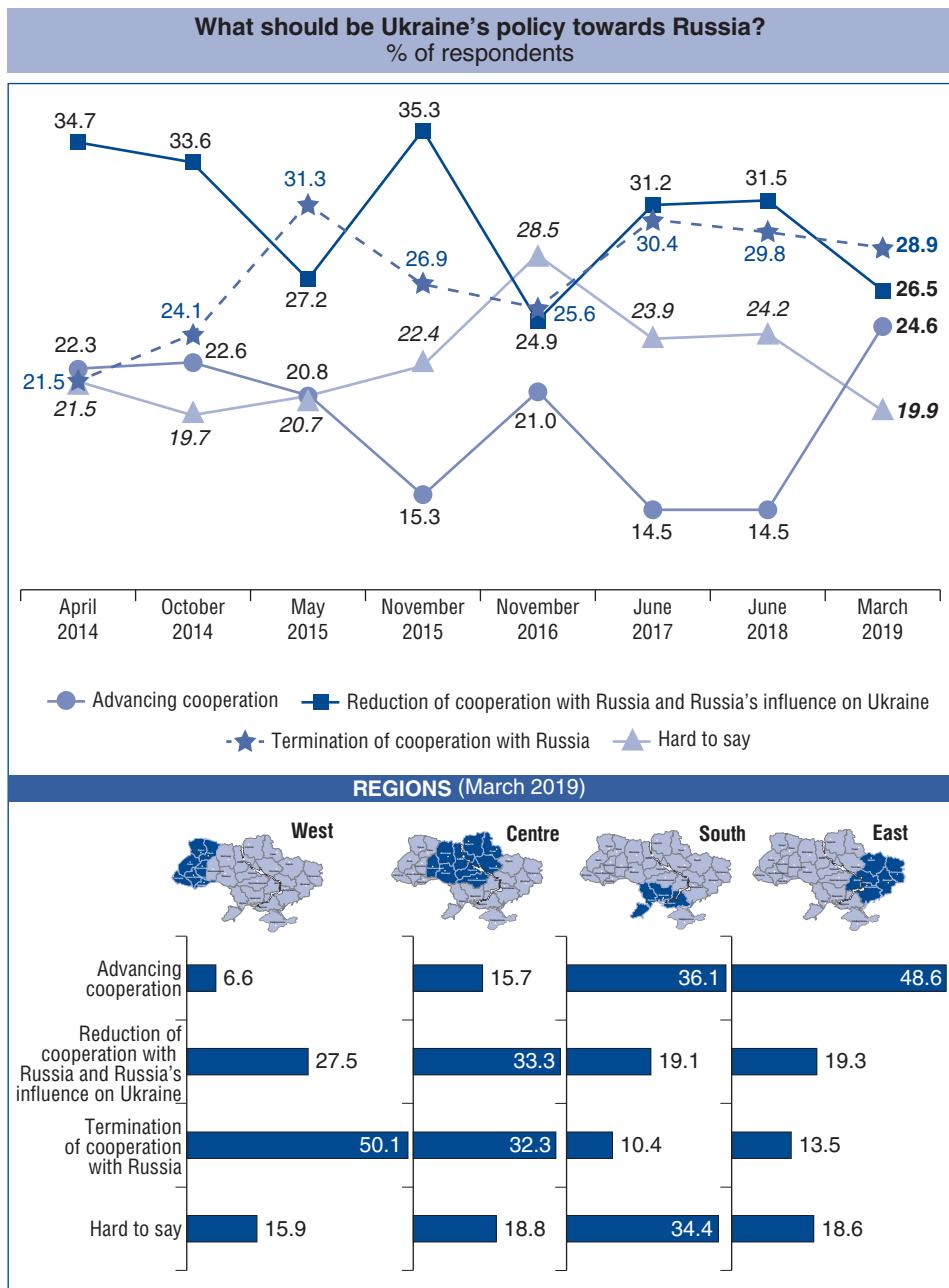
(continued)



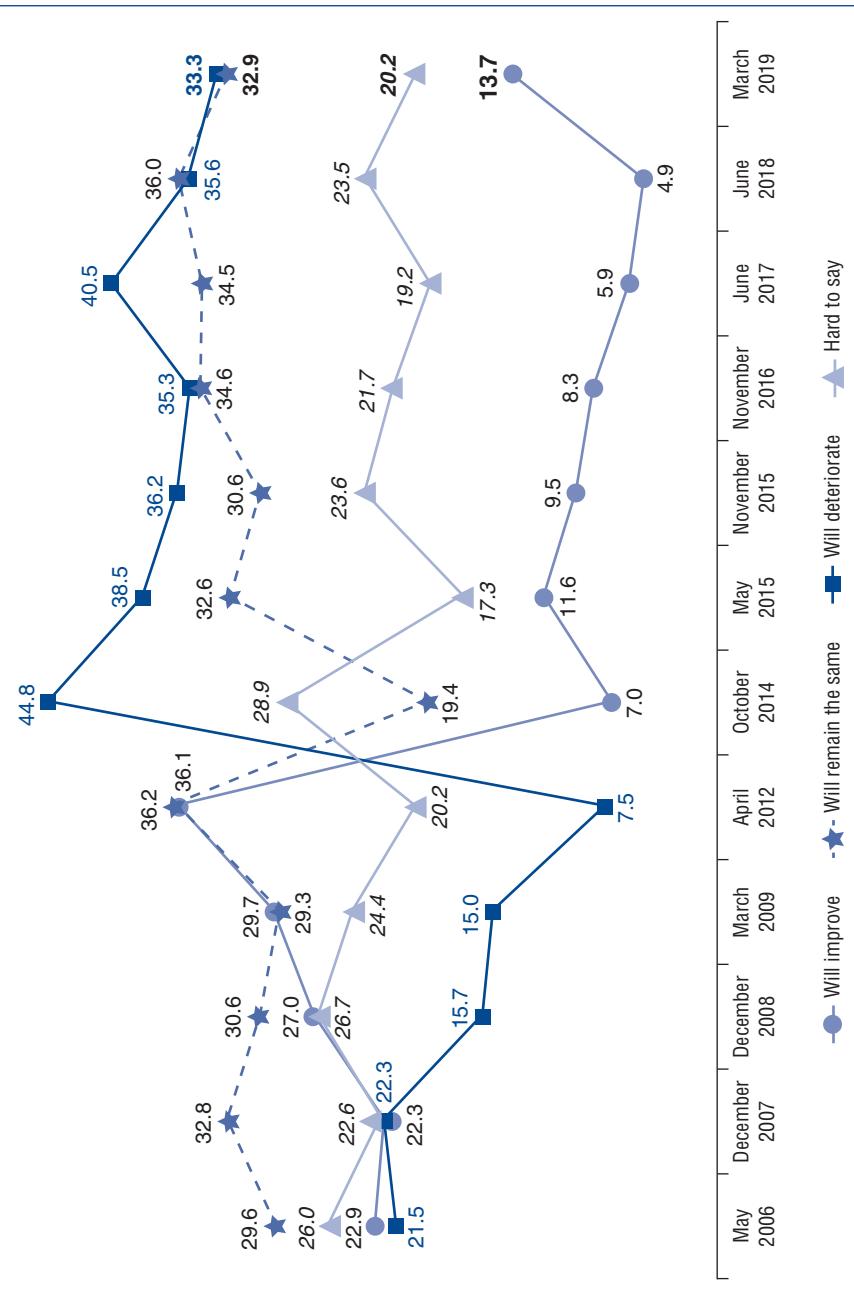
What is your attitude to...?				
% of respondents				
(continued)				
<b>REGIONS (March 2019)</b>				
<b>Russian Citizens</b>				
	West	Centre	South	East
Positive	17.3	22.2	62.2	46.4
Negative	32.5	27.8	7.9	12.7
Neutral	36.3	42.1	22.8	33.9
Hard to say	13.9	7.9	7.1	6.9
<b>Russian President</b>				
	West	Centre	South	East
Positive	1.3	1.2	11.2	22.9
Negative	90.1	86.0	56.8	37.5
Neutral	4.9	10.2	26.1	32.8
Hard to say	3.8	2.6	5.8	6.8
<b>Russian Government</b>				
	West	Centre	South	East
Positive	1.3	0.5	7.9	17.6
Negative	85.6	80.9	51.9	34.1
Neutral	7.2	15.3	32.8	40.3
Hard to say	5.9	3.2	7.5	7.9
<b>State Duma of Russia</b>				
	West	Centre	South	East
Positive	1.3	0.8	6.2	14.6
Negative	83.3	76.9	51.0	33.4
Neutral	8.4	18.2	35.3	43.3
Hard to say	7.0	4.2	7.5	8.6

**Do you feel the alienation between the citizens (societies) of Russia and Ukraine?**  
 % of respondents

**REGIONS (March 2019)**



**How would you assess the prospects of Russia-Ukraine relations in the near future?**  
 % of respondents



**How would you assess the prospects of Russia-Ukraine relations in the near future?**

% of respondents

(continued)

**REGIONS (March 2019)**

	West	Centre	South	East
Will improve	3.6	11.5	22.4	21.8
Will remain the same	34.0	35.0	27.8	31.0
Will deteriorate	40.8	40.4	22.8	21.0
Hard to say	21.6	13.1	27.0	26.3

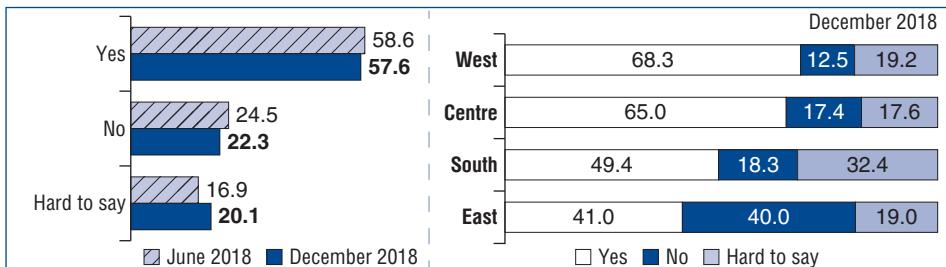
**Can there be changes for the better in Russia's policy towards Ukraine?**

% of respondents



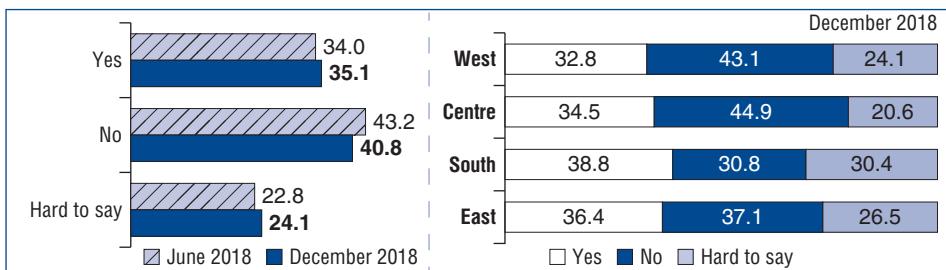
**Do you support the deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces in temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts?**

% of respondents



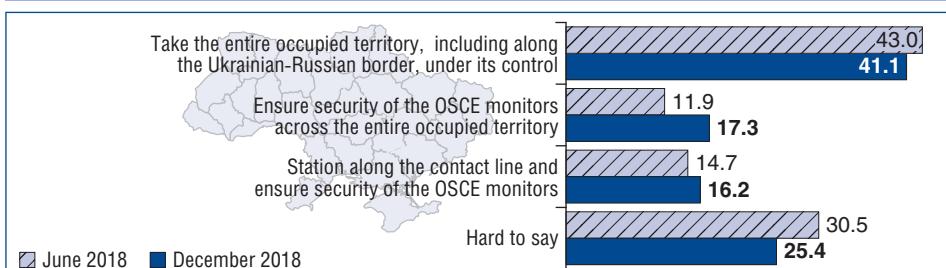
**Should the deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces be coordinated with “DPR” and “LPR”?**

