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# **THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES**

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Materials for the Trilateral Expert Meeting  
27-28 February 2017, Berlin

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-Russian-German Dialogue

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This publication was prepared by the Razumkov Centre with the assistance of the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine. Since 2015, with the assistance of its Kyiv and Moscow offices, the Foundation has arranged regular (semi-annual) meetings of Ukrainian, Russian and German experts, for discussion of matters related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This expert discussion initiative may be considered very important and necessary, given that contacts between Kyiv and Moscow are frozen not only at the political and diplomatic level but also at the level of expert communities and civil institutions.

During the last meeting (August 2016), experts discussed the means, scenarios and prospects for settling the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv. How has the situation changed over the past six months? Has there been noticeable progress in the negotiation process in the Normandy format and the trilateral contact group? Are new geopolitical trends (the US presidential election, Brexit, political changes in Europe and the world) affecting the situation? What specific steps should be taken to settle (or mitigate) the Russia-Ukraine conflict? These and other problems will be discussed by the trilateral expert group in Berlin on 27-28 February 2017.

This publication may serve both as an introduction to the panel discussion, and as a relatively comprehensive illustration of the attitudes, assessments and predictions by the Ukrainian, Russian and German experts.

This edition presents a series of short topical interviews regarding two key subjects: the nature and impact of geopolitical changes on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and ways to settle the conflict. In addition, the publication presents some of the results from sociological surveys performed by the Razumkov Centre during the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014-2016).

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

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

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## PROMOTING DIALOGUE AND MAINTAINING TRUST BETWEEN PARTICIPANTS

I remember well the end of 2014 when we discussed creating the Ukrainian-Russian dialogue in the Kyiv and Moscow offices of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. What kind of dialogue would it be, who would be invited to participate, and would it be possible for Ukraine to agree to it given the fact of an imposed military conflict.

Of all 25 years since the fall of the Soviet Union, 2014 clearly stood out as the worst in relations between the two countries. Russia had backed the authoritarian president Yanukovich even during the Maidan events and held an illegitimate referendum in Crimea in March, after which it had annexed Crimea, despite it being the Ukrainian territory. There followed a successful attempt to erode the situation in Eastern Ukraine, in Donbas, by supporting the separatist forces with funding, personnel and weaponry from Russia. In the summer of 2014, Russian Regular Army units became engaged, and that not only saved the pro-Russian forces from defeat and strengthened them, but also created the frontline, along with the seizing of new territories by separatists.

In September of the same year, the first meeting of the parties to the conflict was held in Minsk in order to achieve a ceasefire agreement. Germany and France were acting as intermediaries at that time already. However, the ceasefire was ultimately not reached until the Minsk Summit in February 2015. Once again Ukraine suffered massive civilian and military casualties.

There was naturally a strong emotional component, in connection with numerous victims, among the guest experts from Ukraine at our first meeting, held in Berlin shortly after “Minsk II”. However, their consent to participate in these discussions was never questioned.

The Russian party had invited experts and we were confident that in the debate they would be able to disengage from the Kremlin’s official



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

position. After all, the key objectives of the discussions were, on the one hand, to continue, at least, some sort of dialogue between Ukraine and Russia, and on the other, to pursue settlement of the conflict. The official positions of the Kremlin were well-known to all attendees and they hardly needed to be reiterated.

All four discussions in Berlin and in the Italian town of Cadenabbia took place in a trilateral format involving German experts.

The second meeting involved discussion of such specific areas of Russian-Ukrainian bilateral relations as economic and energy policies. Generally speaking, in 2015 we had assumed that subsequent meetings would be fairly predictable and unproductive and this would unlikely change due to the prevailing situation at the beginning of the year.

However, the case turned out to be the opposite: our discussion changed consistently amid new challenges, global changes and numerous internal factors in Ukraine and Russia, including the 2016 elections to the State Duma. It soon became clear that our communication was in a position to move to a new level of mutual understanding in connection with the reaction to changes in the international landscape.



Trilateral Expert Meeting “EU-Ukraine-Russia Relations Amid the Protracted Conflict”,  
20-23 August 2015, Cadenabbia (Italy)

In September 2015, Russia launched a military intervention backing Assad in Syria, which weakened the public's attention to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, at least in Russia and Germany. Here, it should be mentioned that one of our first meeting results was a tacit recognition that we were not talking about the "Ukrainian crisis" but about a conflict between Russia and Ukraine. This was not only about the situation in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, but also about the whole range of bilateral relations in the political and diplomatic realms, in economic, energy and humanitarian affairs.

Our 2016 discussions had to address the influence of global events such as the possible strengthening of EU sanctions against Russia in connection with mass killing of civilians in Aleppo. 2016 was also marked by German Chairmanship in the OSCE, which naturally increased the OSCE role in discussions related to settlement of the conflict in Ukraine. What is more, this year the Normandy format meeting of the Heads of State and Foreign Ministers of Germany, France, Russia and Ukraine acquired more significance that Ukrainian and international analysts have come to the conclusion that it is more adequate to the task than the Minsk process.

In Ukraine, the talks of the contact group were increasingly condemned, and the Minsk Agreements have been stalled. Kyiv has insisted that political processes, for example elections in the occupied territories of Donbas and granting them special status, should not commence until there is a full and stable ceasefire.

However, these political processes are exactly what the official Russian delegation demanded, accusing Ukraine of non-compliance with agreements and obstructing the negotiations. These two standpoints were voiced during our dialogue, as the parties tried to approach each other's arguments with a degree of understanding.

At the end of 2016 Russia is facing a large number of international resolutions by the UN, PACE, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and the International Tribunal in Hague, which have strongly condemned it for violating the international law, the occupation of Crimea and the military invasion in Donbas. Does this have any real impact on Russian policy? This will be a subject of discussion at the February 2017 meeting.

2017 may again be considered a crucial time with regard to international policy setting the agenda. The new US president Donald Trump remains vague about the international role of Russia, and this year Ukraine will apparently have to search for a possible common ground with the US administration.

France and Germany, the countries that for almost three years have been mediating the Russia-Ukraine conflict, will soon have the elections. Their outcome will influence the matter of prolonging sanctions against Russia.

Meanwhile, the year commenced with increased fighting along the demarcation line in Donbas, and Ukraine is losing more and more soldiers, civilians and infrastructure in the frontline areas. As previously, escalation of the conflict cannot be ruled out.

In this context, it is crucial that the dialogue, which we began two years ago, does not stop, but rather develops on the basis of trust already established between its participants and despite the continuously emerging new challenges.





# THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL CHANGES

*Interviews by Ukrainian, Russian and German experts (January 2017)*

This round of interviews is planned as a prelude to the next round of a face-to-face German-Ukrainian-Russian dialogue, which was initiated by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in 2015.

This expert meeting in Berlin on 27-28 February 2017 is devoted to current problems of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the context of conflicting and ambiguous geopolitical changes in Europe and worldwide. How will the US election results affect the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv? How will the internal processes in the EU (migration crisis, Brexit, the upcoming elections, the rise of the far right and spread of Islamic terrorism) affect the position of Brussels on the “Crimean issue” and the war in Donbas? How will the negotiation process of the Normandy group and the Minsk Trilateral Contact Group develop? And most importantly: what are the prospects, options and mechanisms for settlement of the dramatic three-year conflict between Russia and Ukraine?

These are the questions that the Ukrainian, Russian and German experts tried to answer. Obviously, matters related to the development of processes in Europe and their impact on relations between Kyiv and Moscow can only be the subject of speculation for the time being. However, certain clearly delineated tendencies provide a basis for substantiated predictions and conclusions.

These expert predictions and assessments in a series of expert interviews are of obvious interest and lay the groundwork for further discussions and searching for means and opportunities to resolve (or at this stage, minimise) the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

## POSITIONS OF UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

### THERE IS NO REASON TO EXPECT A SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE MEDIUM TERM

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The impact of these events on the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict will be highly ambiguous and contradictory.

The administration of the new US President D. Trump will certainly try to negotiate with Russian President V. Putin to overcome the current confrontation and normalise bilateral relations. The “Ukrainian question” will be among the topics to be discussed. But whether an agreement will be reached, on what issues exactly and on what terms? These things are far from clear. Despite all the various “information leaks” about the new plan for settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the Administration of the new US President, it seems that Trump’s team has no clear plans in this respect for the time being.

In all likelihood, there is only a set of various recommendations. It is unlikely that anything substantially new will be offered regarding the settlement of the conflict. **The most probable scenario for the coordination of interests between the US and Russia would entail intensified efforts to implement the Minsk Agreements.** If the Trump’s team suddenly agrees to the Russian idea of priority implementation of the political clauses of the Minsk Agreements, I do not see the right conditions for its implementation by Ukraine. As in the past, there will be very strong domestic political constraints in Ukraine on implementation of the Minsk Agreements. This has once again been confirmed by the fierce debate in Ukraine over the proposals of the famous Ukrainian oligarch Victor Pinchuk regarding “painful compromises with Russia”. As has previously been the case, a significant part of the society, the political class, and the most active segments of the civil sector are not ready for serious basic compromises with Russia; they do not believe in the possibility of constructive compromises with the aggressor country. And if some agreements on settlement of the Donbas conflict are reached without the participation of Ukraine and with no regard for the domestic political situation in Ukraine, they simply will not be followed. There is also a worst-case scenario: an attempt to implement the agreements under pressure from the US may lead to an acute political crisis in Ukraine. The current leadership of Ukraine understands the risks of such a scenario and is unlikely to let that happen.

The expectation is that the French presidential election (April-May) and German parliamentary election (September) will likely lead to suspension of the negotiation process in the Normandy format, which is the key platform for real negotiations



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

(Minsk is only the place where the details of decisions adopted in the Normandy format are finalised). The trend towards suspension of the negotiation process has already become apparent.

**Nevertheless, in the process of resolving the conflict in Donbas, there may be bursts of negotiating activity, launching new initiatives based on particular clauses of the Minsk Agreements, as well as efforts to reach a ceasefire. However, in the broader context of Ukrainian-Russian relations, a serious breakthrough is not to be expected.** Russia will not discuss the issue of the Crimea annexation, and, most likely, will not make any meaningful concessions in resolving the conflict in Donbas. The Kremlin will try to use negotiations with the team of the new US President, as well as possible changes in the leadership of a number of influential European countries, to reduce sanctions pressure on Russia. But if sanctions against Russia are eased without progress in resolving the conflict in Donbas, this will compromise the significance of the Minsk Agreements, and eventually discredit them in Ukraine.

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

There is currently no agreed-upon “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Thus, there is no basis for talking about where it leads. All that we have today are various proposals from Ukraine and Russia on the content of such a “Roadmap”, as well as a compromise option presented by Germany and France. Judging by the information from various sources, there has been no significant progress in recent months in negotiating the content of the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

The main option for resolving the conflict in Donbas remains the same: implementation of the Minsk Agreements. It is highly unlikely that any sort of a fundamentally different conflict resolution plan will emerge in 2017. Any changes in the format of negotiations without the consent of Russia are also unlikely. Beyond that, the problem is not in the format of negotiations, but in fundamental contradictions in the interests of the opposing parties. There may be certain modifications related to the terms of implementing the Minsk Agreements, particularly as part of negotiation on the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

However, prospects for comprehensive implementation of the Minsk Agreements remain doubtful. **The best-case scenario is a gradual reduction in the intensity of hostilities and relative freezing of the conflict in Donbas, maintaining the military and political status quo in the region.** Chances for implementing the political clauses of the Minsk Agreements are minimal, as in the past.

The positions of Ukraine and Russia remain diametrically opposed both in terms of the logic of implementing the Minsk Agreements (Ukraine insists on immediate implementation of security clauses, and Russia on the priority of political aspects), and in the interpretation of the content of the political part of the Minsk Agreements (Ukraine insists on dismantling separatist republics and full reintegration of their current territory into Ukraine with a limited and temporary special procedure for the local

government; Russia proposes a return of the two separatist republics to Ukraine with the greatest possible autonomy, which is entirely unacceptable to Ukraine).

There are major differences in understanding the status and functions of the OSCE mission in the conflict zone. Ukraine seeks an armed police mission by OSCE, which would not only monitor the demarcation line but also take control, during the election period, over the parts of the Ukrainian-Russian border which are currently not controlled by Ukraine. Also, in the view of Ukraine, the OSCE armed police mission should ensure safety and compliance with democratic standards while holding local elections in certain districts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions. Russia categorically rejects a policing objective for the OSCE mission, including with regard to security during the election process in certain districts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions; it also refuses to allow the mission to control the parts of the Ukrainian-Russian border which are currently not controlled by Ukraine. Due to the position of Russia, the implementation of Ukraine's proposals regarding the OSCE police mission seems unlikely. Without that, however, Ukraine will not agree to hold local elections in certain districts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

**The Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is not limited to the conflict in Donbas. Russia has an extremely negative attitude regarding the foreign policy orientations of Ukraine towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The annexation of Crimea by Russia remains an intractable conflict issue.** In addition, there is a set of extremely pressing problems in bilateral economic and humanitarian relations. In regard to these conflict issues and the Crimean issue, there is neither a negotiation platform (except for trilateral negotiations on deliveries of Russian gas) nor a conceptual framework for stopping the spiral of confrontation.

There is only one objective that appears to be more or less realistic in the foreseeable future, and that is avoiding further aggravation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and establishing negotiation platforms devoted to a range of issues, particularly trade relations. However, it should be noted that Ukrainian public opinion, the position of the leading political forces in Ukraine and the development of Ukrainian policy towards Russia are all strongly influenced by the perception of Russia as an aggressor country waging war against Ukraine. A gradual easing of the political and psychological situation is possible only if hostilities in the Donbas area are halted. If hostilities in Donbas continue (even in the form of a simmering conflict), the perception of Russia as an aggressor country will be preserved for the foreseeable future.

In Russia, there are certain expectations regarding possible revenge by pro-Russian forces in the parliamentary or presidential elections in Ukraine. However, these expectations are delusional. Even under the most favourable conditions (high turnout of former voters for the Party of Regions and the Communist Party of Ukraine), the total potential electorate of possible pro-Russian forces will not exceed 20% of the total number of likely voters in Ukraine. And this is clearly insufficient for a pro-Russian comeback victory in the elections.

**Thus, in the short-term and, most likely, in the medium-term perspective, there is no reason to expect a significant improvement in the Ukrainian-Russian relations. The minimum objective is to prevent further escalation of the confrontation and to neutralise the risks of aggravation in specific areas of bilateral relations.**

## THE BEST OPTION IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IS “FREEZING” THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*



**Mykhailo PASHKOV,**  
Co-director of Foreign  
Relations and International  
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The international situation is determined by strengthening unfavourable geopolitical trends. Donald Trump’s US election victory caused uncertainty and turbulence in US-EU and US-NATO relations and called into question the current system of Euro-Atlantic partnership, including the unity of the West against Russia. Meanwhile, Europe (the EU) is suffering from a structural imbalance, burdened with internal problems (the migration crisis, Brexit) and external challenges (the war in Syria, the upsurge of terrorism). The rise of far right and Euroscepticism may be decisive in results of the upcoming election in the leading EU countries. (Cases in point are the results of the recent elections in Bulgaria and Moldova, where the pro-Russian socialists won.) Moreover, the Kremlin will not stand on the sidelines in the 2017 European election marathon. Here, we may paraphrase a famous saying with a modern twist: Russia does not need a great Europe; Russia needs great upheavals in Europe.

These processes are taking place amid the total devaluation of global and regional security systems and pose the threat of restructuring of the post-Helsinki European political space with unpredictable consequences.

**However, serious progress in Russian-Ukrainian relations is not to be expected in the near future.** The Normandy process is on hold due, among other reasons, to the need to wait and see how the new White House administration identifies itself in geopolitical terms, and how the Le Pen – Fillon election battle turns out. No significant changes are expected in positions of Ukraine and Russia for the time being. The Russian plan for “constitutional implantation” of the militarised DPR/LPR puppet formations in Ukraine is completely inadmissible for Kyiv. Meanwhile, the Ukrainian proposal for resolving the conflict is unacceptable to the Kremlin.

Statements about the need for a “Roadmap” have acquired a procedurally binding nature, taking the Normandy negotiation process to a new round of confrontation with no results. After visits to Kyiv and Moscow in January, the new OSCE Chairman Sebastian Kurz announced a palliative “small-step approach” in Donbas (expansion of the mission, providing additional technical equipment, organising night-time patrols). The conflict between Moscow and Kyiv seems to be taking on a kind of “internal”, background character.

However, the overall trend in the situation concerning the Russia-Ukraine conflict can hardly be considered favourable for Ukraine. There is every reason to predict: a) clear changes in positions on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, at least, as concerns those

of the US and France; b) gradual restoration of cooperation between the West and Russia (*business as usual*) and easing/lifting of sanctions. (Incidentally, *Deutsche Bank* analysts estimate a 65% probability of weakening the US sanctions in March-April 2017); c) turning the “Ukrainian question” into a peripheral issue while demonstrating some nominal solidarity with Kyiv; d) changing atmosphere and the balance of power in the Normandy Four and increasing pressure on Ukraine to resolve the situation in Donbas based on the Russian scenario.

Such a course of events meets Russian expectations and gives Moscow *carte blanche* to intensify its activities with regard to Ukraine. In the meantime, Kyiv will have to take more severe preventive measures and focus on strengthening defence capabilities to counter Russian aggression and ensure national security using its own capacities and resources.

It is unreasonable to expect that the fourth year of the Russian-Ukrainian hybrid aggression will be a breaking point; Russia will maintain the Donbas conflict in its “simmering” state with the threat of local escalation in Donetsk and Mariupol theatres. In the current situation, it is clearly impossible to resolve the Crimean issue, an issue that is closed for Russia and on hold for Ukraine, through political diplomacy, international law or military option. Therefore, the minimum objective for Kyiv at this stage is maintaining the relevance of the issue of occupied Crimea on the international agenda, preserving solidarity among the countries which signed the UN GA Resolution and re-channeling the Crimean issue to the international judicial level.

**Unfortunately, such trends as alienation, confrontation and hostility between Moscow and Kyiv will continue.** The system of Ukrainian-Russian relations is based on a medium-term framework of “confrontational coexistence”, involving the cutting of ties in all areas without exception. The trend towards decline in turnover persists; energy confrontation continues; restrictive measures in informational and socio-cultural sphere are being expanded; travel between the countries and interpersonal contacts continue to decrease; and the war in cyberspace is expanding. International judicial institutions will be more actively involved in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These are currently the predominant trends in the conflict, and in the near future the old adage, “believe nothing, fear nothing, and ask for nothing” will be highly relevant for Ukraine in its relations with Russia.

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

On 16 January 2017, the leaders of Ukraine, Germany and France agreed by phone to continue working on preparation of the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements. In the three months since the meeting of the Normandy Four in Berlin (October 2016), the process has not moved forward one inch, and there is not even a glimmer of compromise. For Russia, the “Roadmap” is a way to push its own version of the settlement, which would be fatal for Ukrainian statehood, while for Ukraine it is a way to avoid the “traps” embedded in the Minsk Agreements.

Incidentally, this document has no alternatives not because of its “canonical perfection” but because of the groundless refusal to find other ways and options to resolve the conflict.

At the same time, the option of some sort of “exchange” of Crimea for Donbas, floated by Ukrainian businessman Victor Pinchuk in the international discussion, is delusional and inherently unachievable, since such a deal, along with the rejection of European integration, would be suicidal for Ukrainian leadership. And it is clear enough that such a “trade” would not change the nature and goals of the Putin regime. What the Kremlin needs is not Ukraine’s silence regarding Crimea, but suzerainty over Ukraine, a loyal government in Kyiv, unconditional stay in its “zone of privileged interests”, and possibly accession by Ukraine to the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia and Ukraine are currently countries at war and, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau once said: “Buying peace from the enemy means providing him with the means for a new war”.

**It is clear that the current framework of confrontation will continue to be the only option for coexistence between Kyiv and Moscow for a long period. (Not to mention the possible escalation of the conflict which might be caused by disengagement of the West from the “Ukrainian question”).** According to the findings of the November 2016 sociological study conducted by the Razumkov Centre, 70% of Ukrainians believe that over the next few years Ukrainian-Russian relations will either worsen or remain unchanged. There is a prevailing opinion in Ukrainian society that no positive changes are to be expected in Russian policy towards Ukraine within the next five years.<sup>1</sup> For this reason, 50% of Ukrainians support reducing or curtailing cooperation with Russia.

At present, there are no plans, recipes, or mechanisms for comprehensive settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The focus should be on minimising tension, reducing the degree of confrontation and preventing the escalation of aggression. This is an obvious immediate goal.

It makes no sense to console ourselves with illusion of a quick and painless reintegration of certain parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions into Ukraine. Three years of war provide very convincing evidence that the conflict in Donbas has no rapid solutions. To illustrate, let us recall four conflicts in the former Soviet Union which have been “frozen” now for a quarter of a century. The control panel for these conflicts, where their temperature and activity level are regulated, can be found in Kremlin Office No. 1.

**In my opinion, given the complete incompatibility of the positions of the parties, the best option in the current situation is “freezing” the conflict in Donbas.** This means isolating the first three clauses from the Minsk Agreements (ceasefire, pull-out of weapons and effective monitoring of implementation of these obligations by both sides). These clauses might be formalised in a separate armistice (or memorandum)

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<sup>1</sup> See the results from sociological studies by the Razumkov Centre, published in this edition.

and agreed upon in the Normandy format. This would be without any prior political demands and conditions. The goals are a ceasefire, the withdrawal of both sides, the creation of a 400-kilometer buffer zone along the entire frontline, certainly under international control (OSCE).

This does not mean the end of negotiations in other areas (mainly negotiations for the release of hostages), but the implementation of a separate ceasefire agreement should be a basic condition and the main negotiating topic in the Normandy format, as well as a priority for the Trilateral Contact Group meetings in Minsk. On the other hand, a stable and long-term ceasefire would certainly affect the atmosphere, tone and nature of both the Minsk and Normandy negotiation processes.

In addition, the West, if only guided by the instinct of self-preservation, should be interested in a stable “freezing” of the conflict in Donbas and eliminating the threat of escalation. It is safer, cheaper and more profitable than pushing Kyiv into reckless elections in the occupied territories.

**The key is further internationalisation of the process for resolving the situation in Donbas**, i.e. involving different international actors in peacekeeping through the appropriate international mechanisms and platforms. The presence of the UN, OSCE, PACE, EU, Red Cross, Reporters Without Borders, and international human rights and humanitarian organisations in Donbas should be expanded.

**Of course, “freezing” does not solve the problem, but it is the least bad option compared to the currently simmering conflict or the threat of a large-scale escalation.**

**IF THE WEST GETS MIRED IN ITS OWN INTERNAL PROBLEMS, THE KREMLIN MAY DECIDE TO CONTINUE THE MILITARY CAMPAIGN AGAINST UKRAINE**

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

In 2016, the conflict shifted to a “hot” ceasefire, accompanied by low-level hostilities without strategic consequences for the parties to the conflict. Diplomatic efforts in the framework of the Minsk process, predictably, have not led to the progress in settling the conflict. Sanctions against the aggressor, Russia, were not lifted despite Moscow’s ongoing efforts to destroy the deteriorating Western solidarity on this issue.

Europe’s attention to the Russian aggression against Ukraine has receded into the background since the refugee crisis, the UK referendum, events in Turkey and the intensification of Russian intervention in Syria. Islamist activity in Europe has



**Mykhailo GONCHAR,**  
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“Strategy XXI”



prompted hopes in France and Germany for an alliance with Russia in the fight against terrorism, while turning a blind eye to its war against Ukraine. Although the planned alliance has become elusive after the brutal bombing of Aleppo by Russian aircraft, it still has not been removed from the agenda. Furthermore, President Trump's declared intentions to destroy the Islamic State increase the chances that this *idée fixe* will be revived.

The unwillingness of Paris and Berlin to officially identify “the conflict in Ukraine” as aggression by Russia encourages the Russians to continue calling what is going on in Eastern Ukraine a Ukrainian internal conflict, in which Russia, on an equal footing with France and Germany acts as a mediator in the Normandy format. By avoiding obvious facts, intentionally or not, Berlin and Paris are siding with the Russian vision and offering solutions to the conflict (in the framework of the Minsk accord) as one of internal origin rather than external aggression. Thus, there is a steady stream of rhetoric from European capitals over easing or even lifting the sanctions at a time when they should instead be strengthened against the aggressor state for the purpose of enforcing peace.

Europe's unwillingness and fear to call things what they really are is not only leading to the “forgotten war” in Eastern Ukraine being shaded and silenced, but also increasing the Kremlin's appetite. Despite the increasing overload of geopolitical problems, Russia continues to generate more of them both on the EU borders and within Europe itself. We need only recall Moldova, where Moscow has contributed to the rise to power of a pro-Russian presidential candidate, as well as the coup attempt in Montenegro and the pressure on Serbia in settling the issue of Northern Kosovo. Russia has immediately taken advantage of the distancing of Turkey from the EU by European leaders, making Erdogan its ally, even if only situationally, which further weakens an already fragile European voice in addressing issues on Europe's eastern and southern peripheries.

By creating more problems for Europe or exacerbating the existing “hot spots”, the Kremlin is trying to persuade the fragmented EU and its leading countries to pass the Ukrainian situation over to Moscow, to the post-Soviet means of settlement. As the West has essentially passed the Syrian situation over to Moscow, which, with tacit approval from the Western participants in the OSCE's Minsk Group, has also taken initiative in the Karabakh conflict, in both cases Russia is turning everything into a settlement without Western participation. This encourages the Kremlin to believe that the same scenario will be applicable to Ukraine in 2017.

The referendum in the Netherlands and the corresponding delay in the ratification process of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement by the EU, and the growing rhetoric on the part of a number of political forces in Europe that “Ukraine and Georgia do not belong to the EU and NATO”, create an illusion for the Kremlin that if it pushes a little harder (increasing propaganda, strengthening pro-Russian forces in the EU, scaring Europe with “Ukrainian chaos”), the West will put more pressure on Ukraine with regard to the Minsk Agreements and agree by default to pass the Ukrainian situation over to Russia. **Therefore, if the West washes its hands of it and Russia decides to “put the squeeze” on the situation, 2017 will have a high probability of becoming an acute phase in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.**

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict*

The Roadmap will not lead anywhere. The so-called “Minsk arrangements”, which are quite mistakenly referred to as agreements, were valid in 31 December 2015. They have already expired. Attempts to artificially extend them in 2016 did not lead to any positive changes. Any further discussion must begin with this fact.

Prospects for settlement of the conflict will only arise when the Western participants in the Normandy format recognise Russia as an aggressor and a party to the conflict. As long as Russia is treated as a moderator, and aggression against Ukraine is called a “Ukrainian conflict” or “Ukrainian crisis”, this will play into the hands of Moscow.

Another factor is neglecting the Crimean component of the Russian aggression. Taking the Crimean issue completely off the table results in proposals to exchange recognition of the peninsula as Russian territory for withdrawal of Russia from Donbas and Russia’s recognition of the territorial integrity of Ukraine without Crimea. Naturally, Ukraine finds this approach unacceptable.

The Kremlin’s logic regarding Ukrainian society is faulty, just as it was in 2004 and 2013. Nevertheless, this logic continues to guide the Kremlin’s actions. Putin’s regime, acting behind the scenes and using the mechanisms of informal influence preserved since the presidency of Victor Yanukovych (Putin’s compadre and “consigliere” on Ukrainian affairs Victor Medvedchuk), is trying to pressure Ukraine into agreeing to a resolution of the Ukrainian crisis based on a “compromise” formulated as: “Crimea is ours, Donbas is yours, Ukraine is a neutral state”.

This “compromise” is actually in no way a compromise because Ukraine loses everything, and Russia, thus, wins its hybrid war. Ukraine has already proclaimed its non-bloc status; at the time, it received security guarantees under the Budapest Memorandum, but these guarantees did not safeguard Ukraine from Russian aggression, nor did the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty, in which the Russian Federation recognised Ukraine’s territorial integrity within the 1991 borders. The situation with neutrality seems to be the same. As a result of such a “compromise”, Russia acquires Crimea both de facto and de jure, and Ukraine loses the peninsula once and for all. The occupied areas of Donbas, integrated by Russia into its management system over the past years, is a toxic asset for Ukraine. Based on the technique for ending a hybrid war, these would be a source of economic and political poison throughout the country.

**If the West, and especially the United States, gets mired in their own internal problems, generated in part by Russia, the Kremlin may decide to continue the military campaign against Ukraine.** At any rate, after the violent bombing of Aleppo in autumn 2016, the Kremlin received no adequate response from the West, and on the contrary, the West washed its hands of it and now the fate of Syria is being decided in Astana, not in Geneva. In the case of Ukraine, Moscow wants

everything to be solved in Minsk (or in Astana, an idea that was put forward and may be revived), with or without the participation of the West.

Using hybrid war techniques, Russia has strengthened its activities from within Ukraine by lobbying for resolution of the issue of the “uncontrolled territories” through political forces loyal to the Kremlin, sidestepping the legal channels and the Parliament. If the presidential faction of the Ukrainian government takes such step, it will cause a severe internal political crisis, aggravated by social protests due to the government’s economic policy failures with unpredictable consequences. This chaos in Ukraine is what Russia seeks, expecting that it will further alienate the fragmented EU from Kyiv.

Prospects for settlement will arise only if the aggressor is recognised as an aggressor, and subjected to tough measures, i.e. crippling sanctions: disconnection from SWIFT, regression formula for oil imports, freezing the accounts of Russian state-owned companies and banks in Western financial institutions, freezing the assets of the top 100 representatives of the Putin regime and oligarchs.

If the West fails to do so, Russia’s cyber-intervention in the US elections will be repeated on a larger scale, with more powerful propaganda support of the political forces necessary for the Kremlin to win the elections in France, Germany and other EU countries, with all the concomitant consequences. The “forgotten war” waged by Russia against Ukraine is being transformed into a proxy war against Europe from within Europe carried out by Europeans and Islamists.

### THE FUTURE LIES IN INTERNATIONALISATION OF THE PROCESS OF SETTLING THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The process of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict was at a standstill throughout 2016. As none of the clauses of the Minsk Agreements (Minsk II), except for clause 13 – “to intensify the activities of the Trilateral Contact Group” were fully implemented before the planned deadline at the end of 2015, it became clear that conflict was entering a protracted phase.

This has come about because of Russia’s reluctance to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine and Kyiv’s uncompromising position on resisting pressure from Moscow, which has been trying to force Ukraine to accept the Russian version of implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

**In the absence of any compromise between the combatants, the role of the international community in the process of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict has significantly increased, and many countries and international organisations agree**



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on this. For example, the Programme of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in 2017 clearly states that: “The conflicts and challenges we currently face are international, and they require international solutions”.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Austria is continuing the trend established by German Chairmanship towards strengthening the OSCE’s role in conflict resolution. In other words, settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict depends on the participation of international organisations and must be seen in the wider international context.

The US presidential election has not distracted Washington’s attention from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, nor has it led to reduced pressure on Moscow. On the contrary, at the end of 2016, additional sanctions were introduced, and new measures to exert pressure on Russia aimed at ending the occupation of Ukrainian territory are currently being discussed in the US Congress.

Since Donald Trump’s victory, it has become increasingly clear that the rhetoric against Russia used in his election campaign was aimed at obtaining the support of the electorate. If we analyse the 2016 Republican Platform and Trump’s election platform, we may conclude that in the foreign policy arena, Republicans will act more decisively than Democrats. Specifically, the Republican Party will follow the Reagan model of “peace through strength”.<sup>3</sup> Donald Trump declared this very thing in his programme: “Peace through strength will be at the centre of our foreign policy”.<sup>4</sup>

Donald Trump paid little attention to the Russia-Ukraine conflict in his election campaign, but the Republican Party platform, adopted on the eve of the US presidential election, explicitly states: “We support maintaining and, if warranted, increasing sanctions, together with our allies, against Russia unless and until Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are fully restored”. It is clear that the team of the new US President will try to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict through dialogue but will operate from a position of strength.

Although the transition of power in Washington had no impact on the US position on the conflict settlement, Russia used it to reinforce its own positions. They have continued the policy of discrediting Ukraine, accusing it of “non-implementation” of the Minsk Agreements, and exerting pressure on Kyiv to implement the Russian interpretation of agreements.

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<sup>2</sup> Programme of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship for Presentation to Participating States. – OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe), 10 January 2017, <http://www.osce.org/cio/293066?download=true>, p.2.

<sup>3</sup> Republican Platform 2016. – Republican National Committee, 18 July 2016 <https://prod-cdn-static.gop.com/static/home/data/platform.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Foreign Policy and defeating ISIS. – Trump Pence, <https://www.donaldtrump.com/policies/foreign-policy-and-defeating-isis>.

The delay tactics did not bring the desired result, as the United States<sup>5</sup> and the European Union<sup>6</sup> confirmed that security, i.e., a complete ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian troops and equipment from Ukrainian territory, remains the highest priority in settling the conflict, followed by elections in certain parts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions.

Meanwhile, Russia has sought to strengthen its international stance by using its participation in the war in Syria. The taking of what remains of Aleppo was supposed to be a valid argument for negotiations between Russia and the West, but this argument has been weakened by the surrender of Palmyra to ISIS militants and the general criticism at the highest international level of the shelling of the peaceful population and civilian facilities by Russian air force.<sup>7</sup> The climax was Putin's decision to cancel his visit to France, which had been scheduled for 19 October 2016.<sup>8</sup> Russia still managed to strengthen "the Syrian card" by holding Russian-Iranian-Turkish negotiations on Syria in Moscow on 20 December 2016.<sup>9</sup> Russia may use this to influence the US and EU countries, including during further negotiations on resolving the conflict in Eastern Ukraine.

The EU internal problems, enhanced by the refugee crisis and Brexit, are forcing the European countries to pay more attention to internal problems and less to the settlement of a heated conflict in Eastern Europe. The population of the European countries, tired of globalisation processes and internal criminal and terrorist threats, is demonstrating increasing support for nationally orientated political forces, most of which support easing the EU policy towards Russia.

Despite the extension of the EU sanctions on Russia in December 2016, another decision on prolonging them, which EU is to take in June 2017, does not seem so straightforward and will certainly affect the process of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This is particularly true given that it will be taken after the French presidential election and during the run-up to the German parliamentary election.

### **The transition of power in the US and the upcoming elections in Europe are temporary stagnating the process of settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict,**

<sup>5</sup> The United States confirmed the implementation order of the Minsk Agreements: Security first, then the Elections. – Glavcom, 30 April 2016, <http://glavcom.ua/news/348195sshapodtverdiliporjadokvypolnenijaminskasinachalabezopasnostpotomvybory.html>.

<sup>6</sup> First, the implementation of security conditions, then elections in "LDNR" – Hollande and Poroshenko position aligned. – Donbass.ua, 13 November 2016, – <http://donbass.ua/news/region/2016/10/13/snachalavypolnenieuslovii-pobezopasnostipotomvyboryvldnrpozicijiporoshenkoiollandasovpali.html>.

<sup>7</sup> UK and US ramp up criticism of Russia and Iran over Aleppo crisis. – The Guardian, 15 December 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/15/ukandusrampupcriticismofrussiaandiranoveraleppocrisis>.

<sup>8</sup> Visite à Paris annulée: Comment Poutine a imposé son tempo à Hollande. – 20minutes, 11 October 2016, <http://www.20minutes.fr/monde/russie/1940543-20161011-visite-paris-annulee-comment-poutine-impose-tempo-hollande>.

<sup>9</sup> Joint Statement of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Turkey on the agreed measures aimed at reviving the political process to end the Syrian conflict, Moscow, December 20, 2016. – Russian Foreign Ministry, [http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign\\_policy/international\\_safety/conflicts/asset\\_publisher/xIEMTQ30vzcA/content/id/2573489](http://www.mid.ru/web/guest/foreign_policy/international_safety/conflicts/asset_publisher/xIEMTQ30vzcA/content/id/2573489).

accompanied by Russia's efforts to achieve this according to its own desired outcome. The unsuccessful attempt to approve a "Roadmap" for implementation of the Minsk Agreements has resoundingly confirmed this fact.

*– Where does the "Roadmap" for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The existing formats and issues in settling the Russia-Ukraine conflict cannot yield positive results.

**First**, the parties to the conflict have different goals in resolving the conflict. Russia is seeking to formally return certain districts of Luhansk and Donetsk regions under the jurisdiction of Ukraine while maintaining control over the region and thereby expanding its own influence on Ukraine. However, Moscow is trying to demonstrate that the status of Crimea as part of Russia is a closed issue and is seeking to formalise this status at the international level. For the international community, especially for Western countries, the aim is to restore the international legal norms violated by the Russian Federation, i.e. to prevent the impunity of using of force by one state and the seizure of the territory of another state. For Ukraine, the goal is simple and clear: restoring the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

**Second**, to achieve its goal, Russia is constantly looking for new ways to exert pressure on Ukraine. Moscow uses a wide range of means trying to discover new vulnerabilities. A striking example is that the flow of refugees from Syria to Europe and the destruction of Aleppo only added fuel to the fire. Ukraine, in contrast, supports international activities for fact-finding regarding military aggression, proposes new restrictive measures on Russia, and increases the defence potential of the country. The Western countries use non-military methods such as sanctions, reduced cooperation with Russia and some degree of international isolation. In this context, the goal will be achieved by the party which has a higher margin of safety, as the process itself does not provide for quick results.