% of respondents



**How should the UN peacekeeping forces act while in temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts?**

% of respondents

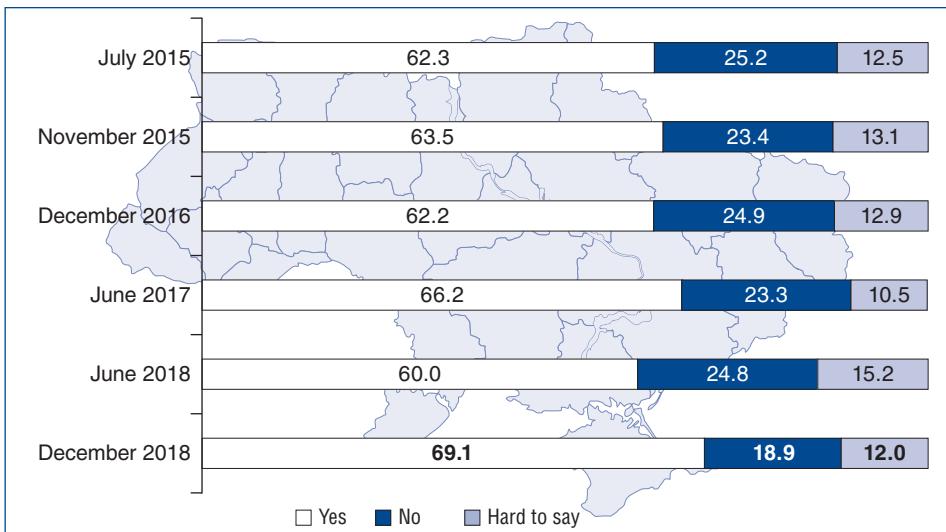


**REGIONS (December 2018)**

	West	Centre	South	East
Take the entire occupied territory, including along the Ukrainian-Russian border, under its control	58.4	40.6	48.5	23.3
Ensure security of the OSCE monitors across the entire occupied territory	12.3	16.7	7.1	27.1
Station along the contact line and ensure security of the OSCE monitors	8.7	20.5	8.7	20.1
Hard to say	20.7	22.2	35.7	29.5

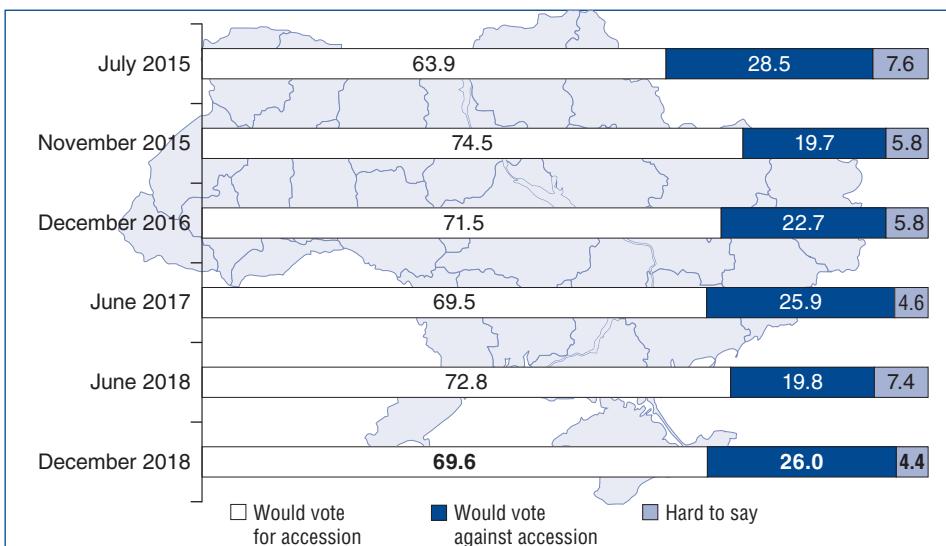
■ CITIZENS OF UKRAINE ON KYIV-MOSCOW CONFLICT

If a referendum on Ukraine's accession to NATO  
were to be held in the near future, would you participate in it?  
% of respondents



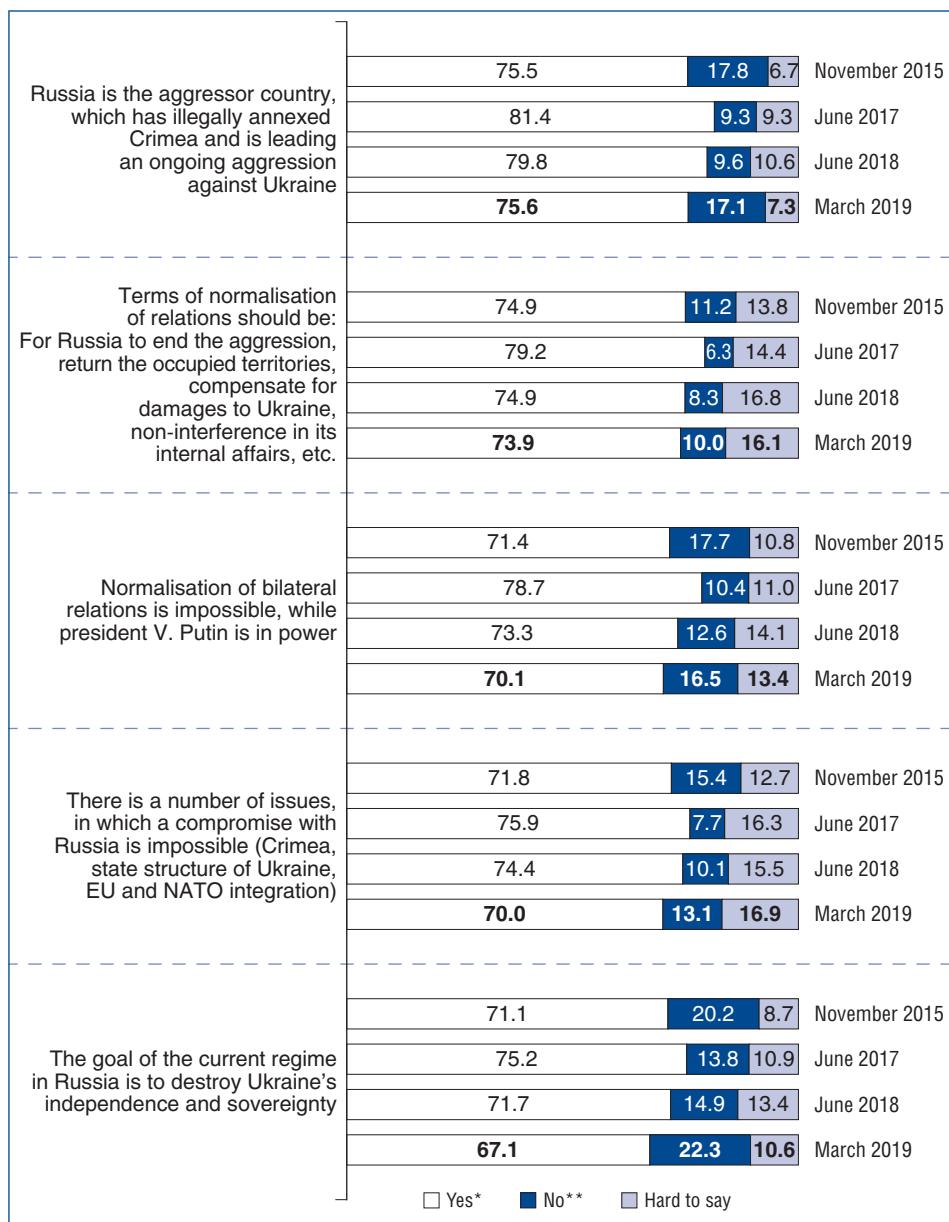
If you were to take part in a referendum on Ukraine's accession to NATO,  
how would you vote?

% of respondents who would participate in the referendum



**Do you agree with the following statements?**

% of respondents



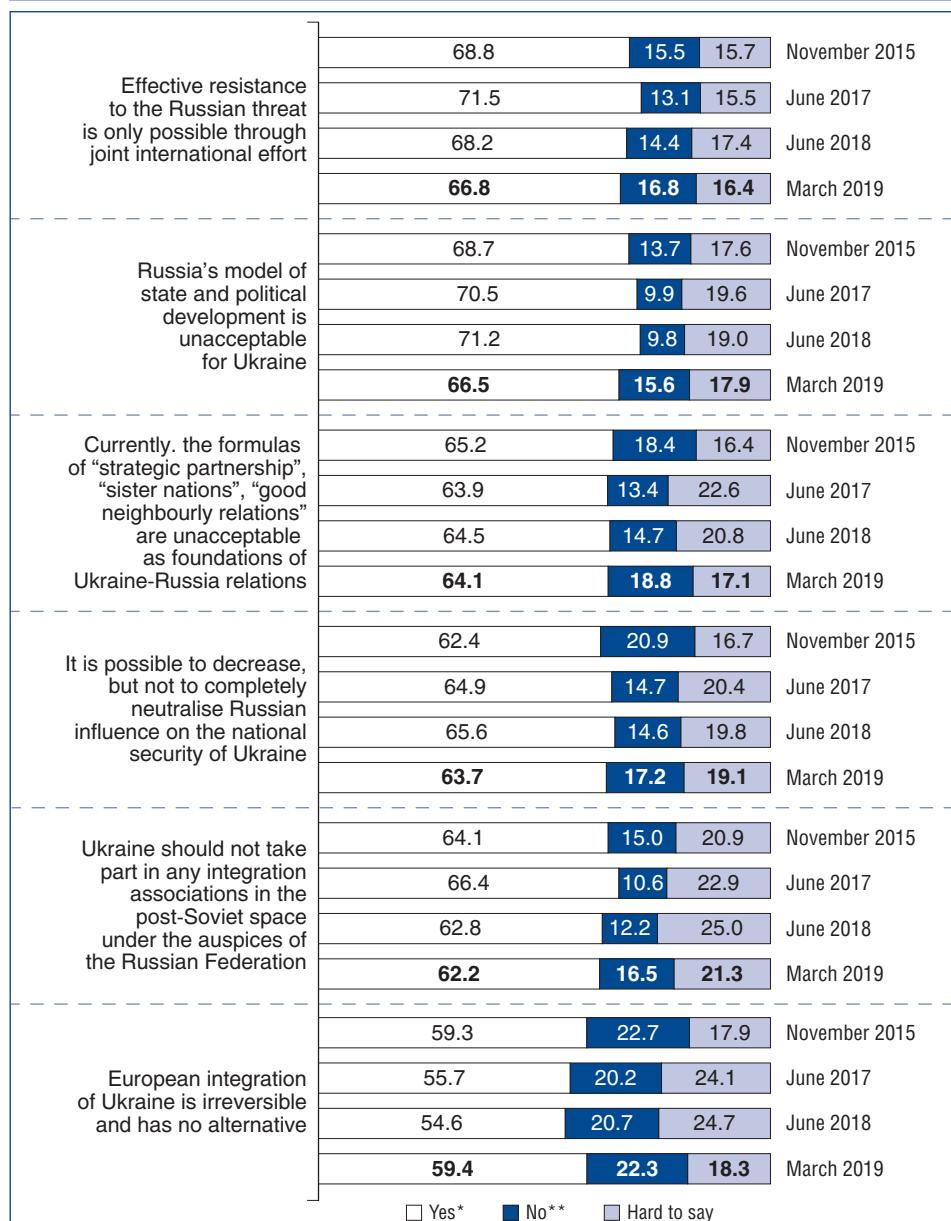
\* Sum of answers "yes" and "rather yes".

\*\* Sum of answers "no" and "rather no".

**Do you agree with the following statements?**

% of respondents

(continued)



\* Sum of answers "yes" and "rather yes".

\*\* Sum of answers "no" and "rather no".

# THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS: OPINIONS AND ASSESSMENTS OF UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

The expert surveys, conducted by the Razumkov Centre, supplement and clarify findings of nationwide sociological studies. The expert survey in April 2019 provides insight into the dominant attitudes and positions in the expert community regarding current state and prospects of resolving the situation in the East of Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

The expert views of some issues are in sync with the opinions of ordinary citizens, and they differ in other matters, all in all, the expert assessments seem more unambiguous and consolidated.

In the survey, the experts evaluated some external factors of the war in Donbas, outlined the “red lines” for possible compromises on conflict settlement, and predicted possible course of events in the future. Of particular interest are expert opinions about further action of the Ukrainian government regarding Donbas and the prospects and format of deploying the UN peacekeeping mission in the East of Ukraine.

## GEOPOLITICAL ASPECTS OF THE CONFLICT

While assessing the goals of Russian expansion in Ukraine, the experts primarily point at the Kremlin’s attempts to prevent Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration (65%). In fact, this westward drift of Kyiv away from Moscow can be viewed as a root cause of the conflict between the two countries, especially in view of Medvedev’s doctrine of the “zone of Russia’s privileged interests” in the post-Soviet space. The same number of experts (65%) mention the Kremlin’s goal to change power in Ukraine and establish its control (protectorate) over the neighbour.