**Third**, in the hybrid war orchestrated by Russia, Ukraine and Western countries are acting defensively, wagering on the depletion of the opposing party, which inherently presumes a long-term process. Neither Ukraine nor Western states are ready to take more decisive offensive actions because they wish to avoid a large-scale conflict, including the use of nuclear weapons.

**Fourth**, Russia itself is not ready for large-scale military operations against Ukraine in order to achieve its goals quickly, as it understands the devastating effects of such actions and realises the potential of countermeasures that could be used against it. In addition, open military intervention destroys Russia's "defence-ready but peaceful" image, which the country has been trying to demonstrate to the Russian population and the international community since the beginning of the Crimean occupation.

**Under such conditions, the short-term prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict lie in its further internationalisation.** This tendency clearly has emerged in the second half of 2016. This is confirmed by a number of international documents: two PACE resolutions on Ukraine (October 2016); Report on Preliminary Examination Activities on the Situation in Ukraine by the International Criminal Court (November 2016); and the UN General Assembly Resolution “Situation of human rights in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol (Ukraine)” (December 2016). At the same time, within the framework of the OSCE, Germany and Austria are making efforts to expand the role and capabilities of this organisation to resolve the conflict, although they are still sorely insufficient even to monitor the implementation of certain clauses of the Minsk Agreements. It is the internationalisation of the conflict settlement process that can reduce the extent of the use of force.

In the long term, the focus is on forcing the aggressor to give up on its plans by weakening its “margin of safety” by using sanctions imposed on Russia. The instrument of persuasion here is the prospect of introducing new restrictive measures and expanding them.

The international community, especially Western countries, will not acquiesce to the situation created by Russia after the annexation of Crimea. If they do, it may lead to an international precedent which could provoke further destabilisation of the situation in Europe and worldwide.

### **NO PRECONDITIONS EXIST FOR NEW ACTIVE ATTEMPTS TO STIMULATE SETTLEMENT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT**

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

At present, we can state the following: Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is no longer among the top priorities of the international community either as an issue in international relations or as an information topic. The key international actors, both organisations (primarily the EU, NATO, Council of Europe, and UN) and individual countries somehow involved in the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, will be focusing on other problems and issues.

With its new presidential administration, the US will probably be more focused on its internal policy, while the foreign policy interests of the new President will not relate directly to the issue of aggression. And though the possibility of new agreements



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between Moscow and Washington is on the agenda for political discussions, the so-called *big deal* hardly seems inevitable. Thus, fears of the Ukrainian society and political community about a “deal” on the Ukrainian issue (de-facto recognition of the annexation of Crimea and removing the issue from the agenda, resolution of the Donbas conflict on Russia’s terms, etc.) may be somewhat minimised due to the factors outlined below.

*First*, the political trust between **Russia and the US is not high enough** to enter into such “big”

agreements. *Second*, **the new US administration may simply be unprepared for such “deals”**, which would be regarded as something of a concession on the part of a superpower. Thus, the most important and, for now, the only apparent consequence of the US election as it relates to Ukraine (including the attempts to settle the Russia-Ukraine conflict) is the overall reduced attention to Ukrainian issues, and, in particular, to Ukraine’s internal reforms.

And the likelihood of an agreement between the US and Russia, including the “Ukrainian issue”, is not so clear: whatever is agreed upon cannot be implemented in practice without the consent of Ukraine itself, the target of the aggression. Any attempt to change the status quo will require consent from official Kyiv to accept the proposed or approved steps within the scope of such a *big deal*. Here, despite various means of external leverage on Ukraine (from financial investments to political support), Kyiv can always refuse strategically unfavourable scenarios such as: elections in the occupied areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, amendments to the Constitution and other political measures that contradict reality – the lack of peace in Donbas and the “red lines” both for the government and for the majority of the country’s population.

The attention of our European partners to the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict will substantially decrease. Here also the problem lies primarily in internal problems and processes in the EU and its individual member countries, such as the migration crisis, Brexit, and elections in the key EU countries: France and Germany. The prevailing tendencies in the second half of 2016 were a reduced involvement of Western Europe in searching for a way out of the existing conflict.

Germany and France will remain prepared at any time to continue moderating the dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow, but will hardly encourage the parties to



engage in such dialogue or even take any steps, even mere formalities, towards a settlement. In the current situation, this may be brought about by an unofficial, but real, consent on the part of the European countries, including Germany, to put the Russian-Ukrainian issue on hold politically: no progress, no willingness to make mutual concessions, so for now the situation may be left as a simmering, not frozen, conflict.

And if the reduced attention by the US to Ukraine as a partner is unfavourable for the latter in light of its relations with Russia, the decreasing vigour of its European partners may have a reverse effect, as most attempts taken by the European countries to get the Minsk Agreements moving involved pressure and encouragement of Ukraine to make new concessions and unilateral de-facto implementation of the political clauses without first resolving the security issue.

If choosing between elections in the occupied territory and other political provisions of what is known as Minsk II, on the one hand, and a pause in its implementation on the other hand, the latter option does not seem to be the worst one. The combination of new factors in the international arena lead to the following conclusion: the attention of the global community and Ukraine's key partners will be distracted, **there are no grounds for new active attempts to stimulate a settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the year 2017 will likely bring no real progress in this area.**

*– Where does the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The development of a roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements now seems to be the only option, and the most likely one, to at least try to lead the negotiation process out of its deadlock. At the same time, even if the work on creating the roadmap continues, the probability of its successful completion, let alone practical implementation, is quite unclear at this point. The problem is not in drafting step-by-step instructions for implementation of the Minsk package as it is, but in the commitment of both parties to the conflict to reach an agreement.

If the parties were committed to that end and had a certain level of mutual trust, a separate document in the form of a roadmap would not be required. However, the experience of negotiations demonstrates not only different interpretations of the Minsk Agreements by the parties, but also a rather strict list of conditions and requirements that Moscow is showing no willingness to sacrifice in the process of negotiations.

The deadlock emerged as a logical consequence of Russia's goal to legalise the self-proclaimed republics in Donetsk and Luhansk without any guarantees of military de-escalation. For the other party, Ukraine, this scenario is not acceptable as it contradicts the "*security comes first*" doctrine and poses risks to its national

sovereignty from a strategic perspective. Thus, the very idea of developing a roadmap faces serious obstacles, including mutually exclusive requirements and approaches by the parties.

The interest of Western moderators, in particular Germany, is to combine, in time and in space, the implementation of both the political clauses and security provisions of the Minsk Agreements. However, from the very beginning this approach contradicts Minsk II itself and the basic approach of Ukraine, most importantly: will it help reach the basic goal, a real settlement of the conflict? International experience has shown that political measures are ineffective without a proper level of security. This is why the content of such a roadmap and the process of developing it remain at the level of emergency prevention. In the current conditions, however, any negotiations are likely to end with just such an initiative, as there are no other more realistic options for supporting the negotiation process.

As to any common approaches and ways of resolving and responding to the consequences of aggression, there is no basis for real progress in the short-term. **The conflict has in practice reached the “simmering” phase, and there will be no classical example of a frozen conflict in this situation, as for this Russia and the self-appointed “republics” would have to want to maintain the status quo.** This is not, however, what they want. Instead they aim for political and administrative independence, only with returning to financial support from Kyiv, which over time will surely be fraught with attempts to influence Ukraine’s foreign policy.

Therefore, “freezing” the situation is simply not possible in practice, but putting it on hold, well, this is what is in fact happening now. The prospects for settlement will only appear after the emergence of new variables, most probably after Ukraine or Russia, or Western stakeholders with influence over the conflict parties, change their position.

Russia’s position is quite rigid, but for Ukraine changing its position now means making further concessions or, in other words, agreeing to the inflexible position of Moscow. Thus, this almost dead-end situation seems entirely logical and results from the current balance of powers and mutual claims.

Kyiv is no longer willing to be the only party to agree to new compromises: if only because at present the response of a substantial part of society to what they believe to be unacceptable steps and agreements is too clear and predictable. And preserving overall internal social stability now is no less, and perhaps even more important than formal success in following the Minsk path.

## ASSESSMENTS BY RUSSIAN EXPERTS

**THE MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO AVOID  
FURTHER DETERIORATION IN  
RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS**

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*



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One way or another, crisis in Ukraine involves a large number of actors who are not on good terms with each other. Changes in individual components of this international equation may, therefore, impact the overall dynamics of differences that exist in the conflict region.

Foreign policy priorities of the Donald Trump administration have been the subject of much speculation. In particular, the assumption has been expressed frequently that he will be inclined to retreat from the position on Ukraine developed under Barack Obama. At the same time, there are some signs that the American political system of checks and balances, which is particularly reflected by the mood in Congress, will have an impact on foreign policy by establishing certain thresholds that the new President may be wary of crossing.

The European Union is going through a difficult time. In the coming years (perhaps the next decade or so), the question of further enlargement is not likely to be seriously considered, even in regard to small countries. And some, by contrast, tend to consider Brexit the beginning of disintegration processes which a number of current EU member states will join.

One way or another, negotiations on Brexit and other internal problems, in particular the discussion of migration policy, will consume a significant share of the EU administrative resources and limit opportunities for joint foreign policy initiatives. Great Britain was, along with France, one of the two pillars of the EU Common Security and Defence Policy. Brexit breaks up the established order, and developing of a new one will take time. All this is happening at a time when the new US President is making no effort to hide his scepticism about NATO.

**In practical terms, for Ukraine this means that its hopes for substantial support from Western countries will rest on bilateral relations, rather than on its participation in international organisations.** However, Western nations have dissimilar approaches, and many, including the largest ones, under the present conditions, will probably exercise restraint in this regard.

For the EU countries, it was important to demonstrate a unified fundamental position on the Ukrainian crisis, but this consensus is currently under threat. In several European countries the political movements today emphasise some sort of national self-interest, protecting own economic interests, even if they contradict the principles declared by Western community. A major step in this direction may be taken with French presidential election, where a representative from the right-wing of the political spectrum is likely to win.

Many refer to Angela Merkel as the “last defender” of Western values at a time when Donald Trump personifies departure from such principles. Merkel’s party has a good chance of winning in the Bundestag elections, but Germany also sees the rise of the aforementioned sentiments of national self-interest.

In fact, even now Germany’s position on settlement of the Donbas conflict is to suggest that all parties that influence the situation should be encouraged to reach a compromise. The specificity of the election period, which will absorb the attention of the German political elite in 2017, will serve to consolidate such an approach, leaving little space for criticism. However, sanctions against Russia itself may become a target of criticism. Merkel’s opponents will point out that sanctions do not work, while Ukraine is interested in continuing them and, consequently, in the failure to implement the Minsk Agreements, to which the EU has formally tied the most significant sanctions.

It is possible that a new consensus in the EU will be the understanding that a gradual easing of sanctions could stimulate implementation of the Minsk Agreements. The change in the US position on this issue, to the extent that this depends on the President, may be even more dramatic, but less predictable, and will depend on the state of US-Russian dialogue on a wide range of issues.

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

**Russian-Ukrainian relations are in a deep crisis. The immediate priorities should obviously include measures to prevent further degradation and support the settlement of the conflict in Donbas.** Formal recognition, by both Kyiv and Moscow, of the Minsk Agreements as a basis for settlement is the minimum necessary groundwork for moving in this direction. Attempts to revise this basis in favour of either party, by contrast, might become a significant problem.

Some political forces approach this issue from the perspective of “worse is better”, in the hope that withdrawal from the agreements will open up opportunities for more benefits, as narrowly understood. The parties regularly demonstrate a lack of reasons to trust each other. There are back-and-forth accusations that the purpose of the opponent is destabilisation rather than settlement.

But the protracted conflict is exhausting all sides involved. A settlement on the basis of the Minsk Agreements would not fully satisfy either party, but in practice would create a more acceptable and predictable situation for each participant in negotiations. Steps towards a compromise must be made on both sides, but to make this possible it is necessary to create an environment in which a step back made by one of the participants does not lead to the other one entering the vacant space created.

**The only feasible way of providing such an environment in practice is expanding a neutral international presence in the conflict area, with the form of this presence being a matter for negotiation.** The OSCE has already played a significant role in stabilising the situation, despite limitations in its resources and the mandate of its mission. It might be useful to give a detailed consideration to the use of the UN mechanisms frequently applied in hot spots to ensure basic security conditions and administration of the disputed territories.

The task of the international presence could be restoration of the conflict-affected areas with assistance from a wide range of countries ready to support the peace process, creating decent living conditions for residents of the conflict region, and ensuring transparency in order to verify the complete cessation of military activities on both sides of the contact line. This might create conditions for a comprehensive political settlement.

### ECONOMIC MEASURES COULD BECOME THE BASIS FOR RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

I would like to draw attention to the economic factor and its influence on issues related to settlement of political and military conflicts in general, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in particular. The growth of geopolitical tensions is increasingly crossing over into economy, severing traditional ties and, thus, exacerbating tensions even in relations between allies.

In the search for a more equitable distribution of income, the world has faced a rapid spread of populism: Brexit and the election campaigns of Donald Trump and many other leading European politicians compromise the development of economic cooperation and the removal of barriers to international trade. Globalisation is in crisis: processes that began in the 1990s with the conclusion of various trade agreements and the acceleration of globalisation are turning into a growing



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of Sciences

regionalisation. If this is not about a complete breakdown of economic globalisation, then we are at least dealing with a complex process of adapting to it, attempts to minimise differences and negative effects and to demonstrate its positive impact to wider segments of the population, which has been the case thus far.

On the other hand, the globalisation crisis threatens some countries with job cuts and increasing poverty and generally undermines their positions as global drivers of economic growth. This constrains it in the isolationist countries and limits their access to funding, technologies, goods, manufacturing and human capital. Despite the loud political statements about rejection of globalisation, the matter is likely to come down to a discussion of a new format of relations between the countries in the framework of globalisation.

**Such a climate will provoke a stubborn unwillingness on the part of the ruling elites to take responsibility for other people's problems, let alone pay for them: Russia and Ukraine will come under increasing pressure to settle the conflict using their own resources.** The status quo with regard to Ukraine's sovereignty, the anti-Russian sanctions, etc., will be preserved.

Countries and populist leaders must once again test the hypothesis that protectionism and trade barriers offer only temporary benefits for individual countries, and, moreover, lead to a decrease in prosperity of the population in both developed and developing countries. Similarly, attempts to withdraw from the existing military-political conflicts may make them explosive.

High hopes and, at the same time, deep fears in the world economy and international relations, are associated with the new US President, who represents a chance for another restart of relations. However, the last restart was initiated by Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton... Basically, the experts are now discussing Trump's dreams: his campaign promises are contradictory, and their implementation is impossible in terms of timing or scope.

In particular, there is an internal contradiction between the desire of the Trump administration to achieve a 3-4% economic growth and the increasing attention of the Fed to accelerating inflation in view of its own 2% mandate. Trump has argued that the dollar is too strong, which undermines the competitiveness of American goods; at the same time, he has promised to reduce taxes on American businesses. However, all other things being equal, the lower the taxes, the greater the economic growth; the higher the discount rate, the stronger the dollar.

For its part, strengthening of the US dollar due to an increase in interest rates could lead to growth of the trade deficit, undermining attempts to reduce it. The trade policy declared by Trump runs counter to his own fiscal policy. Assuming Trump's plans are implemented, this could lead to acceleration of inflation under circumstances where wage pressure and a labour shortage have already been observed in the economy, which would force the Fed to raise interest rates at a faster pace.

Trump's energy programme in many aspects replicates the slogans of these programmes under Richard Nixon and Jimmy Carter. However, the fundamental difference here is that rapid increase in worldwide crude oil prices in the second half of the 1970s was itself a powerful incentive for implementation of presidential programmes, while a relatively low level of oil prices which has prevailed in recent years may ruin Trump's overly ambitious plans in the energy sector. Lowering the barriers to entry into the industry and for off-shore operations does not matter if the extraction is unprofitable. However, the strengthening dollar, the growth of production and increased competition from other fuels will drive down energy prices.

Trump's protectionism might provoke a rise in prices on the domestic market, and hence a reduction in demand. In other words, an attempt to protect the national economy through such measures may in fact do it significant harm. To create jobs in the country, it is necessary to create conditions for the competitiveness of production; in the meantime, there is a prolonged period of sluggish growth looming for the developed countries. This will make it difficult for Trump to keep his promises to revive the US economy by increasing infrastructure spending, passing tax cuts and repatriating jobs.

**If the economic programme of the new US President is this controversial, there is even less clarity in his foreign policy and the possible role in the settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict...**

Ideas of protectionism, isolationism and national self-interest are increasingly prevalent in free expression of the will of citizens during elections and referenda in the EU, and the growth of military expenditures forces leaders of these countries to save on foreign policy initiatives and their impact; it is now every man for himself.

Given these conditions, we must speak of what is most essential: combating direct military and political threats. Thus, a complete settlement is being put off until later, in an effort to simply freeze the conflict. In case of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, such a scenario would be fraught with far more serious economic consequences than any other frozen conflict in the world today.

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

To all appearances, no agreed-upon “Roadmap” has yet been developed. As early as September 2016, in Kyiv, French Foreign Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault made an announcement which was perceived as a coordinated Franco-German roadmap for settlement of the conflict. However, when it came to a real roadmap, Germany and France distanced themselves from what everyone called the “Ayrault's plan”. The plan itself was probably disclosed just to make it possible to hold the Normandy Four summit in Berlin in October.

Many believe that Trump's assumption of power in the White House will mean a change in Washington's attitude to European security, and to Moscow and Kyiv. The nature of possible changes, as well as the level of independence of the new president, remain unclear: he will have to make significant effort just to retain power. Given these conditions, many foreign policy problems might fall by the wayside for him.

He does not feel fully legitimate given the three million popular votes by which he lost to Hillary Clinton during the election, low favourability ratings,<sup>10</sup> the conflict not only with the establishment, but also within his own party, a constant pressure from investigations into suspicions that his team interacted with the Kremlin during the election campaign being conducted simultaneously in five agencies – the CIA, FBI, NSA, Justice Department and the Treasury Department. After the inter-agency investigation group follows up on intercepted phone calls, financial transactions, visits and meetings of Trump's entourage, all the persons involved will be questioned under oath... Trump may become mired in political infighting and fall victim to high expectations.

**While the military and political issues of the Minsk Agreements are being debated, secondary importance is given to the economic aspects: who will be held responsible for the conflict and how much will it cost to mitigate the consequences?**

Experts discuss things like phased lifting of sanctions in exchange for the gradual implementation of the Minsk Agreements; some compensations to the Ukrainian side, or Russian assistance which Kyiv can consider a compensation either for Crimea, or for the destruction of Donbas; the future struggle in international courts; the development of offshore oil fields in the Black Sea; or other solutions that would make it possible to meet the needs of the Crimean population without compromising the economic interests and security of Ukraine, and so on.

At issue are not only the anti-Russian sanctions, which impede the development of the national economy, but also the growing defence spending of many leading countries of the world and, moreover, the threat of a new arms race, the reliability of the EU energy supply, the potential for cooperative ties between Russia and Ukraine, which have been reduced to zero in recent years.

**Economic measures could serve as a basis for settlement of the conflict, which is exhausting for both Ukraine and Russia. Moreover, instead of trying to weaken the sanctions “in exchange for certain actions by Moscow”, it would be more productive to combine the Budapest and Normandy formats, while maintaining the Minsk Agreements as a goal, not means of settlement, to draft and sign some kind of comprehensive “treaty” which would include issues related to economic relations.**

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<sup>10</sup> According to polls conducted 4-8 Jan. 2017, Trump's favourability rating was 40%, the lowest result since Gallup began measuring this, whereas, for example, Obama had 78%, George W. Bush 62%, and Bill Clinton 66%.



## WE HAVE A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY TO SETTLE THE CONFLICT AND WITH ENOUGH POLITICAL WILL WE CAN USE IT

*– Where does the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead?*

The first and most important condition for any roadmap to be effective is the interests of the parties in reaching the agreement to which it leads. The officially approved goal of the “Normandy Four” (N-4) is the Minsk Agreements, and these must be the destination of the Roadmap (RM/MA) that was agreed upon at the Normandy summit in Berlin on 19 October 2016. However, the Normandy meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers held on 29 November 2016 ended with essentially no results and, according to Ukrainian minister Klimkin, no consensus was reached on any issue. The task of approving the RM/MA within the declared period – by the end of 2016 – was not achieved, and the Minsk process was not brought out of its deadlock. A natural question arises – what is the point of the Roadmap initiative? Is it really necessary for activating the Minsk processes, or is it mostly a new political and diplomatic map to continue the Normandy format and to demonstrate the viability of the Minsk process.

In this regard, the Roadmap issue should still be considered, first of all, in terms of (a) whether it meets the interests of the N-4 parties, and only in this context should (b) possible parameters/effectiveness be considered.

All the participants in the Normandy format have declared their interest in the RM/MA. However, this does not mean that they share a common goal: to find a common settlement formula. The key challenge remains the same: Kyiv hopes to “agree upon” the terms of de-occupation by Moscow and to consolidate support for its position from the West. **It is clear, however, that Moscow will under no circumstances change its key position, including its participation in the Normandy format – Russia is not a party to Ukraine’s internal conflict.** This diametrically opposed political philosophy renders it impossible to agree upon specific parameters and the series of steps in pursuance of the Minsk Agreements and the RM/MA. That is why the agreement to develop the RM/MA reflects the political and diplomatic desire to support the Minsk processes, but predictably does not allow to proceed with it.

In practice, the idea of the RM/MA not only prevents actual implementation of the Minsk Agreements, but also provokes stronger political differences of opinion and “red lines” in the settlement process. The interest of the Normandy parties in the RM/MA is, first of all, not equivalent to their political motivation (who wants what and why), and, second, is asymmetrical (the “peacemaking European centre” cannot become a platform to converge the contrasting interests of Ukraine and Russia).



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Germany's zeal, given its OSCE chairmanship in 2016 and in general in the context of its "new" European leadership (White Book 2016 vs. Brexit), is quite evident and is aimed at positive results: unlocking Minsk and facilitating the peacemaking process. It is clear that France is acting together with Germany, and in this sense we can speak about common German-French interests. This is made more acute as Francois Hollande has been losing his capacity to play an independent role. His French policy clearly contrasts with the aggressive line of Nicolas Sarkozy during the Georgian conflict and the "Arab Spring".

However, both Germany and France are tired of the burden of the Russian-Ukrainian agenda; they understand that tough policy has failed and the conflict of 2014 has become protracted; they are not prepared to change their principles with respect to Russia, and at the same time do not want to refuse to support Kyiv, which is now incapable of partnership; they have to take into account challenges and the window of opportunity arising in connection with Trump's presidency and the change of political elites in Europe in 2017 (primarily in France and Germany). All this indicates that the initiative of Germany and France for developing the RM/MA corresponds to their common understanding of the necessity and importance of a conflict settlement in Ukraine, but they are not ready to "persuade" Kyiv or Moscow and do not have the requisite political flexibility or resources to do so. As the practice of the last 2.5 years has shown, pressing Moscow is not effective, but instead counterproductive for European countries and the EU. Pressing Kyiv would mean changing their course, which is problematic for the present political elites suggesting that Kyiv and Moscow agree to a RM/MA.

The diametrically opposed positions of Ukraine and Russia make them unable to unite behind these proposals, the German-French axis. Kyiv still wants the Normandy Four to operate by the "three-against-one" principle, where Moscow is "on the dark side of the Moon". Moscow, on the contrary, wants to persuade its Western partners that Donbas settlement is primarily the responsibility of Kyiv (and Crimea cannot be even mentioned in the context of Minsk talks). The practical approaches offered by Kyiv and Moscow reflect their political positions and are (for now) incompatible (de-occupation/border versus de-centralisation guarantees/internal Ukrainian agreements).

In other words, the agreement on the development of the RM/MA may, with a certain degree of care or even optimism, be considered a political and diplomatic success amid a clear deadlock which is potentially disadvantageous for all. However, this political and diplomatic success does not necessarily mean practical progress, let alone a breakthrough.

Moreover, the RM/MA agreement gave no impetus to resolving the existing differences of opinion and conflicting interests, but instead elevated them to the level of practical negotiations. This, in turn, makes us wonder to what extent such specification of the crisis agenda meets the interests of the parties, most importantly Ukraine and Russia.

There are only two possible options here: either the prospect or possibility of agreement (which is not likely), or an imitation of settlement, another attempt to earn political points regardless of the future results, and, perhaps, even to block the tracks and to find a “switchman” responsible for non-implementation. Presently, there is nothing to indicate that Kyiv and Moscow could agree upon any RM/MA parameters, though we may already observe certain signs of pragmatic realism.

**Asymmetric (dis)interest in a common Normandy RM/MA currently makes it impossible for us to objectively consider its potential parameters and, consequently, its effectiveness.** If no agreement is reached on such a Roadmap that would make it possible to move in a common “N-4” direction, this will devalue the Minsk process and the issue of continuing it will become even more fraught. The problems with the RM/MA are already leading to calls for revising the Normandy format. While the US involvement in a positive development of the Minsk process was previously considered an advantage, and Washington took part in consultations with the Normandy group members, after Trump’s administration took power there are too many problems in this regard.

Kyiv’s hints at involving other partners (China) increase the uncertainty of the process (in view of the multidimensional Russia-China-US-EU configuration) and raise doubts as to Kyiv’s loyalty to the Normandy format. Is Russia interested in involving new players in the negotiation format? Hardly. In any case this would make the negotiation formula less efficient. New participants (US, China, etc.) would hardly add value, but would rather strengthen the influence of external conflicting interests and guarantee their “Brownian” collisions. That said, it is clear that the Normandy Four parties are all generally interested in support of the process by external players, and the position of the Trump administration will be of great significance for the Minsk process and the prospects of the corresponding Roadmap.

*– What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

Of course, I would like to give a short answer to this question and win a Nobel prize. But even the Nobel laureate Barack Obama could not make a meaningful contribution to the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis.

All the aforesaid does not mean that we do not need any RM/MA. The Minsk Agreements cannot be implemented without a clear mechanism for doing so. Objectively, the RM/MA is required if the parties really aim for settlement. **For its part, a settlement based on a RM/MA is not possible without the participation of the parties to the conflict. Kyiv, if it is really interested in the settlement of its internal conflict (even if it considers this a Russia-Ukraine conflict) must determine framework conditions for the reinstatement of its sovereignty in the East that are acceptable for Donbas, including a package of guarantees for its return to Ukraine.**

The socio-economic deterioration of Ukraine, rampant corruption, growing challenges of state governance and the mounting crisis of trust in the government – all

this not only destroys Ukraine from inside, but also substantially changes the context for the *dilemma* of returning Donbas to Ukraine. The question becomes less about the terms Kyiv is willing to support for returning the separatists, and more about what kind of country they will return to. Kyiv's initial formula "We have no problems with the East, we have problems with Russia", later changed to "the conflict in the East is a war with Russia", provides no grounds for settlement.

On the contrary, the "return dilemma" essentially becomes unresolvable, as Donbas is offered only capitulation and movement to a different frontline. It is clear that Moscow, which has an objective interest in internal Ukrainian settlement, also cannot help but consider the "return dilemma" outside the context of its own security with the possibility that the Russia-Ukraine conflict may turn from Kyiv's current political platform into a raging conflict on its borders.

For this reason, the question is no longer whether the Minsk Agreements can be fulfilled, how and based on what RM/MA, but about the significant changes in the political attitudes of the "N-4" parties that are required for this to happen. Demonisation of Russia and such slogans as "Moscow must return everything!", "Russia is the main threat to European security!", "Mobilisation for collective push-back", "Minsk or nothing!" – all this escalates mutual restraint in Europe with the frontline going through Ukraine. But in this paradigm, no political and diplomatic agreements within the scope of Minsk will contribute to any practical compromise or the end result of a stable settlement. Basically, this is why Minsk has reached a dead end.

In any case, however, if Kyiv wants Donbas returned (which is not evident at all), it does not want to do this on Moscow's terms. "Moscow's Donbas" as part of Ukraine, and that with a special status and armed, does not fit the current model of building a national Ukrainian state. In particular, Moscow's position during the RM/MA negotiations is viewed by Kyiv not as an opportunity to agree upon means and guarantees for internal Ukrainian settlement, but as an offer to capitulate which is detrimental for the present government.

This, in turn, strengthens both the Ukrainian "war party" (with Russia/Putin), and the "separatist party" (Donbas/Moskals out). Kyiv's ability to change its approach – to prioritise settlement and nation-building instead of "war" with Russia and the CTO – is decreasing despite Moscow's noticeable willingness to genuinely contribute to the peacemaking process and demilitarisation in the East of Ukraine with certain guarantees from Kyiv, as well as the growing outside demand for progress based on Minsk and normalisation of relations between the West and Russia.

The attempts to "press" Moscow back and to "suppress separatism" are absolutely unrealistic, counterproductive and dangerous. **If Kyiv does not fit into this new political reality, if it still refuses to negotiate with "separatists" and admit their right to regard themselves as Ukraine as well, Minsk cannot be implemented.** (Even in Syria, however arbitrary the comparison, it is not possible otherwise). The proposals to break the RM/MA down into "baskets", into individual areas, will in no way lead to a peaceful settlement, and the issue of the "temporary" status of Donbas will become more urgent.

Under such conditions, the search for the “means and prospects” will come down to securing Minsk’s initial provisions – disengaging the parties and de-escalation, and reducing the risks of confrontation, but without any apparent prospects for further progress towards a peaceful settlement. However, the political and economic price for “non-settlement” will be high for all, and for Ukraine it may turn out to be disastrous. Extremely high risks or even “unacceptable damages”: these must be the starting point when determining the priority goals and political objectives within the scope of the Minsk process. **We have a window of opportunity for this, and with political will we can use it in the current situation of changing political powers in the US and Europe and growing political demand for moving forward in the Minsk process and for conflict settlement.**

**IT CAN BE ASSUMED THAT RUSSIA AND THE WEST ARE AT A STAGE OF DEVELOPING NEW MITIGATION PRINCIPLES, WHICH MAKES UKRAINE’S POSITION MORE DIFFICULT**

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The process of settling the crisis involving Ukraine will largely depend on agreements between Russia and the US under Donald Trump and on the results of elections in a number of key European countries (the Netherlands, France and Germany).

We have to admit that fatigue is setting in from the situation in Ukraine, the non-implementation of the Minsk Agreements by all parties, and the unpreparedness of Ukraine, as well as Russia and the DPR/LPR, to give their consent first to the deployment of the UN peacemaking mission (May 2014), and then to the OSCE police mission.

We cannot rule out the possibility that the Crimean issue will be pushed outside the framework of future agreements. Indeed, the Euro-Atlantic countries will repeat as a mantra the principle of Ukraine’s territorial integrity and Crimea belonging to this state. At the same time, as has been suggested by a number of older German politicians and several prominent American political scientists, this issue might be left for future generations to deal with (like the Baltics). However, negotiations with Russia will be initiated to develop the principles of a new security order in Europe.

The US President, Donald Trump, has made his key foreign policy goal to fight terrorism, radical Islam and the Islamic State. To implement this goal, he needs



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cooperation with Russia. It cannot be ruled out that, during negotiations on this issue, Ukraine may well become a pawn in its political game with Russia.

If we assume that the elections in the Netherlands and France result in victories for right-wing forces which favour cooperation with Russia and stand against the position of Western countries with regard to Crimea and South-Eastern Ukraine, a situation may arise involving a serious turnaround in upholding the values that underlay the order built in Europe after the end of the cold war.

Here, I would like to add that it was only several months ago that I, as an expert, **ruled out** the possibility that the forces maintaining anti-global and anti-integration attitudes, including for strengthening national states, had a chance to win. However, since the Brexit referendum in the UK and the US presidential elections, we must now admit that their window of opportunity has opened. As for Germany, if Angela Merkel wins the chancellor election in autumn 2017, she will, we might say, become the stronghold of democracy not only in Europe, but in the entire Euro-Atlantic space. But Ms. Merkel is known as a very flexible politician, and she will not be able to ignore Washington's position on key issues of global and European policy. In this case we must also take into account the pressure from a certain part of the German business community interested in lifting the sanctions on Russia and returning to normal trade and economic relations, as well as changes in the leadership of the German Foreign Ministry.

**It can be assumed that Russia and the West are at a stage of developing new disengagement principles, which makes Ukraine's position more difficult. We cannot rule out a restructuring of NATO itself and of Russia-NATO relations, which may also lead to changes in the position maintained by this organisation with regard to the conflict.**

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The crisis in relations between Russia and the West that started before the events in Ukraine can be described as a “hybrid cold war”, with such features as: 1) military and political restraint of each other; 2) economic wars (sanctions and counter-sanctions); 3) opposition of values; 4) confrontation in a third region (the Middle East).

Fortunately, for the global community, this has not been a question of confrontation between entire blocs (as was the case in the 1960-1980s); globalisation processes led to at least partial integration of Russia into the global economy, and furthermore there is no ideological confrontation. It can be assumed that this “light cold war” will end with a somewhat different kind of mitigation, starting not from disarmament (though this element cannot be ruled out), but from the development of counter-terrorism approaches and certain trade agreements. **In this context, the significance of the economic dimensions for resolving the Ukrainian conflict increases, even including joint projects to rebuild the southeast of the country.**

As concerns the Minsk Agreements, we must observe that the politicians of the Euro-Atlantic countries and Russia continue repeating that they have no alternative. At the same time, it should be noted that this concerns agreements for a ceasefire and saving of the Ukrainian army (following the battles of Ilovaisk, first, and Debaltseve then).

These agreements are interpreted differently in Ukraine and by all other parties. Strict adherence to these agreements by Kyiv would mean Ukraine losing its sovereignty, while failure to comply would “freeze” the conflict. Clearly, we need a roadmap, “Minsk III” we might call it, that would provide for an acceptable step-by-step plan. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that in the current situation the West may exert serious pressure on Kyiv to strictly comply with the provisions of Minsk II.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MINSK AGREEMENTS WILL TAKE US TO WHATEVER PLACE WE TAKE THE MINSK PROCESS

There is not and cannot be an unambiguous answer to any of the questions concerned. There is no point in attempting to see the future, though it is certainly important to evaluate possible ways in which the international climate “around” the Ukrainian crisis might develop. We should not forget that both Russia and Ukraine are active political subjects, and the settlement of their crisis depends on them to a great extent. Furthermore, it is obviously important to realistically evaluate one’s capabilities, to analyse mistakes and to correct one’s policy, if necessary, at each stage, and particularly in a changing political landscape.

**It is also clear that the political processes taking place in the US and Europe will change the situation around the Ukrainian crisis and are likely to require the parties to the conflict to adjust their policies.**

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

**The “Trump effect”.** After Donald Trump was elected as US president, there were many opinions on how he would change US policy towards Russia and settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. All these opinions have been based on his pre-election rhetoric and, more recently, on his first steps as the President.

However, the primary issue is not what Trump will do, but whether he will be a strong president able to achieve his intentions, given the complicated



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system of mutual checks and balances for which the US political system is known. A strong US president is a president who knows how to “work” with the Congress.

It is not clear whether Donald Trump will be able to do this. All that is clear that his first steps as president have abounded with “cavalry charges” and provoked growing confrontation from the establishment, to the point of judicial stays on his frequently ill-considered decisions. It is difficult at this point to say how and on what issues Trump will come to agreements with the Congress and whether he will succeed at all. It is only clear that, if he succeeds, his policy towards Russia and Ukraine may differ significantly from his previous rhetoric. If he fails to come to an agreement with the Congress and his presidency is marked by confrontation between the two branches of the US government putting sticks in each other’s spokes, he is likely to be regarded by history as a weak president.

We can now state that Trump has keenly understood and flamboyantly articulated the sentiments growing among many US voters and among the Republicans in favour of more isolationist foreign policy. Of course, complete isolationism in US policy is not possible. But the sentiment that Europeans should solve their problems on their own and that Washington should not humour those who try to solve their problems at the expense of America has been growing in the US over the years since the end of the cold war. This trend may accelerate during the Trump presidency with the support of the political establishment. It may intensify *distancing from participation in settlement of the Ukrainian crisis* something that has already started during the Obama administration.

In this light, it will be crucial for European countries, particularly Germany, to play an active role in the settlement of the crisis. At this point, all forecasts for the upcoming parliamentary elections in Germany concur that the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) will retain its leadership in the upcoming coalition government, and Angela Merkel has every chance to remain Chancellor for another term. Much of the German policy will naturally depend on the results of future coalition negotiations, because the society and parties which are the CDU’s potential coalition partners are rather critical of various aspects of the country’s current policy, including in relation to admitting refugees and relations with Russia. Meanwhile, the consensus on prolonging sanctions against Russia is continuing to erode.

We cannot be certain about what will be the final consensus of the new German government. However, coupled with serious internal problems in the EU and the prospect that the new president of France will be more inclined to compromise with Russia, the current policy implemented by Angela Merkel on settlement of the Ukrainian crisis will be questioned and possibly reviewed.

The sluggish and irresolute approach of Ukraine in conducting reforms as envisaged by the EU Association Agreement, old and new corruption scandals and



the unwillingness and/or inability to implement its part of the Minsk Agreements to resolve the crisis in the country under these conditions will not only strengthen the “Ukraine fatigue”, but may become a convenient excuse for the European countries to cease their participation in settling the crisis.

Is it good or bad for a settlement? The answer to this question depends on what conclusions will be drawn in Donetsk, Luhansk, Kyiv and Moscow in connection with possible changes in European political landscape.

*– Where does the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead?*

Implementation of the Minsk Agreements will take us to whatever place we take the Minsk process.

We may lead it into a deadlock by playing hardball and failing in actuality to implement the agreements already achieved.