Many experts also believe that the goal of Russia’s expansion is to disintegrate Ukrainian statehood (53%). Although 30% of experts agree that Russia may

---

<sup>1</sup> The expert survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre on 10-19 April 2019. 80 representatives of government agencies, members of the state and non-governmental research institutions, academics and independent experts were polled.

be pursuing its national interests, the meaning of “national interests” and forms of their advancement are rather questionable. At the same time, only several experts (4%) believe that Russia’s intervention is about protecting the Russian-speaking population of Ukraine. We should note that this is the main ideological rationale for Russian intervention in Donbas.

What is the global community’s role in resolving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine? Expert assessments are rather conservative, with the United Nations scoring the lowest 2.8 points.<sup>2</sup> The motives behind such an opinion are clear – *de facto* the UN is not directly involved in settling the Donbas conflict. Activities of the UN Security Council in this area are consistently blocked by Russia. In general, the UN as a global security power is paralysed by the confrontation of its top players – the United States, Russia and China. UNGA resolutions on Crimea are blatantly ignored by the Russian Federation.

According to the experts, the OSCE role in resolving the conflict is also moderate (2.9 points). The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Donbas is a group of observers tasked to record the dynamics of the conflict, rather than to resolve it. The role of France and Germany is equally limited, probably due to a long hiatus of the Normandy Four. The experts generally appreciate the role of NATO (3.5 points) as a military bloc with sufficient military and political capacity to deter Russian aggression. And finally, the United States earned the highest expert approval (3.9 points). This can be explained by the magnitude of America’s military-technical assistance to Ukraine and consistent political and diplomatic support on the one hand, and by the leadership in the sanctions policy against Russia on the other. Sanctions nowadays are the main restraining factor for the Russian expansion.

However, the effectiveness of Western sanctions has scored only a moderate 3.1 points among the experts. The obvious reason for such an assessment is that sanctions, imposed on Russia back in 2014, while having an important deterrent effect, have so far failed to significantly affect the Kremlin’s policies globally, did not stop the war in Donbas and did not address the issue of the annexed Crimea.

### **“RED LINES” FOR DONBAS COMPROMISE**

During the expert survey, respondents identified possible boundaries of compromise for peaceful settlement in the East of Ukraine. The absolute majority of experts (96%)<sup>3</sup> immediately rejected the idea of recognising Crimea as

---

<sup>2</sup> The experts used a 6-grade scale, where “1” is ineffective and “5” is very effective.

<sup>3</sup> The total of answers “yes” and “mostly yes”.

a Russian territory in exchange for liberation of Donbas. Most experts also oppose the idea of “geopolitical concessions” to the aggressor, such as refusal of European integration (95%) and prospects of NATO membership with the formalisation of the country’s neutral status in the Constitution (86%). It is worth noting that Ukraine’s course towards joining the EU and NATO is now enshrined in the Constitution.

89% of polled experts find the integration of “DPR” and “LPR” back in Ukraine in their present form unacceptable. In other words, the expert community explicitly opposes the idea of “implanting” these “republics” created and supported by the Russian occupation regime. In turn, equal shares of experts (86% each) neither support the federalisation of Ukraine nor the granting of state status to the Russian language.

Similarly unpopular with the experts is the idea of giving “special rights” to uncontrolled territories. Granting a “special status” to certain territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and its formalisation in the Constitution is unacceptable to 79% of experts. In other words, the experts stand against granting certain constitutional rights to the occupation regime that operates in the East.

Furthermore, the respondents reject both the legitimisation of negotiations with the ringleaders of “DPR” and “LPR” and the establishment of cooperation with them. 76% of experts oppose official negotiations with the “leadership of the republics”, and 81% stand against any financial and economic contacts with *ORDLO*. This position can be primarily explained by the fact that the current legislation defines “DPR” and “LPR” as Russian occupation administrations, whose decisions are not recognised in Ukraine. And second, it is not expedient – even in technological terms – to discuss conflict resolution with the puppet leadership of the “republics” fully controlled by the Russian Federation.

68% of interviewed experts do not agree with the idea of granting amnesty for all those involved in hostilities in Donbas. In any case, the vague wording of amnesty, provided in Article 5 of the Minsk Agreements, requires clarification and specification in line with the current laws of Ukraine.

While defining the “red lines” that Ukraine cannot cross, the experts are unanimous (84%) regarding the unacceptability of “cutting off” (separating) occupied Donbas from Ukraine. This is the Ukrainian territory that Ukrainians must fight for, seeking its de-occupation and reintegration.

Meanwhile, members of the expert community believe that restoring Ukrainian control over the occupied territories by military means (at least under the current

conditions) is highly unlikely, and 60% of respondents oppose this idea. It stands to reason, that given the current balance of military contingents in the region, that any attempt to use force can lead to a large-scale escalation with unpredictable consequences.

According to the experts, one of the ways to establish peace in the East is to successfully restore normal life both in government-controlled areas of Donbas and throughout the country. This statement is shared by 94% of respondents. Another way of settling the conflict, supported by 88% of experts, is to force Russia – together with partner states – to stop interfering in Donbas through the sanctions policy and international pressure.

## POSSIBLE SCENARIOS OF EVENTS AND PROSPECTS OF SETTLEMENT

While predicting the future course of events in Donbas, experts agree that the induced termination of hostilities by Russia with withdrawal of its troops from the occupied territories is the least likely scenario, with its probability scoring only 2.4 points.<sup>4</sup> The current situation gives little reason for this kind of expectations (moreover, recent events and actions point at heightening tension in Donbas, rather than at Russia's readiness to compromise. In this context, we should mention the Russian president's Decree of 24 April 2019 that simplifies the procedure of obtaining Russian citizenship for the residents of occupied parts of Donbas).

According to the experts, the probability of a large-scale escalation in the East is rather low (2.5 points). This course of events would have unpredictable consequences for both sides of the conflict. However, given the growing militarisation of the occupied region and the concentration of Russian troops near the Ukrainian-Russian border, such a scenario cannot be ruled out.

The experts are rather sceptical (2.7 points) about the likelihood of conflict resolution as a result of political forces loyal to the Russian Federation coming to power in Ukraine. The respondents have many doubts both in the arrival of pro-Russian leadership of Ukraine, and in the possibility of serious concessions to Russia in view of serious anti-aggressor public sentiment.

According to the experts, the continued *status quo* is the most likely scenario of events in Donbas, that is combat activity of low intensity. This forecast seems the most realistic given the current situation in the conflict zone, the continued

---

<sup>4</sup> The experts used a 6-grade scale, where "1" is impossible and "5" is highly likely.

suspension of the Normandy format, the blocking of the Minsk negotiation process and the need for the new Ukrainian government to formulate its position on Russia. Moreover, Russia has made no steps towards the compromise on the Donbas direction.

While assessing the hierarchy of possible threats and taking into account the dynamics of events in Donbas, most experts (41%) believe that granting the breakaway territories a special status within Ukraine will be the most dangerous. This assessment fully correlates with one of the above-mentioned “red lines” that Ukraine cannot cross. Separation of these territories (24%) is also a serious threat to Ukraine’s stability. Against this background, the conservation of the *status quo* (15%), freezing of the conflict and drawing a new “border” along the contact line (9%) seem less dangerous.

What should Ukraine do to settle the conflict in Donbas? According to most experts (80%), this should primarily involve forcing Russia to liberate the occupied territories by political and diplomatic means (jointly with partner countries). It is clearly one of the few acceptable options, given that other “non-peaceful” actions may lead to disastrous consequences. The second option, suggested by the experts (73%), is to seek deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces on these territories. This, in essence, is a “detailing” of the first option, which presumes a peaceful settlement, but with a decisive involvement of the international community via the UN. Under the current circumstances, this is the optimal model for establishing peace in Donbas. However, fundamental differences in the Ukrainian and Russian approaches to the mandate of the UN mission represent the major stumbling block.

A significant share of respondents (46%) support the continuation of the Joint Forces Operation until complete liberation of the occupied territories. Such opinion should be regarded as an understanding of the need for armed resistance to Russian intervention, rather than initiation of a large-scale offensive.

## THE UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN DONBAS

Nowadays, the issue of the UN peacekeeping operation in the East of Ukraine remains in the spotlight of international narrative.

Just like ordinary Ukrainians, the experts, albeit more resolute and consolidated, support the deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces on the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (88%). Some 6%

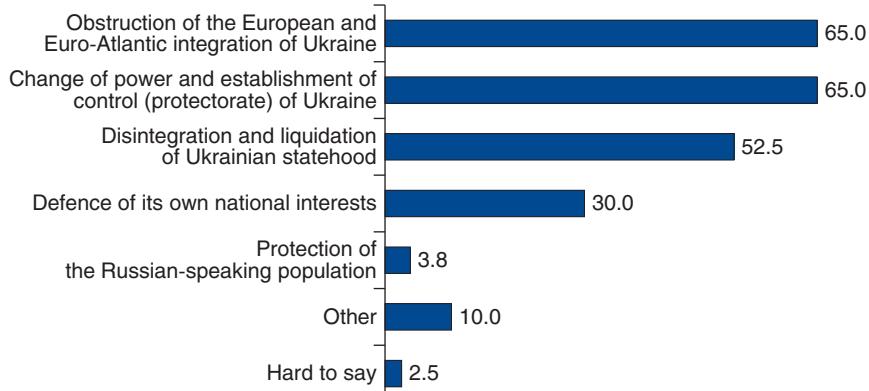
of experts consider the presence of peacekeepers in Donbas inappropriate for one reason or another.

Most members of the Ukrainian expert community (66%) do not consider it appropriate to coordinate the deployment of the UN peacekeepers with the “DPR” and “LPR”, apparently believing that such negotiations should be held directly with their Kremlin masters. 19% of respondents still consider such an arrangement possible, and 15% find it difficult to answer. It is worthy to note that it is the Russian side that insists on direct talks between the official Kyiv and pseudo-republics, making this an obligatory condition for peaceful settlement.

Absolute majority of polled experts (85%) are positive that in the case of a peacekeeping operation, the UN forces should take the entire occupied territory, including uncontrolled segments of the Ukrainian-Russian border, under their control. This is fully in line with Ukraine’s position, which supports the idea of deploying a multi-faceted peacekeeping contingent, including the military, police and civilian components in the form of international transitional administration under the auspices of the UN. 8% of respondents agree with the Russian position, according to which the UN mission should be stationed along the contact line and ensure protection of OSCE monitors (relevant draft resolution on peacekeepers in Donbas was submitted by the Russian Federation to the UN Security Council in 2017). However, this option would likely lead to the freezing of the conflict, rather than to its complete settlement. Only several Ukrainian experts supported a proposal, in which the peacekeepers should provide protection for the OSCE mission observers on the entire occupied territory.

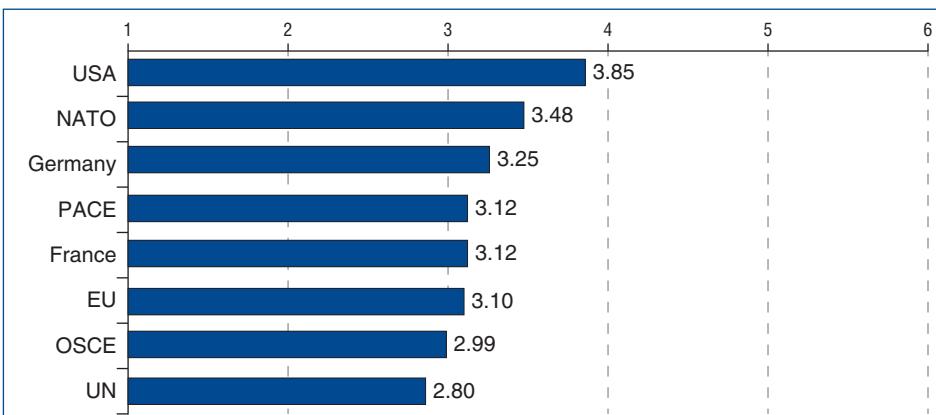
One way or another, the deployment of the UN peacekeeping mission in the context of years-long armed conflict is the optimal way to stop fighting in the East of Ukraine. However, it is also clear that the Donbas conflict is only one of many areas of lengthy confrontation between Moscow and Kyiv.

**How would you describe the goals of the Russian aggression against Ukraine?\***  
 % of experts



\* Experts were asked to select all acceptable answers.

**How would you assess involvement of separate countries and international organisations in settlement of the conflict in Donbas?**  
 Average score\*



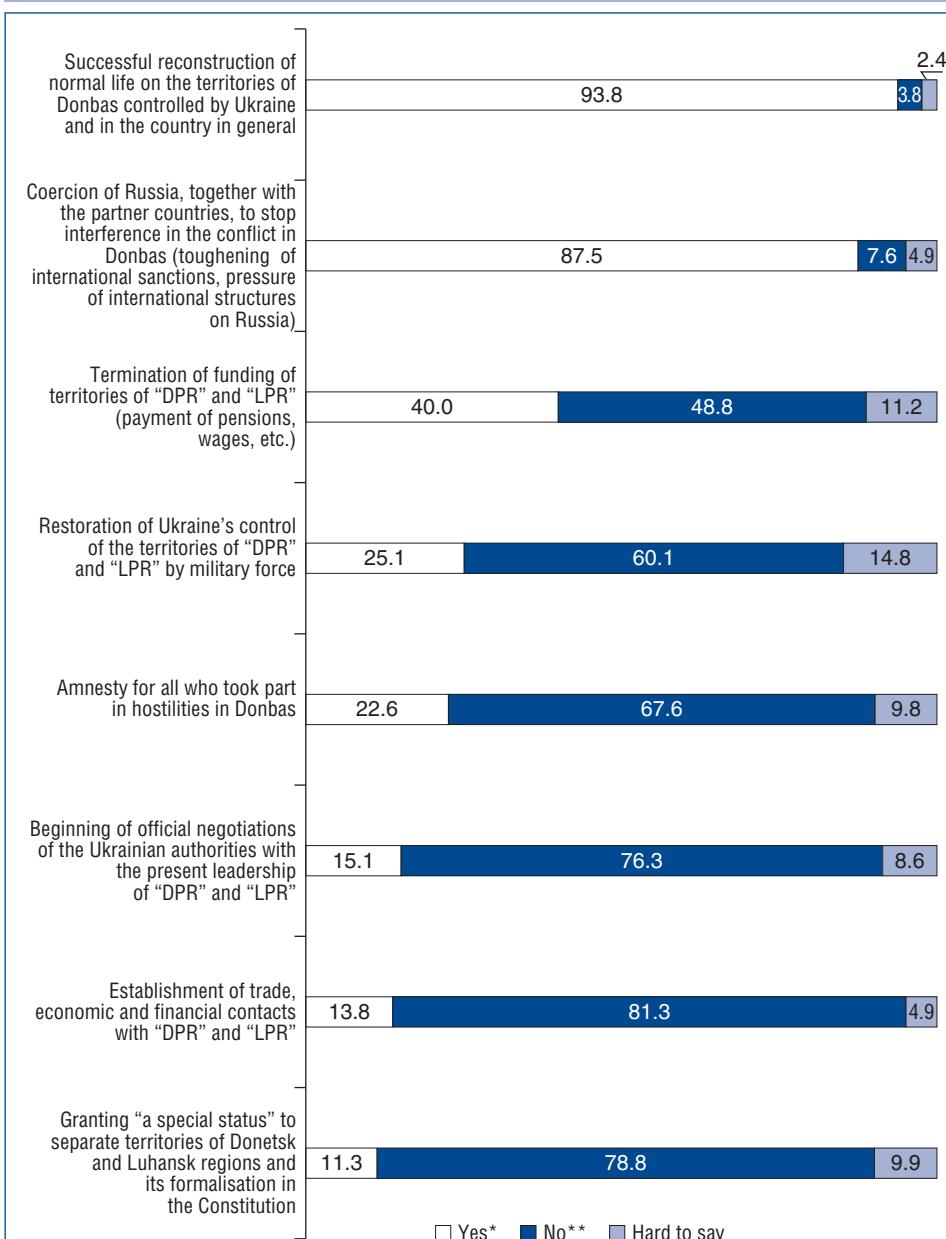
\* Using a scale from 1 to 6, where "5" means very efficient, "1" – inefficient, "6" – hard to say.

**How would you assess the efficiency of sanctions of the Western countries against Russia for settlement of the conflict in Donbas?**  
 Average score\*



\* Using a scale from 1 to 6, where "5" means very efficient, "1" – inefficient, "6" – hard to say.

**What steps for establishment of peace in Donbas would you support?\***  
% of experts



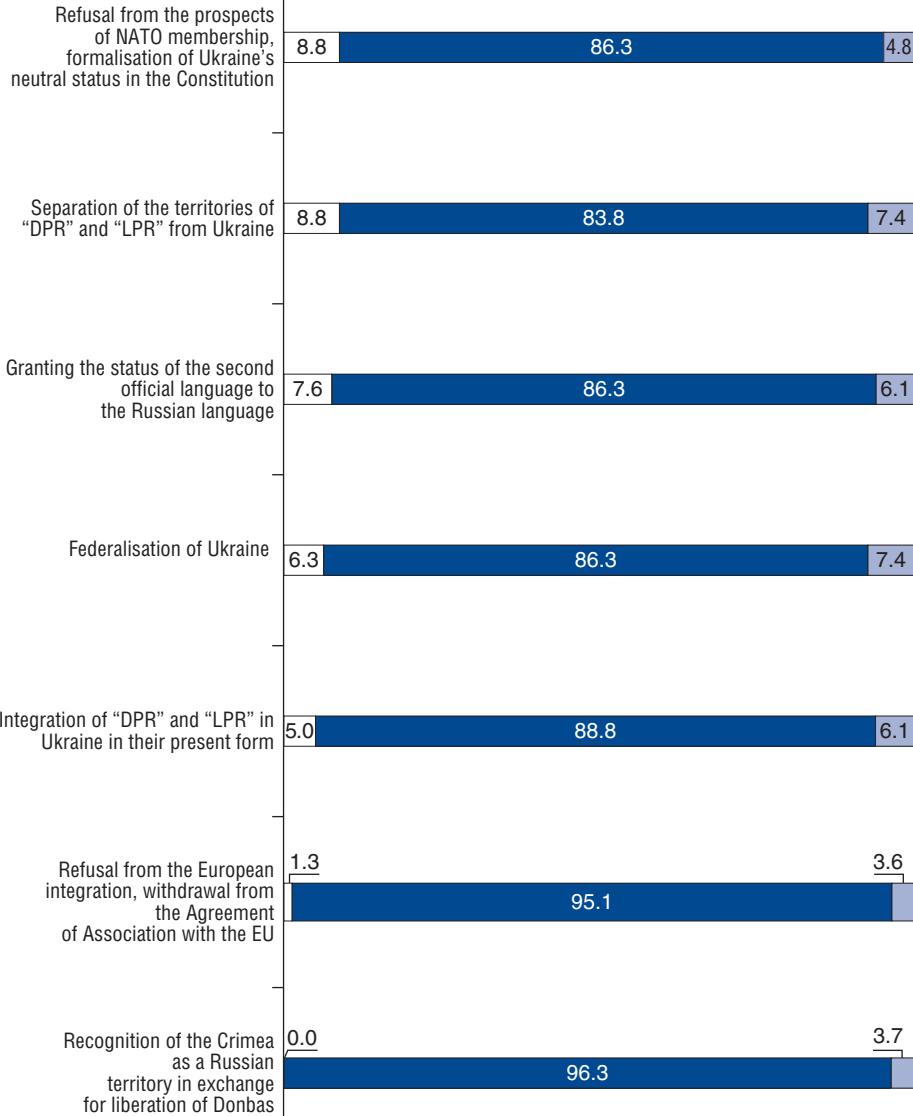
\* Sum of answers yes and rather yes.

\*\* Sum of answers no and rather no.

**What steps for establishment of peace in Donbas would you support?\***

% of experts

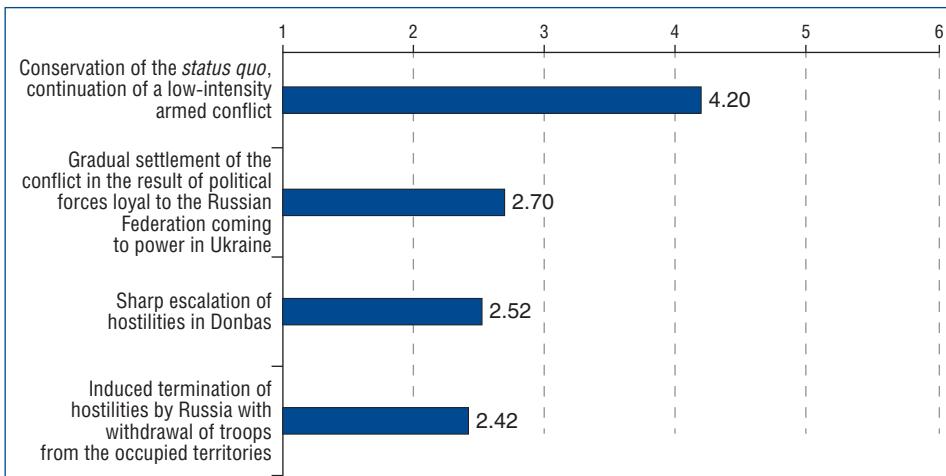
(continued)



\* Sum of answers yes and rather yes.

\*\* Sum of answers no and rather no.

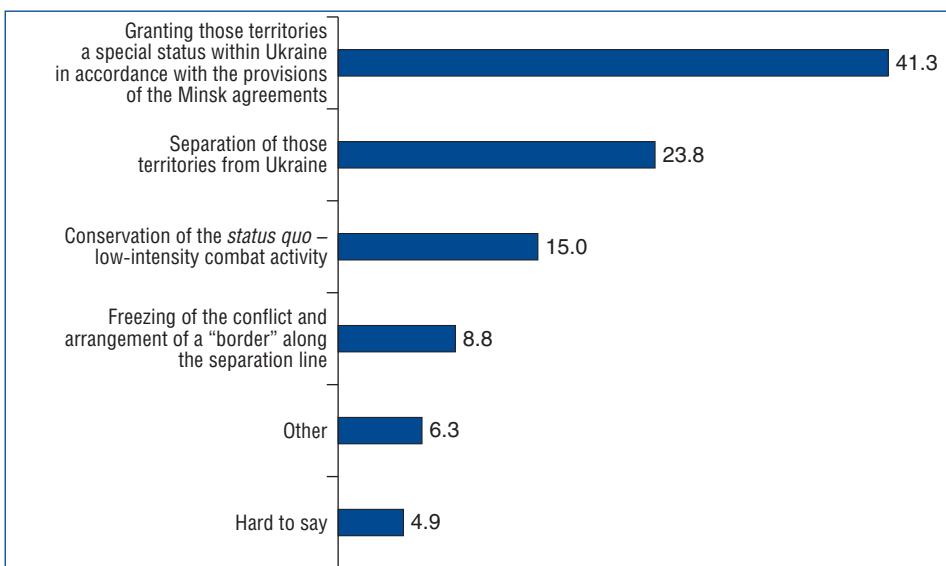
**Assess the probability of the following options of developments  
in Donbas in the near future (in 2019),  
Average score\***



\* Using a scale from 1 to 6, where "5" means very efficient, "1" – inefficient, "6" – hard to say.

**Which scenario of developments in Donbas poses a greater threat  
for stability and development of Ukraine?**

% of experts

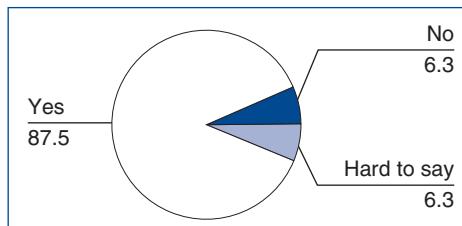


**What should Ukraine do for settlement of the conflict in Donbas?\***  
% of experts

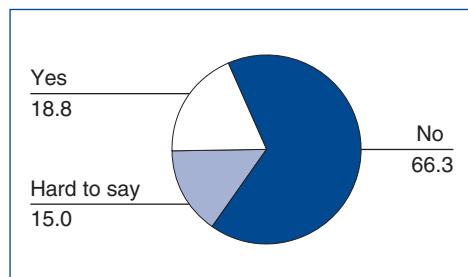
Force Russia to liberate those territories by politico-diplomatic means (jointly with partner countries)	80.0
Seek deployment of UN peacekeeping forces on those territories	72.5
Continue the Joint Forces Operation until complete liberation of the occupied territories	46.3
Freeze the conflict and arrange of a “border” along the separation line	10.0
Grant those territories a special status (autonomy) within Ukraine on the Russian conditions	5.0
Separate those territories from Ukraine	1.3
Hard to say	1.3

\* Experts were asked to select all acceptable answers.