Full implementation of Minsk Agreements by **all** parties to the conflict provides a chance for reaching compromise agreements if participants in the process do not insist on their most extreme demands and stop proceeding from what in essence is a Bolshevik stance, that the crisis may be settled only by means of complete victory over the other party.

The Minsk Agreements contain nothing that would infringe upon the sovereignty and independence of Ukrainian statehood. Everything else is a matter of special arrangements, which Kyiv should discuss with Donetsk and Luhansk also with respect to the issues discussed in Minsk, including the procedures for holding local elections and the nature of a constitutional reform.

*– What are the ways and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The wording of this question itself contains the problem typical for Ukrainian policy towards the conflict, i.e. the conflict is treated as strictly between Russia and Ukraine, ignoring the internal dimension of the Ukrainian crisis. Of course, this failure of recognition does not make settlement of the crisis any easier.

However, let us not delve deeper into this topic and instead return to the Minsk Agreements, according to which Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk are responsible for implementation of specific provisions. As soon as these agreements were signed, they became the subject of criticism. It was said that certain provisions were not enforceable. The issue was raised of the need to either re-write the Minsk Agreements and to remove such “unenforceable” clauses or to come to another agreement which would better satisfy the parties. However, no alternatives for settling the crisis have actually been suggested.

The criticism and rejection of the Minsk Agreements in Ukraine is understandable from an emotional point of view. These agreements do not correspond to Kyiv's ideal vision of how the crisis should be settled.

The Minsk Agreements have been and still are being criticised even more harshly in Luhansk and Donetsk, where they are seen as capitulation to Kyiv. In fact, their representatives signed the roadmap only under pressure from Moscow, and even so there was hesitation. Many people in Russia are also not satisfied with the Minsk accords.

However, this is not about the Minsk Agreements being good or bad. They are the result of a compromise reached by all parties, including Kyiv. The main question is whether the parties to the conflict can expect that amending the Minsk Agreements can lead to a new roadmap which better satisfies all parties than the existing one.

If the political changes in the US and Europe even partially support the arguments we expressed in our answer to the first question, and settlement of the Ukrainian crisis becomes increasingly marginal in the European agenda, Donetsk and Luhansk may begin labouring under the illusion that they can expect a conflict settlement more satisfactory for them.

Can Ukraine expect that, under such conditions, it will be able to come to an agreement with Donetsk and Luhansk with conditions more favourable to it than the existing roadmap? Only Kyiv can answer this question.

If the answer is yes, the attempt to amend the Minsk roadmap may make sense. If there is no confidence about the result, then the Minsk Agreements, though they are imperfect, will remain the only way towards political settlement of the crisis.

## THE UKRAINIAN CONFLICT AT A NEW STAGE IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

**The election of Donald Trump as the new US President has the potential to cause fundamental changes in international relations, first and foremost, in relations with European allies and Russia, which will obviously affect settlement of the Ukrainian conflict. In fact, Trump's assumption of power in the White House opens a new phase in post-bipolar international relations. This is explained by the Trump phenomenon that is not unique to the United States only.**

### **“Donald Trump” as an unknown element of international relations**

The victory of Donald Trump, initially regarded as a political outsider, a nationalist and situational isolationist, fits well with the global process of spreading and strengthening of populism. Simply put, the anti-globalist Donald Trump, strangely enough, is a product of one aspect of globalisation: a triumphant expansion of populism.



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This contemporary phenomenon is explained by the excesses of globalisation (the global economic and financial crisis, migration challenge, etc.) which the existing elites cannot overcome, and consequently by popular distrust in the political establishment of their own country.

The lack of trust among Europeans in the EU institutions and Brussels bureaucracy accused of being unable to respond decisively to new challenges and to correct their past mistakes, has paved the way for the Brexit phenomenon (the decision to leave the EU made by the United Kingdom in a referendum in June 2016), and continues to be the most significant threat for the future of the European project.



The upcoming elections in Germany and Ukraine in 2017 will also face strong pressure from populist forces in those countries, which marginal parties or parties of the political establishment cannot ignore. **With few exceptions, conservatism is a general trend in Europe.**

Dedicated Eurosceptics will certainly be tempted to unite with Trump, though he is hardly the President the Europe was expecting. The clearest example of this is the intention of the British Prime Minister Theresa May to resume a special relationship between the UK and the US which existed in 1980s, by glossing over those aspects of Trump that do not entirely satisfy London. However, one cannot step into the same river twice. In 1980s those special relations between London and Washington were based on a common threat from the East and on the Western Europe's security dependence on the US. In spite of the crisis in relations between Russia and the West, the situation today is somewhat different. The agendas of the US and its European allies are not identical. And the arrival of Trump has paradoxically enhanced those differences, and often to the disadvantage of London.

The positions of Theresa May and Donald Trump do not always fully coincide on a number of international issues, particularly the conflict in Syria (especially as concerns Assad's role), the Iranian issue, Euro-Atlantic relations, the Ukrainian conflict, and perceptions of the Russian threat. The hopes of British politicians to exert a significant influence on Trump, since he is an unknown element in both US and international policy, seem to be groundless. Politicians like Trump are ill-disposed to follow advice from third parties, and instead follow their own intuition, if not instincts.

Meanwhile, Trump's Euroscepticism may play an unexpected role in relations with Europe. Given that Trump's pre-election rhetoric clearly called for a reduction in traditional international commitments abroad, primarily in Europe, **Trump's isolationist stance may act as a catalyst for integration processes in the EU, including its defence component.**

There is no doubt that relations among the NATO allies will undergo major changes. Strictly speaking, these changes are not associated with Trump's victory. The US political establishment has repeatedly warned its allies that NATO's European member states must maintain the required level of military spending to ensure NATO's readiness to cope with challenges ranging from terrorism to cyber-attacks, which will make Europe a strong partner that the US actually needs.

Robert Gates, as long ago as the Libya campaign, warned the allies that the US would not see NATO as a useful and serious military partner if that gap was not filled.<sup>11</sup> This quotation is noteworthy as a kind of Freudian slip. NATO for the US now implies only the European countries, and the US is moving away from Europe, at least at the level of rhetoric. With the presidency of Donald Trump relations between the US and its European NATO allies are likely to develop as a functional partnership, where traditional partners are expected to inevitably grow distant from each other but, nevertheless, be able to identify areas for functional or limited cooperation.

Today, an important unknown element in foreign policy of the new US President remains the question of who will influence whom, i.e. whether Trump will influence the Republicans in Congress or Republicans will influence Trump. The extent to which Trump will follow the advice of professionals on his team, which are few, also remains an important question.

### **Ukraine in the US-Russia-EU Relations Triangle**

Many people are now wondering how Trump's declarations of his intention to improve relations with Russia will be put into practice. The new US President is a businessman and a pragmatist, and this is how he will build his relations with Russian President Vladimir Putin also known for this *quid pro quo* approach. Both Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are dissatisfied with the existing global order, albeit for different reasons.

The new US President has the impression that everybody, including their European NATO allies, uses the US for their own benefit. The Russian President has a feeling that Russia is being pushed out of its zone of special interest due to NATO enlargement and the EU Eastern Partnership programme. **Issues related to**

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<sup>11</sup> Shanker Tom. Defense Secretary Warns NATO of 'Dim' Future. – New York Times, June 10, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/11/world/europe/11gates.html>.

**the export of democracy, human rights, NATO expansion and countering Russian influence within the CIS are likely to fall outside of the key interests of the new administration.** During his election campaign, Trump's statements on Ukraine were neither clear nor coherent. In other words, the new US President is far from analysing the problems in US-Russia relations, which led to a crisis. Donald Trump will cooperate with Russia where he considers it to be good for the US, e.g. in Syria against ISIS.



Much will depend on Moscow's response and its readiness to compromise. The Russian leadership currently wants to improve relations with the US, showing in every possible way that problems in US-Russia relations were not due to an overall anti-US sentiment in the Kremlin, but rather the anti-Russian policy of the previous president, Barack Obama. Furthermore, improving relations with the US allows Moscow to position itself as a global player and not as a "weakening regional state".

Trump's scepticism towards NATO as "an obsolete" organisation and the EU "dictating the rules of conduct for its members" also eases tensions between Washington and Moscow accumulated during the presidency of Barack Obama. Russia would welcome any reduction of the US commitments to Europe under the new president. In his relations with the EU, Donald Trump, like many Russian politicians a supporter of Brexit, will give preference to bilateral relations.

Does this mean that there are no prospects for settling the Ukrainian conflict with Trump in power? Paradoxically, it does not, even though Ukraine is not among the foreign policy priorities of the new president and he would like to delegate resolution of this conflict to the EU. However, improving relations between the US and Russia will inevitably raise the question of revoking sanctions against Russia, which may depend not only on, let us say, progress of negotiations on the reduction of nuclear weapons, as the President has already announced.

Donald Trump will surely be reminded of the reasons for the anti-Russian sanctions, and revoking them may become part of a package along with other agreements, perhaps on Syria or nuclear weapons. For example, Trump may tell Putin: "We will cooperate in Syria and on nuclear weapons, but we need to settle the Ukrainian crisis somehow. Let the OSCE observers monitor the border between Russia and Donbas, and we will start revoking all anti-Russian sanctions associated with Donbas and Luhansk".



**This would be the most important step in resolving the conflict, which could deliver a serious blow to the lagging implementation of the Minsk Agreements and bring some logic to the “roadmap”. As for Crimea, the new US administration will not let it be a stumbling block for cooperation in other areas, though they formally do not consider it to be Russian territory.**

Success in advancing the Minsk Agreements may also arise from the fact that Russian leadership is interested in involving the new US administration in settling the Ukrainian conflict and restructuring the Normandy process. They failed to do so with Obama, but might succeed with Trump.

The first clear results in advancing the Minsk Agreements may also affect relations with the European Union. Protracted “cold peace” in EU-Russia relations creates an extremely unfavourable situation for both parties. In the last 25 years, European leaders have grown accustomed to living without a threat of confrontation in the East, which is why they now feel extremely uncomfortable in the conflict with Russia and would welcome any positive change in Russian-Ukrainian relations.

### **The better the relations, the better for all**

The above discussion is naturally based on a positive scenario in US-Russia relations, but other scenarios are also possible. Personal affection between the Russian and US presidents does not guarantee good relations between the two countries, as was clearly demonstrated when the friendship between Vladimir Putin and George W. Bush did not prevent the crisis in US-Russia relations. Today, there remain a number of disagreements in relations between the countries.

The surprising thing is that many people in Europe and the US, despite their hypothetical interest in settling the Ukrainian crisis, subconsciously want Donald Trump to fail in relations with Russia, pursuing the principle of “the worse, the better”.

History teaches us that in relations with Russia this principle turns out to be quite different: worse leads to the worst. And it is no small matter what role Ukraine will play for Donald Trump: a confrontational role with all predictable consequences, or a positive role despite the existing antipathy. The better the relations between Russia and the West, the US and the EU, the better things will be for everybody.

## OPINIONS OF GERMAN EXPERTS

## UKRAINE MUST RELY ON ITSELF ONLY

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

This question is complex and interesting since the “West” as we have known it until recently is in a period of disintegration. And Ukraine is trying to orientate itself toward something that will disappear shortly. The US election results, the referendum in the Netherlands and the growing popularity of fascist parties in Europe conceal hidden social processes, going on in parallel, that I would like to present in the following order.

**First. A reduction in the mobilising capacity of Western/European policy.** Both Brexit and the Dutch referendum have shown that European political elites are finding it difficult to mobilise the electorate to implement their own plans and objectives. Even if remaining in the EU or free trade with Ukraine is beneficial to people, they might see no reason to spend half an hour of their time on this on Sunday. Even the protest movements are not launching serious demonstrations. Whereas in the past fascist and communist movements could mobilise their supporters for major events in order to change the world in accordance with their own ideology – although these were ultimately self-destructive – their current imitators on the right and the left are virtually unable to do so. Their ideology is nothing but a manifestation of idleness clothed in words.

**People want a quiet life, and this, to a large extent, is what the ideology of those who oppose the establishment is about.** At present, the left want nothing but peace of mind, away from the market, globalisation and competition. They prefer to lie on the bed made for them by the social welfare state as long as they want to. Those on the right want to be left in peace by those who think differently and by problems of migration, globalisation, etc. They are always “against”, and it does not really matter what they are against. They do not have their own ideas of a state and nation, which somebody is allegedly trying to impose on them. They support the abandonment of all international obligations and construction of a taller fence around their illusory little world with their garden gnomes, in which they intend to live as long as possible.

It should be mentioned here in passing that “strong” nations are not afraid of migrants. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Poland hosted Tatars escaping from Russia; they may



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be broadly compared to the Turks living in Germany. They settled, built mosques, opened shops, etc. One hundred years after, no mosques remained in Poland, and the only reminder of Tatars was a dark-haired woman. This is not because the Tatars were exterminated, but because they assimilated into Polish society. Manners, customs, the Catholic Church and the social order exerted such a strong influence that the Tatars eventually simply dissolved into Polish population. Without Kukiz,<sup>12</sup> “Law and Justice”<sup>13</sup> and all the rest.

The “Law and Justice” (PiS) party got scared of 5,000 refugees and is more prepared to isolate the country than to admit a few immigrants. The Catholic Church does not take effective measures to integrate refugees. There are no major public projects which would attract people, regardless of their place of origin. As Oswald Spengler would say, we have turned into fellahs.<sup>14</sup> Ironically, the right, whose rhetoric so strongly opposes “decadence and effeminacy”, have become the pioneers and personification of our transformation into fellahs.

According to Spengler, the fellahs want, more than anything else, to be left alone. They are weak-willed, not obsessed with history, and cannot be mobilised for participation in any political project. But if you cannot engage people to participate in such ordinary things, how would European society behave in the event of a serious challenge? For example, in the event of war with Russia? Could they be mobilised to meet such a serious test?

**Second. The revival of anti-Western ideologies, or the “third way” against the old order.** When the Cold War ended, we believed that it was not only the “West” that had achieved the ultimate victory, but also “liberalism” (of course, there are many interpretations of this concept). After all, there is no reasonable alternative to the market economy, open society and democracy. The remaining fragments of old authoritarian, illiberal ideologies will have to adapt if they want to keep up with democratic progress (in technological, economic, monetary, social and other terms).

We thought that internal processes would force them to adapt to this. The economic and technological achievements of China (and Russia to a far lesser extent) called these expectations into question. The systemic political (Iraq, 2003) and economic (the financial crisis of 2008) crises of the West once again gave rise to anti-liberals in our societies. They had conditionally accepted the leading role of the US and the liberal social order after 1945, as long as it defended against the Soviet threat. After 1989, they (the anti-liberals) remained calm, trying to gather the like-minded people. And now they are back.

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<sup>12</sup> Paweł Kukiz is the founder of the Polish party Kukiz'15, which resisted Poland's acceptance of refugees from the Middle East.

<sup>13</sup> A representative of the Conservative Party of Poland, Andrzej Duda, won the presidential election in 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Local village residents in the Middle Eastern countries.



The basis of this “anti-Western” ideology is the instability of the current world order and the liberal model of society. Anti-Americanism is the second ideological component which brings together the “nuts” from all countries. Environmental and economic issues are being worked out on the left. The “third way” ideologies are being resurrected, with the aim of an isolated Europe with a very consolidated policy and a Scandinavian welfare state (based on the Swedish model, not the current one, but that of the 1960s and 1970s). Those who support a strong, centralised state, referenda instead of parliamentary decisions, robust borders and domestic policy based on tribalism, are turning their heads to the right. On the right and left alike there is an increase in the anti-liberal and anti-democratic swamp, fed by nostalgia for the old days. And this swamp is getting larger and larger.

**Third. The crisis of the Anglo-Saxon model of politics and society.** Without questioning the existing model of the West, certain features of the Anglo-Saxon political and social models are worth noting. First, the state would be weak, providing its people with a small number of services, and even those being largely dysfunctional (health service modelled on the UK national health system, the school system). This deficit in the services provided by the state is compensated for by strong civic and private activity (private schools, private hospitals, charity organisations, etc.).

Second, open competition (free trade, minimal government intervention in the market economy) within society and between societies is very important. The starting point here is the idea of finding oneself anew after each industrial decline, and the new growth impulses always override the old structural weaknesses. And indeed, since its independence, the United States has repeatedly found itself again and emerged from every more or less serious economic crisis with a new concept of development or new approaches. Last time it was the digital revolution in the late 1990s.

However, over time, the “ball” of initiative and innovation has fallen into the hands of Asia. The existing structural problems have remained unresolved or been aggravated. Thus, the weakness of the public school system in the UK and the US has recently spread to the private university sector and called into question the effectiveness of the education system as a whole. In the US health care system, reforms carried out by President Obama were an attempt, albeit a largely unsuccessful one, to compensate for the lack of services.

**Even if Trump were to be removed from office by impeachment, even if the voice of reason were to prevail in the US Congress, neither the US nor the UK would become what they used to be.** It was Obama who first personified the American identity crisis, although in a different form. In the meantime, the political struggle once so damaging to him as president are taking on an increasingly fierce nature and will not soften under Trump. And even if Trump has to leave office, the elites would not have a clear idea of what in fact has to be done with the United States.

In many Eastern Europe regions, there is an illusory perception of the United States: based on analysis of the United States during the Clinton period (all-powerful

and committed to the liberal order), they conclude that Washington should feel compelled to continue developing in this same tradition. This is an illusion. Indeed, the ideological traditions of development towards free trade and liberalism are rather strong in the United States. But their range of effectiveness is becoming increasingly conditional. And meanwhile their development is constrained by constant tiffs over little things, the lack of mobilising capacity and spread of fellah ideology. And above all this stands Trump.

**Implications for Ukraine.** In the 1990s, Poland could have been confident that whatever nonsense was transpiring in Europe and difficulties Russia was having, Washington would have its say about the issue of NATO expansion. Ukraine has no such certainty. On the contrary, it must adjust to the fact that both the US and EU may be ineffectual due to internal political problems, Russian aggression, etc. Even if some politicians understand the seriousness of the situation, they are unlikely to adjust their political system to take any serious actions, and thus they will act without the slightest risk to themselves, denying any consequences of their own actions or failures to act.

**In essence, Ukraine must rely on itself only, and given the level of professionalism among its politicians, this is not the best option.**

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

The Minsk Agreements may be anything you like, but they are not an ideal option. It was a quick decision to cool the raging war, and in no way was it the final decision on the settlement of the conflict. Implementation of the Minsk Agreements based on the Ukrainian proposals will deprive Russia of control over the separatists. Therefore, Moscow will not agree to this. Implementation of the agreement on Russian terms means the end of an independent Ukraine. This is unacceptable for Kyiv. Even if a Ukrainian President was corrupt enough to sign such an agreement, people would hold him liable (not in the sense of formal dismissal, but in the sense of the mob rule and shootings in the street).

So what can be done? **How far Russia is ready to progress from the positions it currently holds, depends primarily on the capabilities of the Ukrainian army. If it inflicts disproportionately high losses on the Russian army, Moscow will stop.** If not, the forecasts are pessimistic. Today, the international assistance provided to the Ukrainian army is so low, that cancelling the US assistance by Trump would go largely unnoticed.

However, Ukraine could have made better use of this assistance in the past two years if it had better reformed its defence sector, particularly in the area of supplies and logistics. But things turned out as they always do in Ukraine, and the lost chance for reforms cannot be brought back. Ukraine should not have expected supplies of

lethal weapons. Cooperating with relevant European countries, Ukraine could have developed the appropriate weapons systems (most importantly, anti-tank and anti-aircraft weapons, electronic warfare systems). However, to do so, Ukraine would have had to carry out a radical reform of its defence industry, its system of property relations, as well as the supply system in the Armed Forces. Otherwise, it is unlikely that relevant countries – Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic – would agree to develop military equipment jointly with Ukraine.

The Minsk process will continue without success. As in the “Roadmap for peace in the Middle East”, conferences and meetings will be organised, initiatives will be announced, but no meaningful progress will be achieved. The art of diplomacy here is to lay the blame on someone else.

**With regard to diplomacy, Kyiv must “hold the ball”, making proposals and advancing initiatives (which will be rejected by Russia), in order to look good in the eyes of European society.** This is what the Israelis and Palestinians have been doing for decades. After all, the problem of not being able to achieve peace with Russia in the current political situation (except for a peace based on subordination) is too banal for Europeans to understand.

#### KEY ISSUES FOR UKRAINE: POSITIONS OF THE US AND THE EU ON THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

In the coming months, two matters related to the positions of the US and EU on the Russia-Ukraine conflict will be crucial for Ukraine. This concerns the annexation of Crimea by Moscow and the covert intervention in Donbas in 2014.

While there might be some changes in positions of the US and EU towards Russia, it is still impossible to determine their final direction and possible extent, to say nothing of the results from the complex interactions between these policy changes.

The EU and the US may either follow each other’s example or, on the contrary, oppose each other, and it is not clear which of them will be the first to decide and what the choice will be.

The Trump’s team is sending conflicting signals. The President himself, some of his pro-Kremlin advisors, appointees in the State Department, the CIA and the Pentagon, as well as the Republican leaders in Congress, have shown different positions in



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regard to the Kremlin. What will American foreign policy eventually derive from this mixture? What will be the nature of Trump's attempt to restore US-Russia relations in general and, in particular, with regard to settling the conflict between Kyiv and Moscow?

The key question for future EU foreign policy is who will win the 2017 French presidential election: François Fillon, Marine Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron or Manuel Valls? Currently, it is the conservative François Fillon who is most likely to be the next President of France. How much and in what ways will his victory change the EU policy towards Russia? If elected, Fillon is likely to be friendlier to the Kremlin than François Hollande. But will this just be a change in the communication style? Or will Fillon try (and be able) to significantly change the position of Brussels on Russia and Ukraine? In particular, what impact, if any, will Fillon's victory have on EU sanctions against Moscow?

And finally, would the current British and Canadian governments, which have been explicitly critical of Putin, be willing and able to play a definite role in shaping Western policy towards Russia and Ukraine? And, if so, how significant will the role of London and Ottawa be? How much and in what ways will other political events in the EU influence the position of Brussels with regard to Moscow and Kyiv? For example, will the current German approach to resolving the security crisis in Eastern Europe remain unchanged, and will it be recognised by Ukraine and Russia?

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

During Germany's OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, the most important issue in relations between Kyiv and Berlin seemed to be the Steinmeier formula for implementing the Minsk Agreements, named after the outgoing German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The basic position of the German Foreign Ministry is that, according to the agreements, the special status of temporarily occupied areas of Donbas cannot be granted immediately, and not even in the event of a ceasefire. Kyiv does not need to provide the occupied territories with this special status after implementation of the basic security conditions by Moscow and its proxies in Donbas. On the contrary, the special status of these territories will take effect only after Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which will monitor the future elections in the breakaway territories, determines that they meet democratic standards.

At first glance, this plan may seem naive, but in fact it is well thought-out. This is because the Steinmeier formula assumes that, first and foremost, the military, political and social situation in the Moscow-controlled areas of Eastern Ukraine will have to change radically. Elections in the temporarily occupied territories

must be held in accordance with Ukrainian legislation and with the unhindered participation of Ukrainian government officials, political parties, media and civil society, and also in the presence of reputable international election observation missions. This implies that the temporarily occupied territories must in practice be returned under full or partial control of Kyiv. Only then will the democratic elections be possible in accordance with Ukrainian legislation. And only if such elections are successfully held and deemed by ODIHR to meet OSCE standards, will Kyiv grant a special status to these territories within Ukraine, as stipulated in the Minsk Agreements.

**However, a decisive factor in the Steinmeier formula is maintaining and upgrading the current Western sanctions regime against Russia.** It is unlikely that, without the continuation of constant pressure, Moscow would agree to return control over the occupied territories of Donbas to Kyiv and hold elections in accordance with Ukrainian legislation. It remains unclear whether the West will be able to maintain a unified and coherent position regarding Russia in 2017. The West's conciliatory position on Moscow's control over Crimea and part of Donbas will further undermine international law and fundamental principles that underlie the current European order established after the Cold War.

### THE KEY TO RESOLVING THE SITUATION IS IN KYIV

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

*– Where does the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the ways and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*



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Current and future international changes will not pave the way for possible settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in connection with the annexation of Crimea and the status of the Donbas territories not controlled by the Kyiv government. The current situation is as follows. Ukraine's requirements for settlement do not satisfy Russia. Moscow is fed up, but is not going to change the status quo secured by its military forces. **For this reason, the demands put forward by Kyiv can be achieved only by military means.**

The US leadership and Barack Obama personally had not been prepared to support Kyiv in a way, which would have allowed Ukraine to win militarily. No changes in this regard will occur during Trump's presidency. The same is true of the EU, with

or without the UK, and regardless of who is elected the next President of France. Such a military victory is unrealistic also because of the readiness that Russia has repeatedly demonstrated to escalate the conflict.

**This is why the key to resolving the situation is in Kyiv.** Kyiv faces a choice: either maintain the existing confrontation with its threat of war, or make difficult concessions to throw its lot in for a peaceful transformation with an unknown outcome. The desired goal, i.e. full control by Kyiv over the entire territory, possibly including Crimea, may in any event be achieved only in the long-term future.

But it faces the question today! And here we must understand the difference between the legal and moral condemnation of the annexation of Crimea, which was conducted in violation of international law and indirect (and sometimes direct) financial, logistical and military support of local rebels in the Donbas, and the political attitude towards this situation.

The military capacity of the rebels is being fed by support from Moscow. However, the influence which Moscow can exert on Ukraine – on the territories of Donbas outside Kyiv’s control and other regions of the country – depends on local authorities and the readiness of the population to support them. The stronger are the military pressure from Kyiv on the Donbas government and the threats of criminal prosecution, the closer is the connection of this government with Moscow. The more security guarantees Kyiv provides them, e.g. by officially recognising the “elections”, the weaker the relationship will be between the political leadership of the self-proclaimed “people’s republics” and Moscow.

It stands to reason that all of the above is possible only on the condition that the change in US foreign policy towards isolationism or common understanding with Russia on zones of influence, as well as further weakening of the EU’s capability to provide political, financial and moral support to Ukraine, will not lead to an expansion of the territory over which Russia has military control.

However, there are no grounds to talk about this as a likely scenario. **With its actions in Syria, Moscow has recently shown that it has the desire and ability to use military means to achieve goals based on order, centred on confrontation and referred to as truce. But it does not have sufficient resources to transform this in a peaceful direction. It lacks economic power and a convincing societal model. Moscow is not strong enough to establish an empire. For this reason, seizure of more territory, to say nothing of the whole of Ukraine, does not appear to be possible.**

## THE EUROPEANS SHOULD CLEARLY FOCUS ON THEIR OWN VALUES AND STRENGTHEN THEIR OWN CAPACITY

*– In your opinion, how might changes in the international realm (the US elections, internal processes in the EU, Brexit, war in Syria, the upcoming elections in a number of European countries, etc.) affect the process of resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*



**Armin STAIGIS,**  
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It might seem as if the world is already rather fragile and unstable, but radical changes in American foreign and security policy are likely to bring about even more serious consequences for the US, Euro-Atlantic community and worldwide. In the era of globalisation and digitalisation,<sup>1</sup> when the level of interdependence is growing practically every day, the already apparent changes in US policy will affect all areas of life, including the existing crises and conflicts, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in particular.

President Trump will pursue a policy of unpredictability, of which he spoke during his election campaign: “We must as a nation be more unpredictable”. Thus, in the wake of President Putin, we have another leader of a major country who exalts unpredictability as a symbol of his policy. Unpredictability prevents building an atmosphere of trust and security, and it is toxic for diplomacy and settlement of conflicts.

In this regard, Trump's foreign policy will increasingly deviate from the liberal world order, the long-standing foundations of the West with its alliances, international institutions and free trade that were laid by the US itself 70 years ago and subsequently protected by it. With Trump's presidency, the US will be more prone to autocratic decision-making based only on the country's own interests – “America first!” – and will refuse to participate in complicated global policy programmes, for example, in the areas of security, climate change and trade.

As a result, in future the US will more likely rely on the bilateral and quickly attainable “deals” mentioned by Trump during his election campaign, rather than on long-term contracts requiring legal documentation of rights and obligations under multi-national agreements. **Eventually, such deals may divide the world into zones of influence, as was the case at the Yalta conference,** and the consequences of this for the countries in geopolitically divided areas, such as Ukraine, cannot even be conceived.

<sup>1</sup> Digitalisation of information (i.e. digital transmission of data), the path forward to further globalisation and transnationalisation of global information ties (Editor's note).



So, the time has come for the Europeans, not to turn away from the US, but rather to show their capacity and power, and to make “new America” understand that, in a world that has simply turned into a network, friends, allies and alliances are important to protect their own interests. The Europeans are strong enough for that, even after Brexit, or perhaps because of it. This is true in the economic, political and military realms. Eventually, they must determine their

strategic goals and priorities and find unified approaches in economic, financial, foreign and security policies.

Today is not exactly the best time for this. The financial, economic and currency crisis has hardly been overcome, one of the key members of the European Union is withdrawing, and the issue of refugees and migrants has not yet been resolved in a satisfactory manner. In 2017, two crucial countries, France and Germany, will have decisive elections where national and anti-European parties will fight for the favour of the electors. For this reason, it is crucial to show to Europeans the advantages that the EU provides in their lives: freedom, peace, security and prosperity, and take this as a foundation for strengthening the capacity of the European Union. In this regard, special responsibility must be laid on Germany.

How will all this make itself felt in future settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict? Below are three possible scenarios.

**Scenario 1: President Trump and President Putin resolve the conflict by means of a “deal”.** This deal is on a geopolitical scale: Washington and Moscow agree upon spheres of interest in the Middle East and joint annihilation of the Islamic State, which is Trump’s first priority. In return, Washington will declare its willingness to accept the results of Russian aggression in Ukraine, lift the sanctions, and agree with Russia on zones of influence in Eastern Europe. This may lead to Yalta-2: NATO’s current area of responsibility remains inviolable, and in return Moscow receives the remaining “post-Soviet” countries in Eastern Europe.

If we take Trump’s previous statements at face value (and after his actions during the first weeks of his presidency they seem to be serious) we should admit that such a scenario cannot be ruled out. His clear statements in support of drawing closer to Russia, his evident sympathy for Putin and his unwillingness to condemn the Crimean annexation as contrary to international law provide unambiguous evidence of this possibility. Trump’s intentional unpredictability, his policy of deals based



exclusively on interests without regard to any values, and his evident obsession with annihilating the Islamic State may also lead to this scenario.

The consequences of such a policy for Ukraine, as well as for European and global security, would be disastrous. Ukraine and other East European countries will again fall under the Russian sphere of influence. A flood of refugees will rush to the West. For the Europeans such actions on the part of the US administration are unacceptable, as they pose the risk of splitting the Alliance. If under such conditions the EU cannot demonstrate its capacity and unity, Putin will be close to reaching his goal. Moreover, such a policy would provide encouragement for other racketeers and aggressors around the globe.

**Scenario 2: The US and Russia place their wager on the continuation and escalation of confrontation.** President Trump may choose this path if his advances with Moscow do not produce the desired results, for example in the Middle East, if he sees that Russian policy generally impinges upon US interests and if he gets support for his attacks against Russia from the hard-liners in the Congress. Trump's statements regarding the necessity to increase the nuclear arsenal, as well as his scepticism about international treaties, along with further alienation of contacts with Russia may result in a build-up of armaments and cancellation of arms control treaties such as New START and Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. We also cannot rule out the possibility of further placement and enhanced training activity of the American Armed Forces in Central and Eastern Europe in violation of the NATO-Russia Founding Act, as well as the growth of Ukraine's military potential amid increased sanctions against Russia.

Using the terminology of "The Sleepwalkers" by Christopher Clark, we can say that all this will lead us, the Europeans, to "unstructured confrontation" with a high potential for escalation. Nor will the situation in Ukraine become safer, as Russia will retain escalating dominance in geopolitical terms. We should not expect Moscow to retreat. In general, the European, and therefore the Ukrainian security system, will be characterised by a high degree of instability with a threat of misunderstandings and incorrect interpretations of facts. This scenario is not good either for European countries or for Russia, and still less so for the countries located in geopolitically divided areas, in "intermediate Europe", among which is Ukraine.

**Scenario 3: The US, together with the Europeans, continues pursuing their previous course of overcoming the conflict.** This is possible if European policy and European security, as well as the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, are not among the top priorities in Donald Trump's agenda. And this is not unlikely. Under Barack Obama Washington spoke in favour of unconditionally supporting its European partners in relations with Moscow, including by means of a clearly defined sanctions policy. However, the opportunity of resolving the conflict was left to the Europeans, first of all, the Germans and the French.

In general, we might say that this scenario probably has the highest chances for implementation of the Minsk Agreements, for stabilising the situation in Ukraine, and for the Europeans demonstrating their capacity to the Trump administration. Additionally, it implies the possibility of returning to cooperation with Moscow after the sanctions are removed. But one precondition for this involves changes in Moscow's policy and establishment of collective security in Europe.

I wish I was able to answer the question which of these scenarios, or combination thereof, is most likely to come to pass. Unfortunately, at present, there is probably no one who can give even a roughly accurate answer to this question. The reason is that since the beginning of this year we have been dealing with two global players, one of which is in Moscow, and the other in Washington, and both of them are unpredictable. This substantially complicates diplomacy and the search for conflict resolutions. **And the conclusion for us, the Europeans, is that we must be clearly focused on our own values and strengthen our capacity in order to preserve freedom, peace and security in Europe and to restore them in Ukraine.**

*– Where does the “Roadmap” for the implementation of the Minsk Agreements lead? What are the means and prospects for settlement of the Russia-Ukraine conflict?*

For any political processes, assessment must be based on real events taking place locally. This is true of the attempts to settle the conflict in the East of Ukraine. When we assess what is really going on there, we must conclude that the situation is still very serious. Ten thousand people have been killed since March 2014 and no provisions under the Minsk Agreements have been adequately implemented; no time lines have been met and the work of the OSCE monitoring missions is seriously hindered; over the last weeks ceasefire violations have become more frequent, while the party that breaks the ceasefire regime cannot always be determined with certainty.

The agreements reached over recent months in the Normandy format remain unfulfilled, for example, the creation of seven zones to disengage the parties, withdrawal of heavy weapons and creation of a Roadmap for implementing the political aspects of the Minsk Agreements to ensure security. The Berlin meeting of state and government leaders on 19 October 2016 also failed to stimulate this process.

Regardless of the continuing deep mistrust between Moscow and Kyiv and its substantial restriction of progress in resolving the conflict, Ukraine and especially Russia are eagerly waiting to see what position the new US administration, or specifically President Donald Trump, will take with regard to Russia, NATO and the EU, as well as issues of European security. And until the future US policy takes shape, Moscow will have to wait and bide its time, while Kyiv, which surely hoped

for a different outcome in the US elections, is also better off taking no decisive steps.

It is hard to say how long this stagnation will last, just as it is hard to propose a possible direction towards settling the conflict. The probable scenarios were outlined in the answer to the first question.



Based on the assumptions about a positive development of events in which Washington remains interested in resolving the conflict based on the Minsk Agreements and supports the European efforts, it would be appropriate first to work on the **“grey areas” of the Minsk Agreements** and to arrive at some real paths towards resolution of the issue.

This concerns, first and foremost, disengagement of the conflicting parties by creating the appropriate zones, withdrawing heavy weapons and establishing demilitarised zones, as well as prohibiting certain types of military actions. Complying with the agreements could ensure strict verification control by the OSCE monitoring mission. All this might substantially contribute to the matter of honouring a ceasefire.

In parallel, negotiations on the **roadmap** must be continued. One particular feature of this document is that, despite the resolution on gradual fulfillment of the intentions at each stage, the parties still have reciprocal claims. Ukraine is expected to create the political preconditions for implementation of the Minsk Agreements, namely to adopt electoral legislation on holding elections within the respective territories, pass an amnesty law, and conduct constitutional reforms on decentralisation, and only then will Russia and the separatists be prepared to meet the security arrangements. Such approaches are leading to a dead end.

**That is why an acceptable alternative, hard as it may be for Ukraine, might be securing all political requirements under the Minsk Agreements in legislation, and then enforcing these only to the extent that Russia meets the security agreements.** This would shift the pressure to the Russian side. It might perhaps be the way to move past the dead end on the roadmap.

Another important aspect is **to arrange and monitor local elections in the Donetsk-Luhansk region** through the efforts of the global community. The OSCE member countries must, along with the parties to the conflict, start developing political and strategic planning documents and resolutions to accelerate the establishment of mutually acceptable preconditions for elections.



If this process develops in a positive way, we can speak about a Minsk III that might facilitate peaceful settlement based on cooperation initiatives. Of course, this will be a complex project for long-term implementation in political, military, economic and humanitarian areas, but it is crucial for ensuring stability in the region and maintaining collective security in Europe.

Of equal importance is the Crimean issue. There is no doubt that violations of international law by Russia will be not accepted by the global community. On the other hand, it is clear that at least in the short and medium terms no mutually acceptable solution will be found based on existing international law and international obligations.

This, however, must not block other efforts for achieving peace in the East of Ukraine. To illustrate, recall the political compromise reached on the German issue within the policy of detente in the 1970s. The conflicting parties clearly documented their differences, but remained willing to consider all possible options for cooperation and creation of an atmosphere of trust.

Whether certain options can be implemented in one way or another to settle the Russia-Ukraine conflict in the coming months or years depends to a large extent on the European and global “environment” which, in turn, is affected by the Washington and Moscow governments. However, both Washington and Moscow now seem to prefer unpredictability in their political activities. At the same time, the EU is undergoing an uneasy process of finding its own identity, which will hopefully make it more capable.