**Do you support deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces on the temporarily occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions?**  
% of experts



**Should the deployment of the UN peacekeeping forces be coordinated with “DPR” and “LPR”?**  
% of experts



**How should the UN peacekeeping forces act on the temporarily occupied territories in Donetsk and Luhansk regions?**  
% of experts

Take under UN control all the occupied territory, including the segment of the Ukraine-Russian border	85.0
Stay along the contact line and provide protection for the OSCE mission observers	7.5
Provide protection for the OSCE mission observers on the whole occupied territory	1.3
Hard to say	6.3

# **“BANK OF PROPOSALS” FOR SETTLING (MINIMISING) THE CONFLICT**

The focus and purpose of the trilateral standing expert roundtable was initially set at the very first meeting of German, Ukrainian and Russian experts in Berlin on 11 March 2015. Its topic was “Resolving the conflict – how Ukraine, Russia, Germany and the EU should act”. Since then, the question of “how to act” has consistently determined the nature and outcomes of regular expert meetings.

The discussions covered various aspects of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict – from the dynamics of the geopolitical situation to the specifics of internal political processes in both countries. The experts discussed military and political, economic, energy, socio-cultural aspects of the conflict, also assessing public attitudes and sentiment. The traditional exchange of views was surely accompanied by constructive ideas and proposals for resolving/minimising the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

However, transforming this constructive element into some tangible shared product required time and more importantly, the willingness to hear the other side and to work in a parity compromise mode. The decisive role in establishing a creative and tolerant atmosphere to find common solutions was played by the heads of Kyiv and Moscow offices of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung – Gabrielle Baumann and Claudia Crawford respectively.

Certainly, some proposals from representatives of the conflicting parties were totally incompatible and mutually exclusive. Moreover, at the outset of the roundtable there were doubts about the need and possibility of developing something in common. And sharp disagreements in the positions of Ukrainian and Russian experts are still there. But the gradually emerging “bank of proposals” has offered some points of contact and shaped some lines of possible compromise. And this opened up an opportunity for developing a common position on settling the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv.

*The first package of proposals* by German, Ukrainian and Russian experts was prepared for the expert meeting “Trajectory of the conflict: the model of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the near-term outlook” (August 2017,

Cadenabbia, Italy). This package contained concrete proposals on the settlement (minimisation) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the following areas: (a) Russia-Ukraine relations in general; (b) the situation in Donbas; and (c) Crimea. (It should be emphasised that initially no one planned to elaborate some balanced, joint “plan of measures” to settle the conflict. Instead, the task was modest – to prepare a set of specific, situationally appropriate and realistic proposals by the expert communities of the three countries). These materials, along with expert interviews and relevant sociological studies, were collected in publication by the Razumkov Centre, produced with the support of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine.

Despite their “motley” nature, these proposals remain largely relevant and compelling, because the situation that they were intended to change unfortunately has not improved. Quite the contrary, the interstate confrontation and degradation of bilateral relations continues to aggravate, and for now one can hardly say that the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv has reached its bottom. Therefore, the value of situationally appropriate, mundane and specific proposals to reduce tensions between the two countries is growing.

Of course, one can argue about the reality of establishing direct bilateral dialogue in the near future, but this “postponed” issue is still on the agenda of bilateral relations. The same is true about the experts’ proposals on the mechanisms of strategic mediation of third countries, abandonment of the confrontation policy, preservation and continuation of humanitarian and expert contacts, prevention of actions that would exacerbate or expand the subject of the dispute. Expert recommendations for settling (minimising) the conflict in Donbas and addressing the “Crimean issue” remain relevant.

***The second package of proposals*** is linked to peacemaking in Donbas, and the experts appeal to this topic were quite logical and reasonable. The discussions on the deployment of the UN peacekeeping force in the conflict zone in Donbas continue on various international platforms and in different formats. Some countries have already announced the possibility of their participation in this mission. Parameters of the UN contingent’s mandate in the East of Ukraine is a major stumbling block.

A relevant package was prepared for the next expert meeting “Russian-Ukrainian conflict: prospects and parameters of the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas” (August 2018, Cadenabbia, Italy). The experts developed specific proposals on the parameters of the potential peacekeeping mission’s mandate in Donbas.

In particular, they determined (a) the goals, tasks and functions of a peace-keeping mission and (b) its composition, deployment area and timeframe. Despite certain variations in approaches, there is a noticeable identity in the positions of the Ukrainian, German and Russian experts. All discussion participants supported the idea of international peacemaking in Donbas. The relevant publication includes the above-mentioned proposals, expert interviews on this topic and the concept of the International Provisional Administration elaborated by the Ukrainian experts, as well as the results of sociological studies on Ukrainian-Russian relations.

*The third package of proposals* presented in this publication, has been prepared for the upcoming expert meeting “A conflict of Moscow and Kyiv: a window of opportunity, a *status quo* or a new round of escalation?” (August 2019, Italy). Members of the expert communities of the three countries offer practical measures necessary to prevent the escalation/minimise the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Taking into account new geopolitical settings and internal dynamics in Ukraine and Russia, these materials further supplement, develop and clarify previous expert developments on minimising the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

These recommendations are particularly relevant because the new Ukrainian government is currently (at the time of writing these materials) in the process of positioning itself in the Russian direction and searching for the innovative solutions for the Donbas situation. One could notice some changes in the official Kyiv’s foreign policy rhetoric, but fundamental changes in Ukrainian foreign policy course are quite unlikely. However, representatives of the new presidential Administration have already announced the need for new creative approaches to Donbas. Therefore, the materials in this publication are to help to at least “half-open” the window of opportunity for settling the conflict not only in the East of Ukraine, but also in general relations between Kyiv and Moscow.

Of course, all participants of the international expert group understand that the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv is wide-ranging and lengthy. Therefore, the materials presented in this publication are “for future reference”, because all conflicts are finite in time and space. We hope that this “bank of proposals” will be sought-after and beneficial to settling the conflict one way or another.

# PROPOSALS FOR THE SETTLEMENT (MINIMISATION) OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT<sup>1</sup>

*Based on the Interviews with Ukrainian,  
Russian and German Experts (June 2017)*

**A**s part of the interviews, the Ukrainian, Russian and German experts were asked to formulate concrete proposals and recommendations on the settlement (minimisation) of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the following areas: **(a) Russia-Ukraine relations as a whole; (b) The situation in Donbas; (c) Crimea.** It should be emphasised that it was never planned to prepare a balanced or a joint “plan of measures” for the conflict’s settlement. This is simply material for discussion.

Not surprisingly, some of the proposals are “incompatible” and mutually exclusive. However, it is encouraging that there are many points of overlap in this material, making it possible to assume the possibility of coming up with a joint position on issues in the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the long term.

Expert proposals are published in a generalised form.

## I. UKRAINE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

### **Ukrainian Experts**

❖ **The cessation of hostilities in Donbas.** This is the most fundamental and pivotal prerequisite for ending conflict/crisis tendencies in bilateral relations. With the end of the war in Donbas, tensions in Russia-Ukraine relations will gradually subside.

❖ **In the event of a sharp escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, strategic mediation efforts** on behalf of the United States, the European Union and Germany are necessary. It is also crucial to maintain a consistent negotiation regime.

<sup>1</sup> This material was first published in 2017 in the Razumkov Centre’s edition “Trajectory of the Conflict: the Model of Ukrainian-Russian Relations in the Near-Term Outlook”.

❖ **To resolve problematic trade and economic relations** between Ukraine and Russia, it is advisable to hold special negotiations between Ukraine and Russia with mediation of the WTO and/or the EU.

❖ **It is fundamentally important to create and maintain venues for contacts between representatives of the civil societies of Ukraine and Russia** on neutral territory with the support of the European Union, Germany and other EU countries. This will not produce any quick effects, but will function to preserve communication channels between representatives of Ukraine and Russia who are ready for a constructive dialogue, thus forming the potential for improving relations in the future. At such venues, it is reasonable to consider the implementation of joint tripartite projects (social, cultural, communication).

❖ **It is crucial that the relevant documents of the EU and NATO are transformed into concrete actions.** Without a change in Western approaches to Russia as a violator of international law, no settlement is possible. If the leading countries of the EU and NATO, Germany and France, found the courage to conclude that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is based on Russia's aggression, rather than some mythical "conflict in Ukraine", then they can proceed in deterring the aggressor. This is the basic condition for the conflict's settlement, as the parties to the conflict are of different sizes, where the stronger side is the aggressor. Therefore, a strong external impulse is needed to deter aggression.

❖ **The current regime of effective "peace enforcement" sanctions** (at the very least, the withdrawal of Russian troops from the occupied territories and the transfer of the border in the east under the control of Ukraine) should include:

- the substitution of Russian oil, oil products, gas and coal imports into the EU by energy carriers of a different origin;
- the EU refusal to consider Russian transit-free gas transport system projects (Nord Stream-2, the second thread of the Turkish Stream in the EU) until the Russian Federation returns to the status quo in implementing the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and Paris Charter of 1990, i.e. until it restores the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Georgia, and withdraws the Russian contingent from Moldova;
- freeze personal assets of the Kremlin oligarchy, including Putin's family members and "circle of friends" in the West.

**The topic of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, its support for illegal armed groups and occupation of Crimea, must invariably be on the agenda**

**of every international organisation and platform** where Russia is present, and limitations must be imposed on the Russian Federation's ability to pursue foreign policy interests. The costs of participation in the conflict will far exceed its benefits, and this will arouse Russia's interest in the settlement of the conflict.

**The issue of Crimea, and accordingly, the improvement of Russia-Ukraine relations are largely considered in the long-term.** Russia does not plan to fulfill its part of the Minsk Agreements. Under these conditions, serious steps to resolve the conflict in the short term (before the end of 2017) seem unlikely, and therefore this process is best viewed in the long-term.

### **Russian experts**

❖ **The prospect of improving Russia-Ukraine relations is only possible with the complete cessation of armed conflicts in Donbas,** which in turn may require a wider package agreement, most likely in the context and development of the Minsk Agreements. Bilateral relations allowing to agree and implement in practice the priority steps towards a political settlement is the most that can be expected in the foreseeable future. Further normalisation will then be made possible by the future generations of politicians in the two countries.

❖ **It is advisable to take the following steps:**

- Meeting of the presidents of Russia and Ukraine to discuss a wide range of issues, including settling the conflict in Eastern Ukraine to determine a forward-looking agenda;
- Mutually agreed (possibly, gradual) lifting of sanctions and restrictions introduced since 2014;
- Initiation (ideally by Russia and Ukraine jointly) of negotiations with the participation of EU member states, the Eurasian Economic Union and the European and Eurasian Economic Commissions with the aim of addressing specific trade and economic issues associated with the signing of agreements on association with the EU, and in the future, the harmonisation of compatible regulatory systems and administrative practices to allow the unfreezing of trade and economic relations, in particular, between Russia and Ukraine.

❖ **It is necessary to establish a direct bilateral dialogue and seek promising areas of cooperation.** To this end:

- Maintain a basic Agreement to activate direct lines of political dialogue between Moscow and Kyiv;

- Abandon the line on the curtailment of bilateral ties and, on the contrary, seek out promising areas of cooperation (not excluding energy and, possibly, nuclear options);
- Maintain and retain humanitarian contacts and exchanges to depoliticise cultural ties.

❖ **Ukraine and the Russian Federation should refrain from actions that would worsen or expand the subject of the dispute**, or complicate its resolution. A reasonable combination of both deterrence and easing of tensions in conflict zones is necessary.

❖ It is also necessary to establish an intra-European dialogue on legal issues, and conduct legal reforms in the EU with the subsequent reform of international judicial institutions. In doing so, a decisive step would be taken to stimulate the negotiation process and pre-trial settlement of disputes. Nihilism in European legal systems must be stopped.

❖ **Propaganda must be fought against**, and there must be developed, with the help of the international journalistic community, a self-regulating organisation entitled to make moral and ethical assessments on specific media actions.

❖ **There is an acute need for institutions of people's diplomacy**. The prosecution of so-called “foreign agents” in Russia has severely limited the state’s ability to create tools for interaction at the non-governmental level. The cessation of the persecution of such organisations, the abolition of current restrictions and comprehensive support are necessary conditions for moving beyond the current Russia-Ukraine crisis.

❖ **There is a need to seek out and implement major international investment projects** with the joint participation of European, Russian and Ukrainian companies: positive experiences in economic interaction opens the way to expanding cooperation both at the state level and for humanitarian projects.