In any case, we are experiencing a time when things which have been our benchmarks for decades are vanishing like smoke. And today no one can say what Europe and the world will look like in a year.

# THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT: ASSESSMENTS AND POSITIONS OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is a tragic event for Ukraine, which has brought a lot of suffering and losses – over 10 thousand Ukrainian citizens have died, 44 thousand sq. km of territory has been occupied, 20% of industrial potential has been destroyed. In the three years of war, Ukrainian citizens have gained an enormous traumatic experience, which caused a drastic change in their opinions and ideas regarding the state of relations with Russia, its government institutions, Kremlin’s policy regarding Ukraine, the nature and prospects of Kyiv-Moscow contacts.

Latest sociological data (2014-2016) demonstrate the emergence and deepening of the cycle of mistrust and alienation in regard to Russia. It is clearly not a local splash of emotions, not situational mood fluctuations – Russia’s “hybrid” aggression has caused deep lasting changes in attitudes and beliefs. Therefore, there are reasons to say that this “mental component” of the Russia-Ukraine conflict will determine the nature, atmosphere and specifics of relations between Kyiv and Moscow in a long time.

The Razumkov Centre conducted a new poll dedicated to the issues of Russian-Ukrainian relations in November and December 2016.<sup>1</sup> The citizens gave their assessments of the current state of the Russian-Ukrainian relations, defined reasons and consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, assessed Russia’s policy on Ukraine, made predictions as to the further development of bilateral relations.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are based on the results of surveys conducted by the Sociological Service of the Razumkov Centre over several years. The most recent study was conducted together with Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation on 16-20 December 2016. 2,018 respondents aged 18 years or older were polled in all regions of Ukraine, except Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Theoretical sampling error does not exceed 2.3%.

## CURRENT STATE OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

**Most often people described relations between Russia and Ukraine as hostile.** 46% of respondents supported this point of view in November 2016. (The highest percentage (57%) of such assessments was observed at the time of escalation of fighting in Donbas in October 2014). The share of those, who think that relations are poor is 37%. Only 12% chose a neutral characteristic – “unstable”; and almost no one (2%) thinks they are good. Given the lack of any prospects of solving the problem of annexed Crimea and uncertainty regarding peaceful settlement of the situation in Donbas – there are no grounds to predict that assessments of bilateral relations will improve any time soon.

Notably, the closer to the conflict area, the smaller is the share of those who **think of Russian-Ukrainian relations as hostile – their percentage drops from 55% in the West of Ukraine to 41% in Donbas**<sup>2</sup> (while number of those, who think of them as poor or unstable increases). This can be explained by the fact that residents of Eastern regions have traditionally had a more friendly attitude to Russia, the pro-Russian sentiments have always been more prominent there, – hence the tendency to give Russian-Ukrainian relations more “moderate” characteristics.

**The main reasons for the Russia-Ukraine conflict are Ukraine’s attempts to free itself from Russia’s influence, Moscow’s inability to accept Kyiv’s course for Eurointegration and, in general, Ukraine as an independent state with independent external policy.** All of these are tied to one main reason – Russia’s leadership has always considered and is still considering Ukraine its zone of “privileged” interests in the post-Soviet space, and its independence – an “artificial” and “temporary” phenomenon, a “historical incident”. It is obvious then, that Ukraine’s European and Euro-Atlantic integration are viewed by Moscow as an attempt to leave Russia’s zone of influence. In order to prevent it, Kremlin has started a “hybrid” war using the entire range of destructive methods – from military expansion in Donbas to economic pressure, energy blackmail, informational sabotage, inciting separatism and support of terrorist organisations in Ukraine.

Special attention should be paid to the fact that the percentage of citizens who believe that the reason for the conflict is the violation of rights of Russian-speaking population in the East is rather small (5%). As we know, this was the main reason for the conflict in Donbas as announced by Russia’s leadership and its state controlled media.

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<sup>2</sup> The following division of territories into regions is used: **West:** Volyn, Zakarpattia, Ivano-Frankivsk, Lviv, Rivne, Ternopil, Chernivtsi oblasts; **Centre:** Kyiv, Vinnytsia, Zhytomyr, Kyiv, Kirovohrad, Poltava, Sumy, Khmelnytskyi, Cherkasy, Chernihiv oblasts; **South:** Mykolayiv, Odesa, Kherson oblasts; **East:** Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kharkiv oblasts; **Donbas:** Donetsk, Luhansk oblasts.

**The most negative impact of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the destruction of economic ties between the countries.** The majority of respondents (60%) support this point of view. In the second place is the deterioration of political and diplomatic relations between the countries (44%), in the third – an increasingly negative attitude of Ukrainians to Russians and vice versa (38%). Notably, compared to the previous study (November 2015), the number of respondents who chose energy aspect slightly dropped, while the number of those, who underlined negative consequences of humanitarian nature – grew.

**Relations between the people of Ukraine and Russia have deteriorated in the past year.** This is the opinion of the majority of respondents (61%). However, percentage of these responses dropped in comparison with the maximum indicator recorded in October 2014, when respondents compared these relations with relations at the end of 2013, – i.e. situation before the Donbas conflict. It can be said that another negative sign is that almost a third (29%) of respondents stressed that these relations (which are currently considered to be poor) have not changed.

**Attitudes to Russia's leadership and state institutions remained negative in 2014-2016.** In November 2016, the number of those who had a negative attitude to Russian President was 74%, which is almost the same as in April 2014. Similar is the dynamic of attitudes to other state institutions of Russia – the Government and State Duma.

**Attitude to Russian citizens is more reserved compared to Russian leadership.** Compared with April 2014, the number of Ukrainians who have a positive attitude to Russians has notably dropped – from 45% to 29%, while the level of negative attitude has not changed significantly – from 17% to 21%, and the percentage of those who have a neutral attitude has slightly grown – from 33% to 39%. Thus, most often, the citizens of Ukraine expressed neutral attitude to Russians. But in general, such assessments that are clearly dominated by neutral and negative attitudes, can be viewed as the sign of distancing, mistrust and alienation of Ukrainians from Russians.

Respondents' assessments by regions were quite expected. The number of people with negative attitude to Russian leadership and Russian citizens is the highest in the West and Centre. Also, negative attitude to Russia's leadership is prevalent in absolutely all regions.

The logical consequence of the Russia-Ukraine conflict is that the majority of respondents (57%) admit the fact of alienation between citizens (societies) of Ukraine and Russia.

## **PROSPECTS OF KYIV-MOSCOW RELATIONS**

**People's assessments of the prospects of Russian-Ukrainian relations in the nearest future are rather pessimistic.** In 2014, after the beginning of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the annexation of Crimea and war in Donbas, the percentage of respondents

who hope for the improvement of relations between Russia and Ukraine has rapidly dropped, while the number of those who believe that they will keep deteriorating has significantly increased. (While in April 2012, this opinion was supported by 8% of respondents, in November 2016, this percentage was 35%). Negative predictions can also include answers of those, who said these relations will not change, – i.e. the Russia-Ukraine conflict in its current form will go on.

**Most respondents do not expect any change for the better in Kyiv-Moscow relations in the nearest future (1-5 years).** According to the relative majority (40%), it is more likely to happen in the longer term – 5-10 years.

**In recent years, citizens' opinions as to what Ukraine's policy towards Russia should be like have significantly changed.** In 2002-2012, a stable majority of respondents supported more intense cooperation with Russia. Starting from 2014, public opinion landscape has greatly changed – most respondents noted the need to distance from Russia: either reduce cooperation with Russia and Russia's influence on Ukraine, or terminate cooperation with Moscow altogether. In November 2016, the percentage of supporters of deeper cooperation between Russia and Ukraine was 21% (a lower number – 15%, was recorder in November 2015).

Residents of Eastern, Southern and Donbas regions support advancing cooperation with Russia more often than residents of western and central oblasts.

## **GEOPOLITICAL PREFERENCES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS**

**Ukrainian citizens associate their geopolitical preferences with European and Euro-Atlantic integration.** The majority of respondents (58%) support Ukraine's accession to the EU and only one in ten (11%) believes that Ukraine should join the Eurasian Economic Union (formerly known as the Customs Union), which unites five post-Soviet countries. In the period from December 2013 to December 2016, there has been an increase in the number of supporters of European integration. However, it is worth noting that about a third of citizens (31%) have difficulty choosing a preferred integration course for the country.

With significant preferences for European integration, the resonating issue of granting Ukraine a visa-free regime with the EU is not a primary or particularly urgent one – the visa-free regime with the EU is very important for only 16% of citizens; it is somewhat important for 28% of those polled; and half of respondents consider this issue to be not very important or not important at all.

Citizens' attitude towards Euro-Atlantic integration has considerably changed during the three years of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. In 2014, there was a notable growth in the number of citizens who support Ukraine joining the Alliance. In 2016, a majority of respondents (44%) considered accession to NATO to be the best way to ensure the national security of the state. 62% of citizens would participate in the hypothetical referendum on accession to NATO, and 72% of these would vote for joining the Alliance.



## CONCLUSIONS

**Summarised results of studies make it possible to track the dynamics of citizens' opinions and assessments that lead to the following conclusions.**

Russia's aggression has changed citizens' opinions and attitudes to Russia, the state of bilateral relations, Russian leadership, prospects of relations with Russia, etc. Given the uncertain prospects for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict, there are hardly any grounds to expect any improvement in Ukrainian citizens' attitudes to Russia any time soon.

**Most often people assess relations between Ukraine and Russia as hostile, the reason being Russia's aggression against Ukraine and Kremlin's hostile policy towards the country.**

**People believe that the Russia-Ukraine conflict was caused by Ukraine's attempts to leave Russia's zone of influence, Moscow's inability to accept Ukraine as an independent nation with an independent foreign policy, and its course for European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Thus, Russia views Ukraine as part of its zone of influence and resists Ukraine's attempts to shrug off this influence, using the entire range of instruments – from economic pressure to military aggression. Only a small share of respondents believe that the reason for the Russia-Ukraine conflict is the violation of rights of Russian-speaking population in Eastern Ukraine.**

**People believe that the most negative consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict are the destruction of economic ties between the countries, deterioration of political and diplomatic relations between the states, confrontation in the energy sector, etc.**

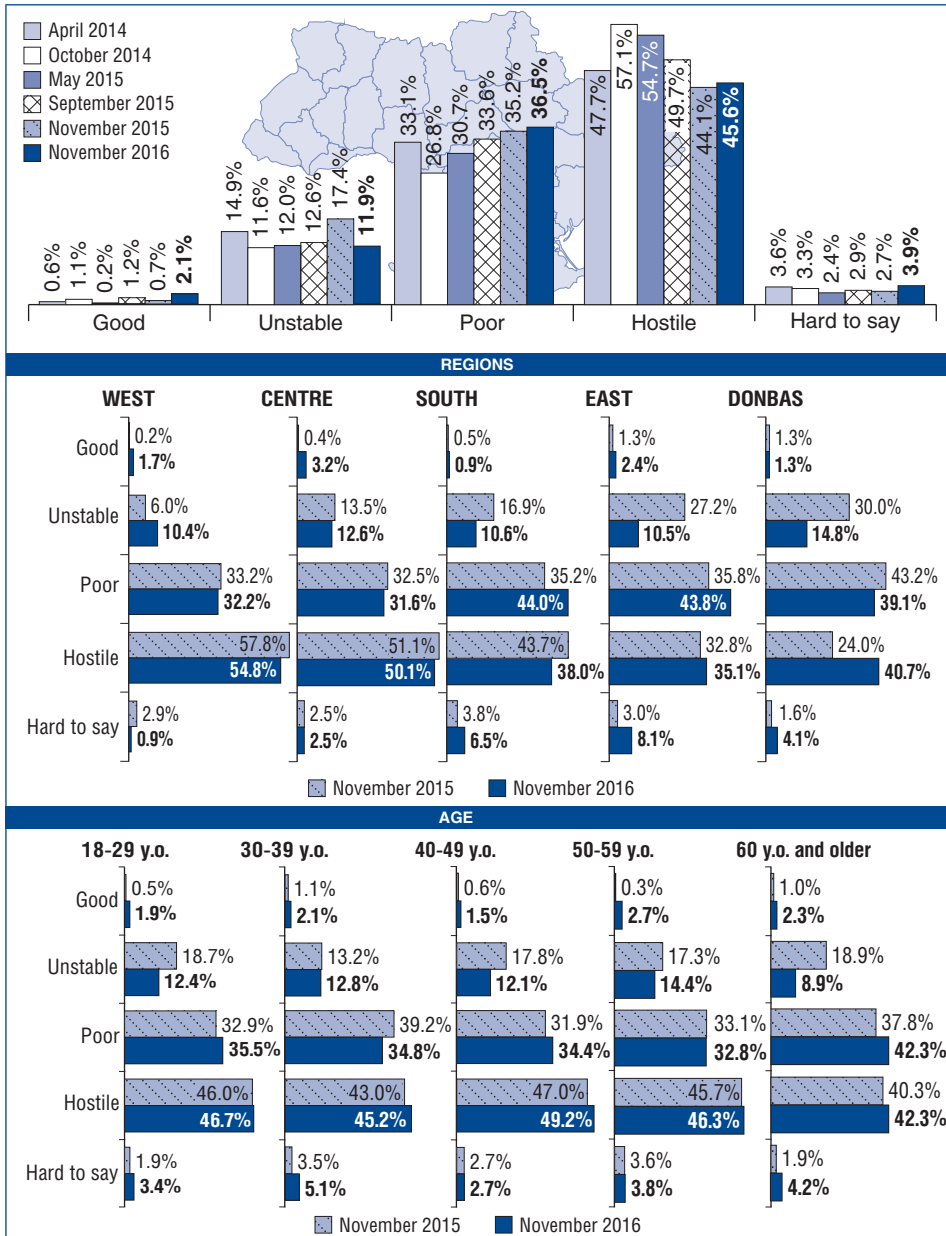
Stable is the negative attitude of Ukrainian citizens to Russian state institutions – President, Duma, Government. At the same time, in 2014-2016, the attitude to Russian citizens has also changed – percentage of Ukrainians with positive attitude to Russian citizens has dropped. Although, the relative majority of respondents share a neutral stance. That being said, the majority of respondents noted that in the past year relations between the peoples of two countries have deteriorated and they feel increasing alienation between Ukrainians and Russians.

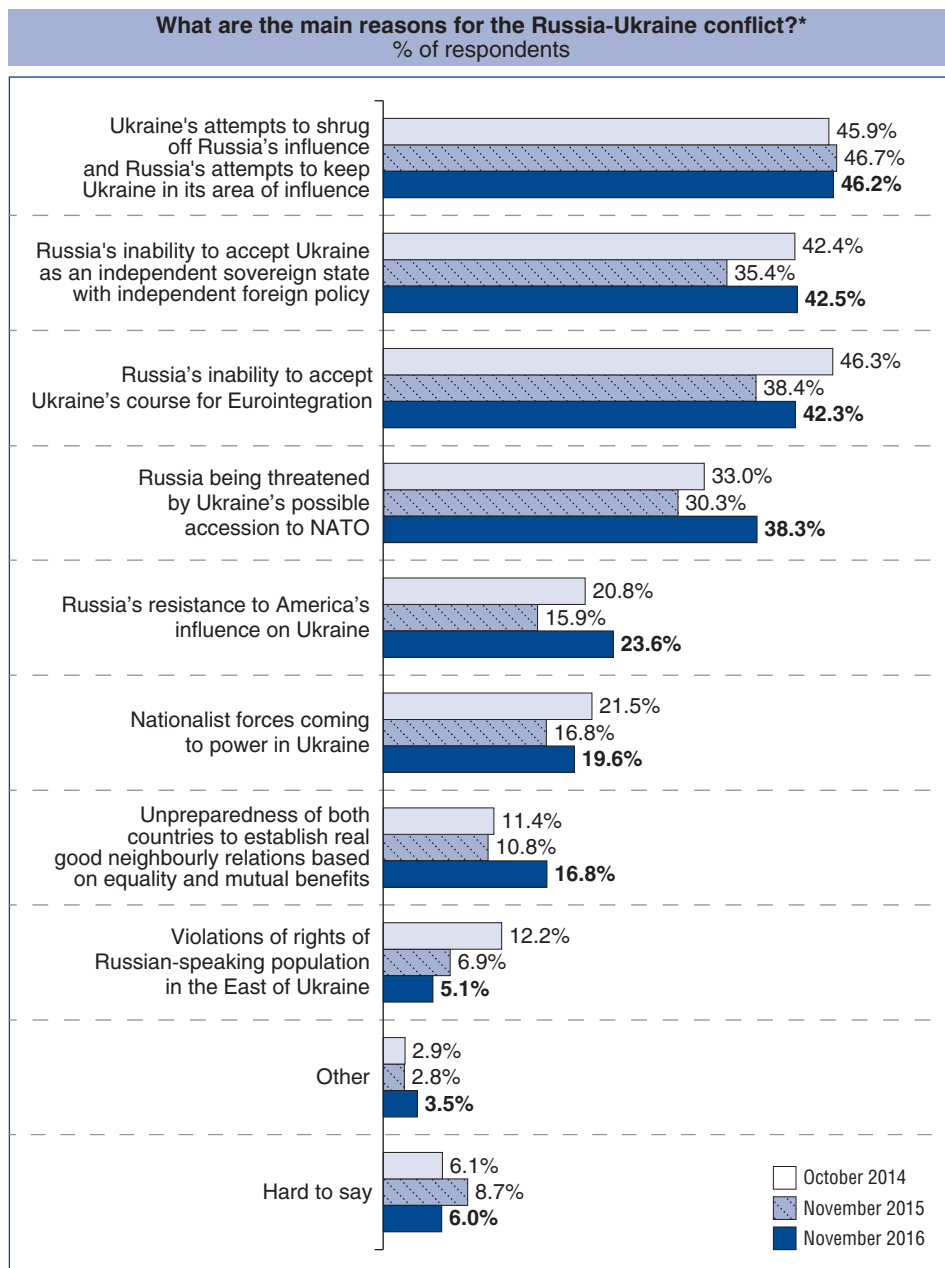
**People are very sceptical about the prospects of Russian-Ukrainian relations. They believe that at least in the mid-term perspective (1-5 years) we are not to expect any positive changes in relations between Russia and Ukraine.**

Generally, people's opinions and assessments show that there is an increasing tendency of distancing from Russia. Thus, most respondents stressed the need to reduce cooperation with Russia and Russia's influence on Ukraine, or to terminate cooperation with Moscow altogether.