❖ Berlin and Paris will not put forward any additional requirements for Ukraine, and at the same time they will not reconsider Russia’s role in the negotiation process. The West is currently not ready to approve any form of a peace-keeping mission. **In these conditions, the crisis will continue until Moscow and Kyiv are ready to start a real search for its resolution. This context of conflict has the potential to last for years to come.**

## **German Experts**

❖ **The potential for improving Russia-Ukraine relations is possible only in a pan-European context**, and in terms of bilateral contacts, this is hardly an option in the foreseeable future.

❖ **Ukraine needs to develop a clear and consistent position on a number of issues related to its relations with both Russia, and the occupied territories.**

Are the occupied areas of Donbas becoming more and more estranged from the rest of Ukraine, as is currently happening, or is there another model that can be followed, according to which links between these areas and the rest of the country are both encouraged and welcomed?

❖ How exactly is Russia refusing to recognise its illegal annexation of Crimea? What are the consequences for the population of the peninsula? How can Ukraine's attitude towards Russia be characterised? What does this mean for the degree and type of interaction (political, economic, social) between the two countries (and, accordingly, their citizens)? Answers to these questions from the Ukrainian government have often been unclear and contradictory. Developing a clear position and making it known to Ukrainians and their external partners will yield better results than the current incomprehensible and often reactionary approach.

❖ **A resolution of the conflict (beyond Ukraine's capitulation) is not yet visible. In the coming years, it is important to build and develop relations around the conflict,** for which the experience of detente policies might prove useful. There are possibilities to develop economic, political, cultural and human relations by professing different strategic principles and values. This does not contradict the sanctions that the West must do their part to continue in the future. Here, Ukraine is in a different situation compared to the EU, as Russia does not depend on Ukraine economically, therefore making a cessation of relations with Russia unable to serve the functions of traditional "pressure".

❖ **Greater flexibility in the application of economic sanction tools is needed.** The EU and/or its member states have the ability to publicly declare their potential reaction to a further deterioration or substantial improvement in Donbas. The Moscow elite must receive clear signals on the type, scope and range of economic and financial penalties or rewards it might expect from certain types of Russian behaviour in Ukraine.

**It is necessary to increase the security of Ukraine** by increasing political, economic and material support for Kyiv. This should include, among other things, free insurance against the political risks of foreign and domestic direct investment, especially in Eastern and Southern Ukraine, for example, through the World Bank's Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency. Direct investments will not only counteract the Russian strategy of depression, but also increase the possible price of future Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine.

❖ **The Ukrainian army should be provided with Western, high-tech lethal weapons**, electronic equipment and the appropriate training, which would make Ukraine more protected from Russian cyber attacks, aviation, cruise missiles, landing ships and modern tanks. This will serve as a deterrent to the Kremlin, and increase the military risks and political costs of possible further advances of Moscow in Donbas or elsewhere.

❖ **The West will have to seriously consider creating additional security structures for Eastern Europe**, especially with regard to countries of the current gray zone, that is, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia. Without a comprehensive solution to the security problems of Chisinau, Kyiv and Tbilisi, there will be no lasting stability, sustainable peace and economic prosperity along the eastern borders of the EU and NATO.

❖ **The EU and NATO should think about alternative ways to promote the international integration of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine.** One model of a possible solution is the Agreement “On Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support between Turkey and Azerbaijan”, signed in 2010. In Article 2 of this document, both sides agreed on “quick mutual assistance” in the event of an armed attack by a third party, which includes “the use of military means and capabilities”. NATO can signal to its eastern member states that they will be entitled to enter into similar agreements with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, if they so wish. Ideally, this could lead to the creation of a new multilateral coalition for security in Eastern Europe.

❖ **The USA could take additional actions in support of Ukraine and Georgia** through its main programme of non-NATO allies. In the case of Ukraine, it was possible to imagine, for example, the specific security guarantees Washington and London gave to Kyiv in the Budapest Memorandum.

❖ **Integration will increase the influence of the West in Ukraine** and make the country more appealing for international investors. In combination with the gradual implementation of the now fully ratified Ukraine – European Union Association Agreement, the above measures will help make Ukraine’s future a success. Such progress will be measurable outside mainland Ukraine, primarily in Crimea, the occupied territories of Donbas, and also in Russia. The results of Ukraine’s successful economic and political development will create prerequisites for restoring the territorial integrity of the country, and help begin Russia-Ukraine reconciliation.

## II. THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS

### **Ukrainian Experts**

- ❖ In line with the Minsk and Normandy formats, instead of discussing a broad agenda, it is necessary to concentrate the negotiation process on specifically the most acute problems. In particular, the de-escalation of hostilities in the hottest spots of conflict (Avdeevka, Maryinka, Shirokino), the mutually agreed (under the control of the SCKK and OSCE SMM) withdrawal of forces and assets from both sides in the village of Luhansk, ensuring the safe operation of infrastructure facilities (Donetsk filtering station, etc.) serving territories on both sides of the line of demarcation, the creation of a rapid reaction system to issues in the activities of OSCE SMM patrols, and others.
- ❖ In negotiations on the exchange of prisoners and hostages, it may be worth changing the very paradigm of exchange. Instead of exchanging everyone for everyone, although it is stipulated as such by the Minsk Agreements, there should be a transition to a stage-by-stage exchange of individual groups on the agreed lists (which, in fact, has been happening over the past two years).
- ❖ It is advisable to strengthen the relationship between Normandy and Minsk format negotiations at the level of advisers to the leaders of Normandy format states and individual working groups.
- ❖ Create an informal non-governmental expert group (composed of authoritative experts of the four Normandy format countries) under the auspices of Germany and France for brainstorming and working out alternative proposals on the Roadmap for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, as well as on resolving the most acute problems in the conflict zone. Such a group will be more free to seek various compromise proposals than the official representatives of the four countries.
- ❖ Concentrate efforts on “freezing” the conflict in Donbas. Isolate the first three points of the Minsk Agreements (ceasefire, arms withdrawal and the effective monitoring of the implementation of these actions by the parties). Arrange these items in a separate Agreement (Memorandum) on armistice and coordinate in the Normandy format.
- ❖ Promote the internationalisation of the process of settling the conflict in Donbas – i.e., connect various international players to the peacekeeping process using the available international mechanisms and platforms. Expand the presence of missions from the UN, OSCE, PACE, EU, Red Cross, Reporters Without Borders and international human rights and humanitarian organisations in Donbas.

❖ **Initiate the convocation of an authoritative international conference (possibly under the aegis of the UN) on peacemaking in Donbas.** Its participants could be the representatives of state bodies from stakeholding countries, international organisations and non-governmental structures.

❖ **The preliminary steps to resolve the conflict should be as follows:**

- “Freezing” the conflict by a ceasefire;
- Admission of international observers (OSCE, UN, EU) to the neutral zone;
- Admission of international observers to the uncontrolled sections of the border;
- Admission of international observers to the entire territory of the *ORDLO*, and the introduction there of the interim international administration and transitional justice regime.

❖ **Ukraine needs to preserve interpersonal contacts with temporarily occupied territories** as much as possible, and provide technological access to Ukrainian information in those areas. These factors will ensure conditions for the peaceful restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine in the future. Ukraine must review its social and humanitarian policies with a view to keep in as much touch as possible with the population in the uncontrolled territories (offer substantial assistance to those wishing to leave the “LPR” and “DPR”; benefits in education and medicine, creation of logistics and transport hubs in the controlled and frontline territory, expansion of opportunities for obtaining administrative services in the controlled territory).

❖ **Promote the provision of safe access for international organisations to the territory of *ORDLO*** to provide humanitarian assistance, promote the protection of human rights and improve the socio-economic situation of the local population.

❖ **Initiate the revision of the Minsk Agreements within the framework of the Normandy format,** since many of its provisions do not correspond to current realities (in particular, regarding the holding of elections without restoring control over the Russia-Ukraine border, which does not allow guaranteeing the security of their conduct). Draw up an appropriate protocol for the meeting of the leaders of the Normandy group with an annex in the form of a clearly defined and timed roadmap for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

- ❖ Within the framework of the OSCE/ODIHR, develop an algorithm for assessing the possibility of holding free, democratic, safe elections in **ORDLO**, allowing for their monitoring, including on the basis of reports from the OSCE SMM and other international organisations, and regular relevant reports.
- ❖ Abandon the idea of expanding the current format of negotiations – at least, the Normandy format – until new circumstances form that signal Russia's enhanced interest in negotiations.
- ❖ Not remove the issue of a special peacekeeping mission from the agenda. Even if there is no hope for the approval of such a mission in the short term, insisting on its necessity is beneficial to Ukraine because it is: a) an informational occasion related to an unresolved conflict; b) a reminder of the issues surrounding the implementation of the Minsk Agreements and a kind of safeguard against pressure on Ukraine to carry out certain political actions before ensuring security; c) preparation for the possible use of the mission in the future, as the conflict is long-term in nature, and discussions over the format and mandate of the mission will take years.
- ❖ To continue the Security First policy. Not agree to a version of the Roadmap that combines the concurrent implementation of both items of military de-escalation and political regulations.
- ❖ Intensify activities aimed at the declaration of “DPR” and “LPR” as terrorist organisations at the international level, which will either force the Russian Federation to abandon the support of terrorist organisations, or rank it among the states that support terrorism.
- ❖ It is necessary to turn the conflict in Donbas into a problem for Russia. To this end, Ukraine should minimise damage to its territory and infrastructure from the influence of the occupied territories and the Russian presence there. An effective internal policy towards the occupied territories and the use of international legal mechanisms to influence Russia can make this conflict unprofitable for Moscow.
- ❖ Raise the price of Russia's aggressive policy by expanding Ukraine's targeted sanctions and economic restrictions, and increasing international pressure on Russian authorities by ignoring international events held by Russia and gradually restricting economic cooperation with Russia.

## Russian Experts

- ❖ **The most promising plan is to restore this region of Ukraine in cooperation with the European Union.** The cessation of hostilities depends on the political will of Kyiv and Moscow.
- ❖ **Organise international conferences on both Crimea and Donbas.** At the same time, the conflict in Donbas can be considered in a broader context of frozen conflicts on the territory of the former USSR, which in many respects are similar in nature.
- ❖ **Expand the international presence in the conflict zone.** This would help ensure the transparency and predictability of the actions of the parties. The existing OSCE Special Monitoring Mission carries out important work, but does not have the mandate and resources to implement the full range of tasks an international staff could undertake, whether under the flag of the OSCE or the UN. Such tasks could include full-fledged control over and the prevention of incidents on the contact line and the section of the border uncontrolled by Kyiv, ensuring public safety, administrative management and compliance with election procedures in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.
- ❖ **Start a real dialogue between Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk** on the implementation of the Minsk Agreements in their entirety in the subgroups of the Tripartite Contact Group.
- ❖ **To intensify the activities of the Joint Centre on Control and Coordination,** conferring it broad powers to ensure a ceasefire in the conflict zone in the East of Ukraine.
- ❖ **Kyiv must stop its anti-terrorist operation and develop a realistic national reintegration strategy** (taking into account the Minsk Agreements). Ensure demilitarisation of the conflict, not only measures to separate the parties and the ceasefire (demilitarisation involves a comprehensive solution to issues related to the status and level of the armed groups of parties to the conflict, amnesty, international control, etc.). **The conflict cannot be resolved without Kyiv's consent to a direct dialogue with "DPR" and "LPR".**

## German experts

- ❖ **Progress (even incremental) should take place squarely within the framework of the Minsk Agreements.** Withdrawal from these agreements and the search for new approaches will take too much time, and it is unclear what the result will be.
- ❖ **The first step in resolving the conflict must be "humanitarian in nature", i.e. it is necessary to put an end to the violence.** This is possible only if the separatists are involved in the negotiations, but this does not mean that responsibility will be deferred from Moscow. All this is known from the lessons of

history: peace can only be achieved if criminals, or even terrorists, who are ready to take responsibility, are involved in the negotiation process. For the Ukrainian side, this is a serious political problem, which it must solve in its own interests.

❖ **The second difficult step can be implemented, apparently, only in stages. This means overcoming the “deadlock effect”, i.e., the mutual blockade between the creation of political prerequisites for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements on the part of Ukraine – we mean here the adoption of special electoral legislation for the occupied territories, the amnesty law, and the implementation of the constitutional reform of decentralisation – and the implementation of security agreements on the part of the separatists and Russia. Ukraine could create constitutional and legal and legislative prerequisites, the implementation of which will be carried out on the condition that necessary agreements on security assurance by the separatists and Russia are fulfilled. This is a difficult step for Ukraine, but in this case it will already be possible to demand action from Russia and the separatists, and Ukraine will not have to provide anything more.**

❖ **Simultaneously negotiate the next steps**, i.e., the formation of Minsk-3. At the same time, special responsibility will be taken by the international community, first and foremost Europeans. Donbas should be placed under the strict international control with the UN mandate to ensure free and democratic local elections with the participation of observers in the occupied areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, as well as a peaceful settlement in the region and its restoration.

❖ **It is also necessary to accelerate at the same time the political processes contributing to the return of political responsibility in Ukraine for Donbas within the framework of the federal state in the conditions of decentralisation.** Such steps inevitably involve the fulfillment of a number of conditions. This includes Russia's movement away from its goal of creating a “frozen conflict” in close vicinity to itself and its destabilisation of Ukraine, Ukraine's serious readiness to make compromises, which is possible only if a high level of internal stability is achieved, as well as the Europeans' acceptance of the great responsibility in their work and implementation of Minsk-3, including the use of significant resources for military, police, economic and humanitarian purposes.

❖ **It is necessary to maintain the most contact and connections with Donbas as possible.** Areas on the border of occupied territories should be developed economically and culturally to become a positive example for the population of the occupied part (jobs, medical security, Ukrainian passports). All this will put pressure on Russia and its puppet entities. They will either have to improve living conditions in the occupied regions (causing dissatisfaction among people in the other regions of Russia), or accept as a given that the people of the “People's Republics” will begin to orient towards the West – or build a wall that would block the possibility of travel to the free areas of Ukraine. All these options are unappealing for Russia, as they only increase – in the material and political sense – the price of their policy of occupation.

### III. CRIMEA

#### **Ukrainian Experts**

- ❖ Ukraine must continuously promote the topic of the occupation of Crimea on the agenda of international organisations, seek the release of political prisoners in Crimea and Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, and raise the issue of human rights violations in occupied Crimea.
- ❖ The sanction regime in relation to occupied Crimea should be maintained further, making full-fledged economic and commercial activities impossible on the peninsula.
- ❖ The Ukrainian side should prepare and file suit in international court instances in compensation for material damages caused by Russia to Ukraine because of their occupation of Crimea, with the further possibility of reimbursing damage at the expense of Russian assets abroad.
- ❖ Insist on providing access to international organisations (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE) to occupied Crimea in order to monitor the observance of human rights.
- ❖ Initiate the creation of the international Crimean Forum (including politicians, public figures of Ukraine, representatives of various countries and international organisations) that would support attention to the problem of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, monitor the situation in Crimea regarding human rights violations, the militarisation of the peninsula and other problems, and also influence the international public opinion on Crimean issues.
- ❖ Create a Ukrainian-Russian working group to include well-known human rights defenders, which will be linked to international human rights organisations for prompt responses to problematic situations related to the persecution of Ukrainian and Crimean-Tatar activists in Crimea.

#### **Russian Experts**

- ❖ It is advisable not to consider the issue of Crimea in conjunction with Donbas, as this intensifies the crisis and complicates the settlement process in eastern Ukraine. It is necessary to establish channels for pragmatic cooperation between the concerned departments of Russia and Ukraine on such issues as cross-border crime, financial crimes, etc.
- ❖ The positions of Russia, Ukraine and most countries around the world on the issue of Crimea will remain unchanged. In these conditions, the minimisation of conflict potential implies limiting military activity in the region, as well as creating understandable conditions for communication between people

**and economic activities.** Even in the atmosphere of continuing tension in Russia-Ukraine relations, such a result is potentially achievable.

❖ **The return of Crimea to Ukraine in the long term is not an option**, and the topic is excluded from the Russian agenda. The parties can agree only on a certain modus vivendi, proceeding from the fact that Ukraine (like the international community in its majority) does not recognise the inclusion of Crimea and Sevastopol in Russia de jure, but will de facto proceed from the fact that Crimea is controlled by Russia.

❖ **Ensure the coordination of military de-escalation and transparency measures in the Black Sea region** that do not prejudice the status of Crimea. The implementation of this point will require broader agreements between Russia and NATO.

❖ **The Crimean problem cannot be solved in our current historical context;** it can only be solved in the future within the framework of an integration project, the contours of which are not yet visible.

### **German Experts**

❖ **The actions of the Russian Federation contradicting the norms of international law will not find international recognition.** At the same time, in the medium term, there is no mutually acceptable solution based on international law and international obligations. But these circumstance should not lead to the blocking of all other peacekeeping efforts, for example, in Donbas. One example is the political compromise on the German Question in the 1970s. The conflicting parties reflect the points on which they cannot reach agreement in the relevant document, but at the same time declare their readiness to seek and find all possible ways for cooperation. **Therefore, in terms of the Crimea question, there must be patience and endurance, and we must not lost sight of the German example as an incentive bestowing confidence.**

❖ The annexation of Crimea is a violation of the norms of the Final Act of the CSCE of 1975. The international community cannot agree with this development of events, and will never capitulate on this stance. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that most of the people living in Crimea today support the present condition. However bitter this may sound, **Crimea will be “lost” for a long period to come, i.e., it will remain in the sphere of Russian influence as part of the Russian state.** In the event of the collapse or reorganisation of the latter, which in the next 20 years cannot be ruled out, the cards in the deck will be reshuffled once again. But until then, serious changes are unlikely to occur in Crimea. **Therefore, there is no use wasting energy on attempts to reintegrate this territory.** But actions that can be regarded as unfriendly towards the residents of Crimea still must be prohibited.

# PARAMETERS OF THE UN PEACEKEEPING MISSION IN DONBASS: EXPERT INTERVIEWS<sup>2</sup>

*Summary of Interviews with German, Ukrainian and Russian Experts  
to be Discussed at the 8<sup>th</sup> Expert Meeting (August 2018)*

Discussions on the UN peacekeeping mission to Donbass became practical and take place on different platforms and in different formats. This topic has been discussed during Walker-Surkov meetings and the talks continue in the Normandy format. A number of countries have already spoken about the possibility of their participation in this mission. Yet, Ukraine and Russia's positions are drastically different.

What are today's chances of blue helmets appearing in Eastern Ukraine? How do we reach a compromise on the mandate for a possible peacekeeping mission? Will this mission be a mean to help settle the conflict or an instrument for freezing it?

In interviews, German, Ukrainian and Russian experts were asked to define certain parameters of the potential UN peacekeeping mission to Donbas, namely: **(a) goals, tasks and functions of a peacekeeping mission; (b) composition, deployment area and timeframe.**

But the purpose of the publication was not to prepare a single "peacekeeping solution" for Eastern Ukraine but to present the materials for discussion at a regular 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of experts from Germany, Ukraine and Russia. Therefore, some proposals are incompatible and mutually exclusive.

However, it is encouraging to see common points in the opinions of experts from the three countries, which gives reasons to believe that developing a joint position on the problem of conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine is viable.

Summaries of expert proposals are presented below.

<sup>2</sup> This material was first published in 2018 in the Razumkov Centre's edition "Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: Prospects and Parameters of UN Peacekeeping Mission in Donbass".

## 1. GOALS, TASKS AND FUNCTIONS OF THE PEACEKEEPING MISSION

### GERMAN EXPERTS

❖ The main objective of the mission is to ensure control and support for the peace process in Donbass in cooperation with the OSCE and in coordination with Ukrainian state institutions in line with Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

Mission tasks and functions:

- Support the OSCE mission in Ukraine in monitoring the situation;
- Control and sustain the ceasefire regime, first of all, along the line of separation;
- Ensure disengagement of the conflicting parties on both sides of the contact line;
- Support and control withdrawal of heavy weapons according to Minsk Agreements, as well as ensure monitoring and control of the pre-determined areas of forces concentration;
- Ensure dissemination and disarmament of all illegal armed groups in the conflict area;
- Provide support to the OSCE observers and in the process of withdrawal of all foreign armed forces, military formations and mercenaries from the conflict area;
- Establish security throughout all of the conflict area in a coordinated effort of the OSCE mission and the Armed Forces of Ukraine;
- Ensure support for the units of Ukraine's State Border Guard Service in restoring full control over the border with Russia in close cooperation with the UN mission;
- Assist in the release and exchange of all hostages and prisoners on all sides of the conflict;
- Ensure support and execution of unimpeded access, supply, storage and distribution of humanitarian aid in the conflict area;
- Assist in restoring the Ukrainian authority, especially of law enforcement agencies, as well as independent judicial authorities in Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts, on the basis of the constitutional reform and decentralisation in these regions;
- Provide support in preparation for local elections and their implementation in close cooperation with the Ukrainian institutions and OSCE.

❖ The first task of the mission is to ensure the ceasefire regime, withdrawal of heavy weapons and Russian troops, mercenaries and their weapons. In the territory controlled by the separatists, the mission should assume all executive government functions (administration, police, court, radio, television and public information), and after that – ensure formation of new institutions subordinate to representative local government, and provide them with the necessary support.

It is necessary to organise elections, ensure the security of such elections – from registration of parties and candidates to vote counting. This is a rather broad mission mandate. There is a risk of non-recognition of results. Ukraine will not accept a mission aimed only at “changing the label” of today’s “people’s republics”, their authorities and leadership. As for Russia, it is strongly against the re-integration of territories into Ukraine, especially the deployment of Ukrainian security forces. But particularly because local “security forces” are nothing more than “mafia with AK-74 in their hands”, security issues cannot be entrusted to anyone local. Therefore, security forces should get really broad powers, the so-called “broad mandate”.

❖ The goal of the mission is to make sure that all parties (Ukraine, Russia, separatists) comply with security-related provisions of the Minsk Agreements (for instance, stable ceasefire, real withdrawal of heavy weapons), in order to prepare for the so-called political provisions of the agreements, such as conducting elections in the occupied territories in line with Ukrainian legislation and OSCE standards.

❖ There will be no peacekeeping mission in Donbass – a mission for Donbass at most. It is possible only within the framework of an integrated package of agreements on the future relations between the EU and Russia, since the US is no longer a predictable actor. In any case, the EU’s external policy is weak, especially in its relations with Russia and due to the lack of unity in the EU’s Russia policy. As long as the situation remains like this, Vladimir Putin will not be willing to make any compromises, as he is getting more with his “divide and rule” strategy, while paying less.

## UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

❖ The peacekeeping mission in Donbass has to be an integrated mission that, in addition to the military, includes a police and civil administration components as well. This means the deployment of a multi-task UN International Provisional Administration (IPA) to Donbass that will be able to ensure full de-escalation in the conflict area and accelerate conflict resolution.

**The ultimate goal of the IPA will be the *re-integration* of the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts into Ukraine.** The re-integration means implementing a complex of measures aimed at reinstating Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including (in line with 2015 Minsk Package of Measures):

- ensuring a stable security regime (complete ceasefire, demilitarisation of all illegal armed groups on the occupied territory, demining, restoring control over the Ukrainian border in the occupied territory);
  - establishing a legal framework for socio-economic activity in the occupied territories in line with Ukrainian legislation;
  - reinstatement of Ukrainian government institutions on the occupied territories, support of justice processes, transitional justice and reconciliation in line with Ukrainian legislation;
  - ensuring the functioning of media (television, newspapers, radio, Internet media) in line with Ukrainian legislation;
  - organising legitimate elections to local self-government authorities in the occupied territories in line with Ukrainian legislation.
- ❖ The purpose of the peacekeeping mission is to facilitate full resolution of the military-political conflict in Donbass. According to UN terminology, this should be a peacekeeping operation with the task of ceasefire facilitation.

The tasks of the peacekeeping mission are: to facilitate the suspension of hostilities in the conflict area (ensure control over truce and ceasefire conditions execution); disengage conflicting parties; assist in the withdrawal of heavy weapons, as well as foreign and all illegal armed formations from the conflict area; ensure the disarmament of all illegal armed formations in the conflict area; ensure control over the currently uncontrolled sections of the Russia-Ukraine border; assist in mine clearance operations in the conflict area; carry out humanitarian operations (if necessary); assist in the work of the International Provisional Administration on organising and holding local elections in the conflict area, restoring and maintaining order (until Ukraine's full sovereignty over the territories in the conflict area is restored); ensure security in the conflict area during the transitional period (until Ukraine's full sovereignty over the territories in the conflict area is restored, including during preparations and holding of local elections in certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts), i.e., the execution of police duties.

❖ The UN peacekeeping mission to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict is possible only if Russia ceases to deny its obvious participation in it. Making a decision upon the mission's mandate, the UN should take into account its experience of previous and ongoing missions, but the focus should be on the unique nature of this artificial conflict orchestrated by a nuclear state – a permanent member of the UN Security Council – without any real reasons.

The goal of the mission should be the cessation of hostilities between Ukrainian and Russian forces in order to restore peace, security, law and order and the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

The list of tasks for the mission should include: prevent the resumption of hostilities and ensure ceasefire observance; demilitarise the conflict zone; ensure public safety and the rule of law on the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts temporarily uncontrolled by the Ukrainian government; create secure conditions and support the formation of international civilian presence, interim administration, humanitarian and other missions; provide assistance in demining activities; execute border control functions regarding the section of the Russia-Ukraine border temporarily uncontrolled by Ukraine; together with Ukrainian border guards, ensure control over the contact line until it ceases to exist; ensure freedom of movement for own forces, international civilian presence and international organisations' staff; create conditions to prepare for and conduct elections to local bodies of power according to Ukrainian law; execute main administrative functions on the temporary basis, until the Ukrainian government and the lawfully elected local authorities resume control of their territories; provide assistance in restoring key infrastructure facilities.

The mission's function should be to invest maximum effort in restoring law and order (in line with Ukrainian legislation), as well as to ensure the restoration of regular life for civilian population on the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts temporarily uncontrolled by the Ukrainian government.

❖ Ukraine and the EU countries need the UN peacekeeping mission to bring peace and security to Eastern Ukraine. In order to achieve this, conditions should be created for complete resolution of the conflict: fundamental human rights and freedoms should be guaranteed, and preconditions for full re-integration in the social, humanitarian and economic sectors – ensured. Elections and other elements of political life in the occupied territories will become possible only after these territories are back under Ukraine's legal and humanitarian framework. Otherwise, there is a risk of legitimising the existing occupation authorities and the order established by them, which will make the eruption of a new conflict just a matter of time.

## RUSSIAN EXPERTS

❖ A real resolution of the situation in the East of Ukraine is impossible without a full-fledged peacekeeping mission with a mandate extending over the entire territory of Donbass.

❖ The goal of the mission is to support the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Mission tasks are:

- to support the ceasefire regime;
- to ensure smooth operation of the OSCE mission;
- to help ensure safety of civilian population (the police component);
- after elections are held and the main provisions of the Minsk Agreements are implemented, to assist in mine clearance of the conflict area, withdrawal of heavy weapons, ammunition.

❖ The peacekeeping operation is intended to facilitate the implementation of the Minsk Agreements, to ensure the cessation of armed clashes in the conflict zone. Not to freeze the conflict, but to facilitate its resolution.

As a first step, peacekeeping forces should be deployed on both sides of the contact line in the safety zone, from which heavy weapons are to be withdrawn in accordance with the Minsk Agreements.

❖ In UN practices, an official approval of the operation's mandate is required from "DPR" and "LPR", as well as reaching standard agreements with them, in particular, on the issues of safety of international staff, cooperation in the course of operation deployment and execution of its mandate. The UN peacekeeping doctrine requires approval of all parties. Without signing a standard memorandum with representatives of "DPR" and "LPR" (and Ukraine), no state will send its forces into the conflict zone.

❖ Besides deploying a peacekeeping mission to consolidate the ceasefire regime, it would be appropriate to ensure broader international presence in the Eastern Ukraine to provide assistance in resolving the political aspects of the Minsk Agreements (apart from those that depend exclusively on Kyiv, including the adoption of relevant laws and constitutional acts). The best option is a hybrid mission: a multicomponent international presence with division of duties between different international organisations, each solving their specific tasks.

❖ The peacekeeping mission must have the necessary and sufficient number of staff and armaments to carry out its mandate. Because its mandate should allow for a limited use of force, such operation can only be deployed by the decision of the UN Security Council. The mission must have the right and possibility to end violations of the ceasefire conditions on any side, prevent the return of heavy weapons into the safety zone, ensure the safety of civilians and critical infrastructure facilities, suppress attempts to prevent it from fulfilling its mandate.

❖ As the situation in the safety zone stabilises, the peacekeeping mission's geographical scope could be gradually expanded. It would be reasonable to synchronise such expansion with introduction of a larger international presence to serve as an international provisional administration and assist in implementing the political aspects of the Minsk Agreements.

❖ The different stages of expanding the geographical scope of the peacekeeping mission must at the same time be synchronised with phased implementation of political provisions of the Minsk Agreements. It is important that the sequence of mission deployment steps, up to the establishment of control over the Russia-Ukraine border in the conflict area, as well as specific criteria (military and political) of transitioning between stages are identified in the UN Security Council decision at once, without requiring any other special decisions of the SC. Expanding the peacekeeping operation area would allow to establish control over the Russia-Ukraine border after the elections and complete the formation of legitimate government agencies in the East of Ukraine.

❖ Such presence would be required for the entire special status period in separate regions of Eastern Ukraine. Its purpose is to coordinate the work of different international structures aimed at solving post-conflict reconstruction tasks, including preparation for elections and elections themselves, formation of legitimate government institutions, return of refugees and internally displaced persons, law enforcement, ensuring independent justice, economic recovery, delivery of humanitarian aid, re-integration of areas caught in the conflict zone into Ukraine and other tasks.

❖ The best scenario for expanding international presence in the conflict area involves various organisations, including the UN (peacekeepers), OSCE (SMM, ODIHR and, possibly, additional missions), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, International Committee of the Red Cross and others. In this situation, the main task will be to coordinate the work of different organisations. Given that the UN and OSCE missions will be the basis of

international presence in the conflict zone, it is recommended that the positions of the special representative of the UN Secretary-General and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office be united into one.

❖ The UN peacekeeping mission should not undermine or blur the boundaries of the Minsk process, it can only be organised in the framework of Minsk Agreements in order to support their full execution. This is why the Russian draft resolution submitted to the Security Council for consideration talks about deploying a mission to ensure the security of the OSCE monitors directly in the conflict zone, along the contact line.

❖ At the same time, parties could consider a compromise: adopting the Russian proposal, but with the prospect of further gradual mandate expansion – its geographical scope, political goals and practical tasks. If such actions on the Russian part were indeed possible, it would be on the terms that Kyiv strongly refuses to accept – recognising Donbass as a party to the conflict. Putin's position is perfectly clear and the Kremlin will be persistent in upholding it: it is necessary to have representatives of Kyiv government and representatives of the unrecognised republics sit down at the negotiating table. The conflict resolution is impossible without a direct dialogue between the conflicting parties.

## GERMAN EXPERTS

### 2. COMPOSITION, DEPLOYMENT AREA AND PERIOD OF OPERATION

❖ The mission should be comprised of military units – land and air forces, with technical means for reconnaissance and surveillance; police forces, law enforcement and administrative personnel (without an executive mandate, to support local Ukrainian agencies).

Such units are to be staffed by European and Asian countries (mainly, by the EU countries, Russia's neighbouring countries, for instance, Belarus and Central Asian countries, but not by Russia!). The mission should be managed from the UN headquarters, with Germany and/or France forming the core of the management body with broad Russian representation.

Operation territory should cover Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts entirely, first of all, along the line of division. As with all peacekeeping missions, it is difficult to give a prognosis regarding its period of operation, but at least three years.

❖ The mandate should cover the entire territory of “DPR”/“LPR”, Russia-Ukraine border, as well as monitoring territory 30 kilometres from the frontline on the Ukrainian side. Mission size – 20-60 thousand people of regular armed forces, including heavy mechanised divisions and well-armed militarised police units. Initially, there should be more military and less police, in time – vice versa. The mission should also include investigators, prosecutors, judges, administrative and economic experts, etc.

Countries that can potentially provide their units are preferably to include neutral and non-aligned states. But due to language requirements, this will be limited to post-Soviet and post-communist countries. An agreement could be reached between NATO and CSTO (Belarus and Kazakhstan). In case of Belarussian and Kazakh contingents, it would be necessary to ensure their regular territorial rotation in order to prevent them from building ties with local organised crime groups.

❖ The mission must cover the entire area of the occupied territories, as well as the areas adjacent to the contact line on the part of the territory controlled by the Ukrainian government. Members of the mission are to be armed and to have the right to access any buildings or areas in order to establish the fact and the extent of implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The mission is to be headed by a country that is neither a NATO, Eurasian Economic Union, nor the Collective Security Treaty Organisation member. For example, Sweden or Austria. Candidates for other mission members are proposed by the heading country, which holds consultations with other future participant countries, and coordinates such decisions with the leadership of the Ukrainian and Russian states. Mission’s duration – two years, with the possibility of extension if approved by all parties.

## UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

❖ It is proposed that the mandate of the peacekeeping mission extend over the entire occupied territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (including the section of the Russia-Ukraine border uncontrolled by Ukraine) and be effective until all tasks for these territories’ re-integration have been accomplished. This said, the timeframe for each stage of mission’s tasks implementation is to remain flexible and without prior definition. The mission should be headed by one of the neutral countries with the necessary experience – possibly, Finland, Austria or Sweden. It is expected that the mission will also include mainly neutral and non-aligned countries that are geographically remote from the military conflict area in Donbass,

and do not have a conflict of interest in this situation. An important condition in determining the mission's composition is that representatives of Ukraine's neighbouring states are not part of the military or police contingent of the international provisional administration in Donbass, and their presence within any civil or economic administration body cannot exceed 50%.

Experts estimate that in case of mission's success, the process can take from 3 to 5 years.

❖ The mission should include representatives of states with experience of participation in peacekeeping operations. As a party to the conflict, Russia cannot be part of the mission. Since Russia insists that there should be no representatives of NATO countries in the mission, – there should neither be representatives of CSTO member states and countries that are Russia's military allies.

Mission territory should include separate regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts currently uncontrolled by the Ukrainian government that represent the conflict zone; sections of Russia-Ukraine border in the conflict area uncontrolled by Ukraine; territory along the contact line that is controlled by the Ukrainian government and that is part of the agreement on the withdrawal of heavy and medium weapons.

Mission length is to be determined by the time necessary to achieve the set goals and the period of work of the international provisional administration, – until Ukraine's full sovereignty over the separate territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts is restored. The exact term will be determined by the mission mandate depending on the timeline for execution of its tasks.

❖ The mission should consist of contingents from United Nations member states, with the exception of parties to the conflict – Russia and Ukraine, as well as Russia's allies in the CSTO. The length of the UN peacekeeping mission's mandate should be set at 1 year with the possibility of annual extension. The conditions for mandate extension should be determined by mission's progress and the achievement of tasks assigned to it. UN mission territory should cover separate parts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts that remain uncontrolled by the Ukrainian government.

❖ Ukraine will accept a peacekeeping contingent that does not contain troops from Russia and its military allies – CSTO member states. Based on the territory, the proposed mission size is 20 thousand people. The time frame for a peacekeeping

mission has to be connected with Ukraine's exit strategy – Kyiv's definition of political conditions and security markers that indicate the fulfilment of the mission's mandate. It is quite possible that the peacekeeping mission's presence on the territories uncontrolled by Kyiv will be required for a fairly long period – buffer time – to overcome and eliminate the negative and traumatic consequences of Russian occupation for the population of Donbass, before the start of discussion on holding elections and forming local authorities.

## **RUSSIAN EXPERTS**

❖ At the peak of its activity, the mission can consist of up to 20 thousand people with a gradual decrease in number along with stabilisation of the situation. A part of the contingent – international police forces. Possible participants – Finland, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Serbia, Brazil, Bangladesh, etc.

Territory covered (with phased deployment) – contact line and further into the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts uncontrolled by Kyiv, up to the border with Russia.

❖ Mission operation should cover the entire Donbass territory. The mission cannot include representatives of interested parties (either NATO, or CSTO); it should exclusively consist of representatives of countries that have proved themselves impartial peacekeepers (for example, Uruguay).

❖ Russia would oppose including the US or other NATO countries' troops in the peacekeeping mission forces. Given the fact that it would be preferable to staff the mission with forces of the OSCE member-states, there are not many options left. Possibly, forces of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Serbia (if they agree to provide them), neutral European states, including neutral EU member states such as Austria, Finland, Sweden, could be perceived as unbiased peacekeepers by all parties.

We should not exclude the possibility of involving forces from other regions that have diverse experience of participating in UN operations, such as Brazil.

There is a possibility to include unarmed observers from Russia and Ukraine, and expand the mandate of OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to include monitoring of UN peacekeepers' performance of their tasks.