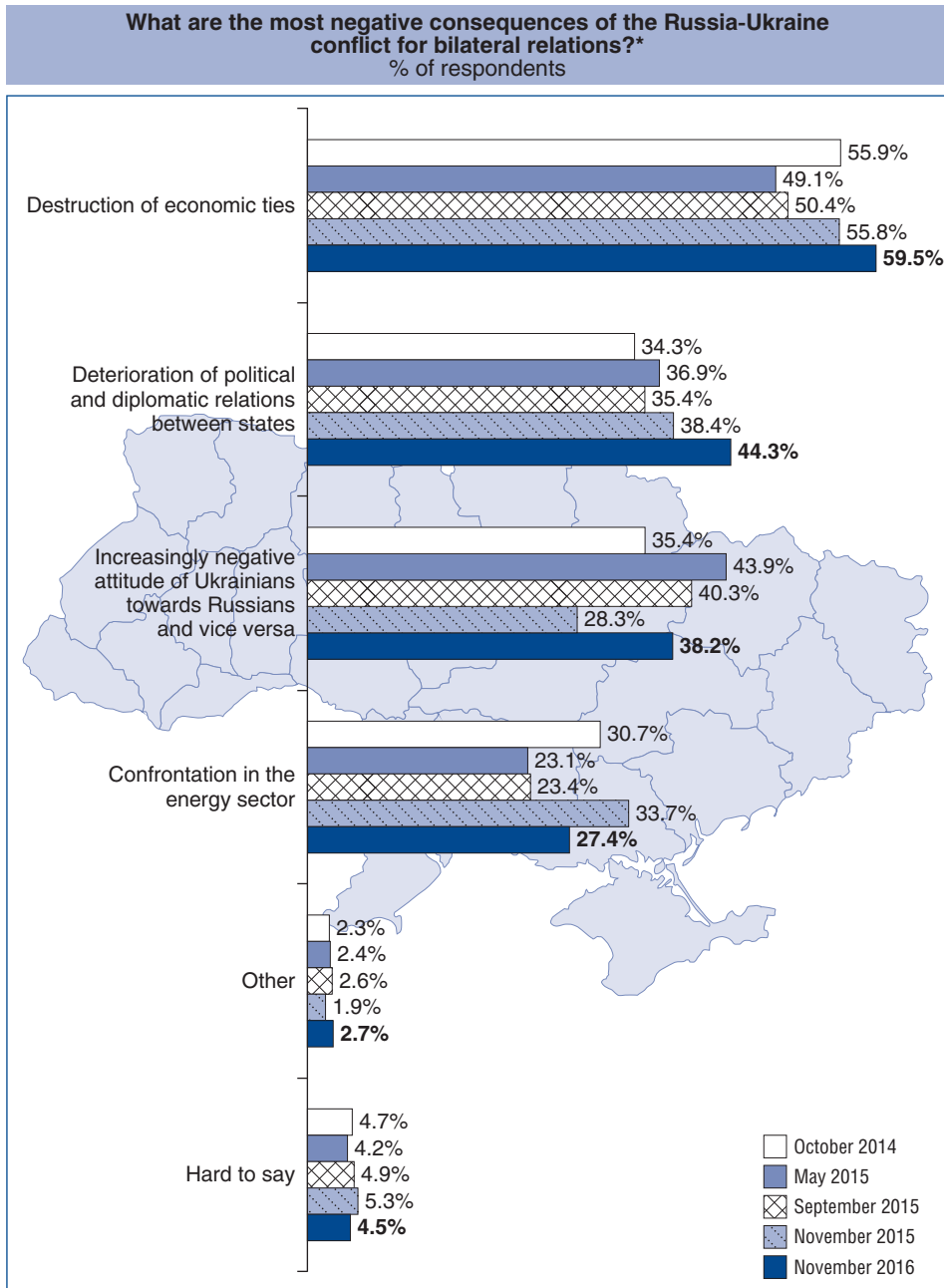
The Russia-Ukraine conflict has caused a noticeable increase in the number of supporters of European and Euro-Atlantic integration within Ukrainian society. Ukrainians give preference to integration with the EU over accession to the Eurasian Economic Union, and most often consider accession to NATO to be the first choice to ensure the national security of Ukraine.

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





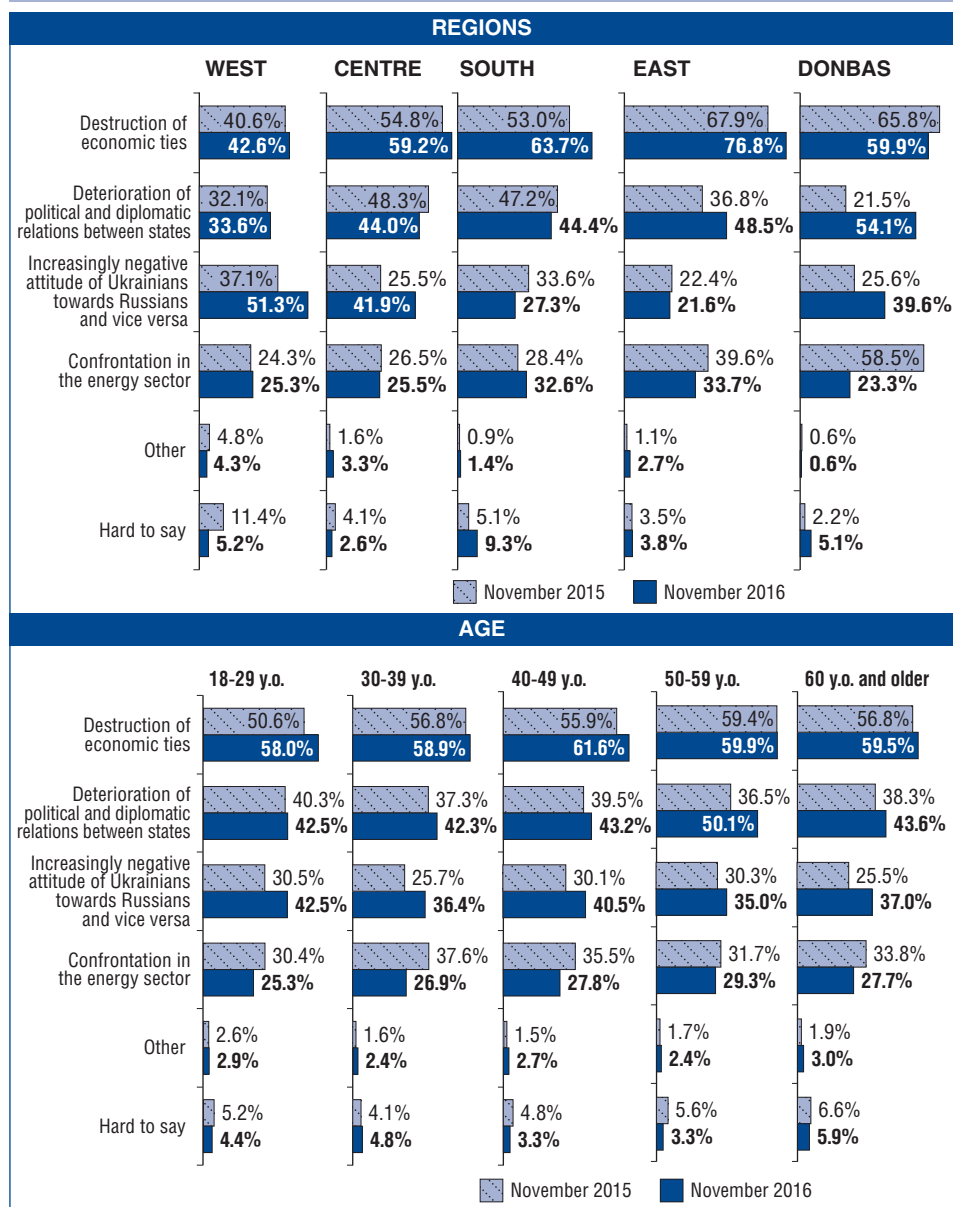
\*Respondents were asked to select all acceptable answers.



\* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.

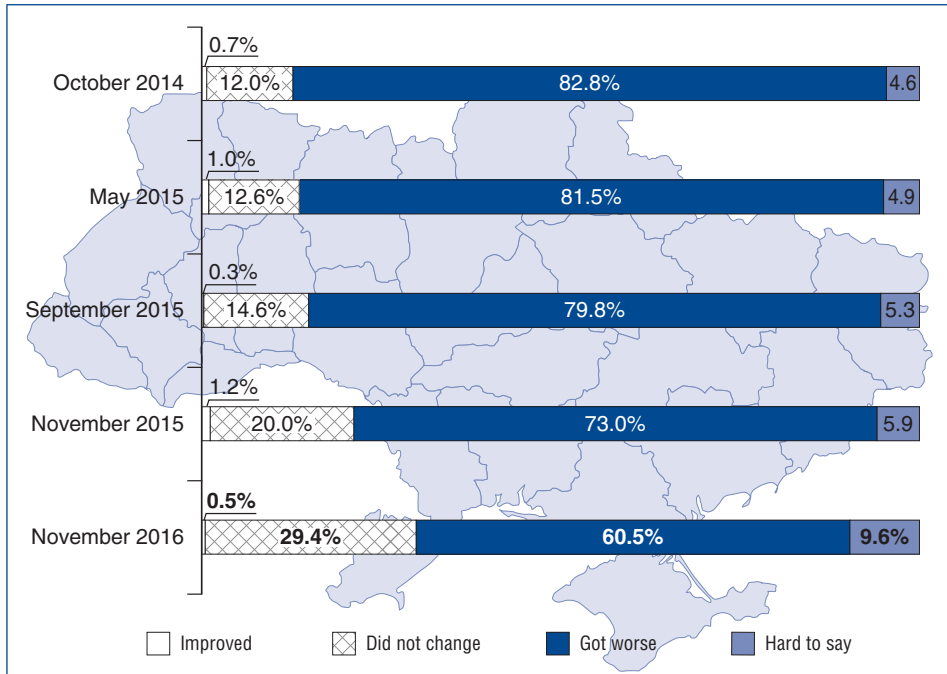
**What are the most negative consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict for bilateral relations?\***  
% of respondents

(Continued)

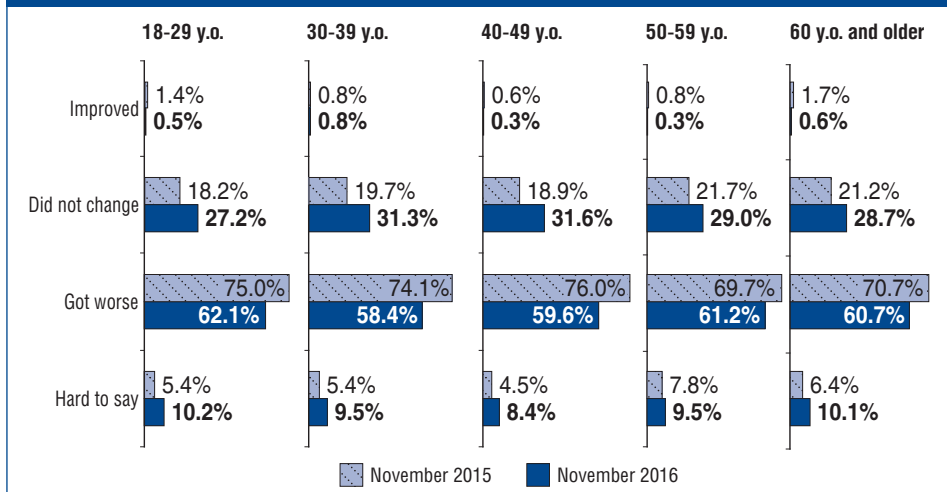


\* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.

**How did relations between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia change in the past year?**  
% of respondents



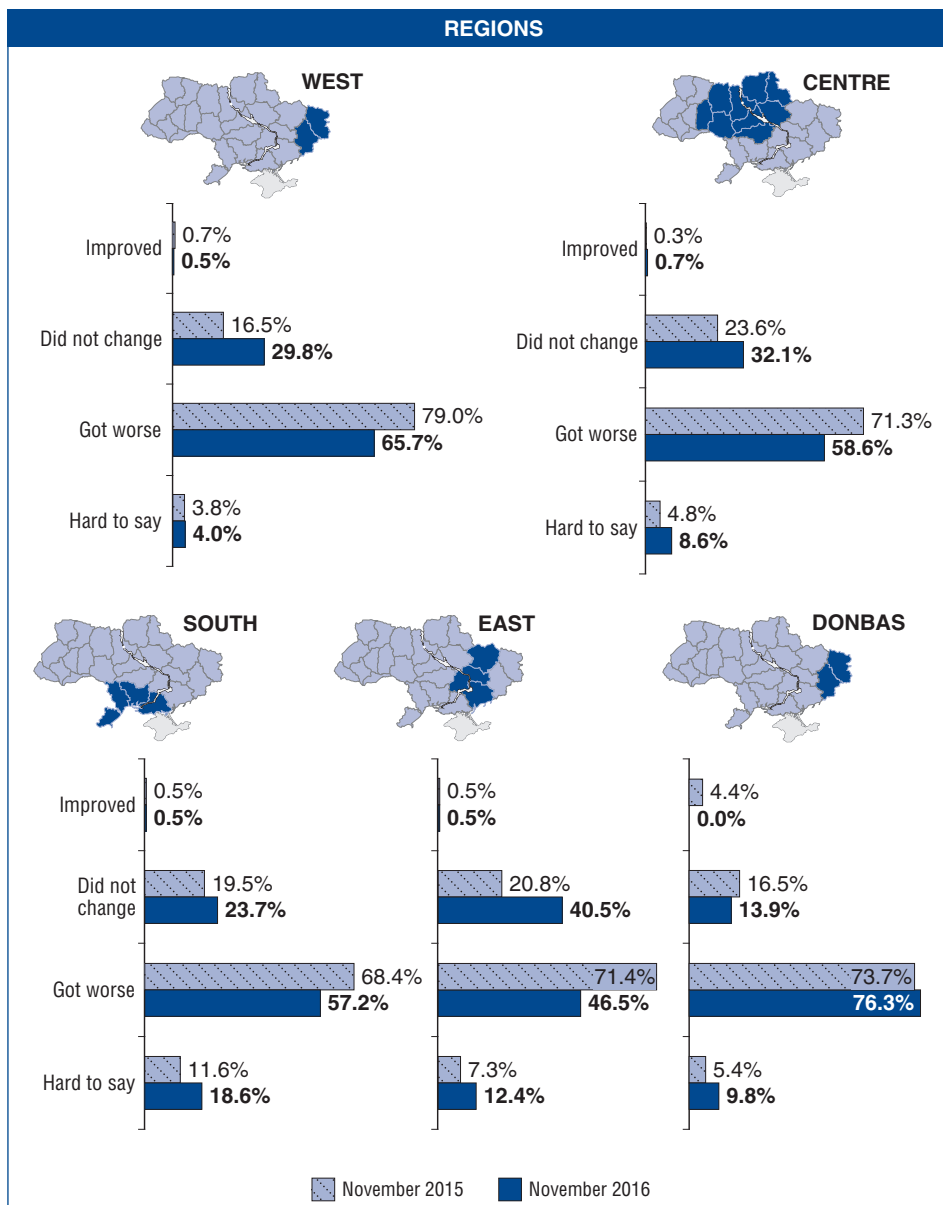
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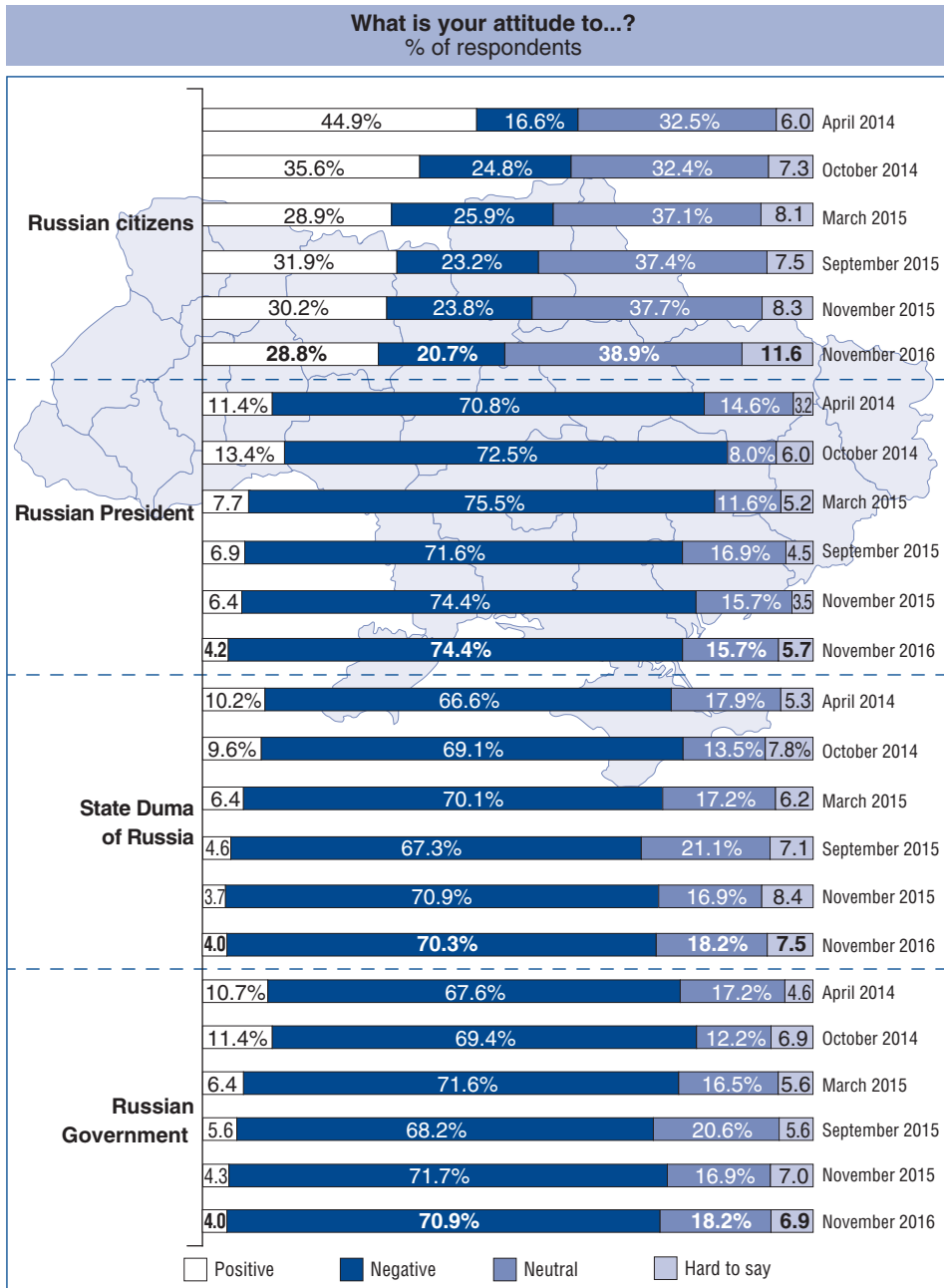


**How did relations between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia change in the past year?**  
% of respondents

(Continued)

**REGIONS**



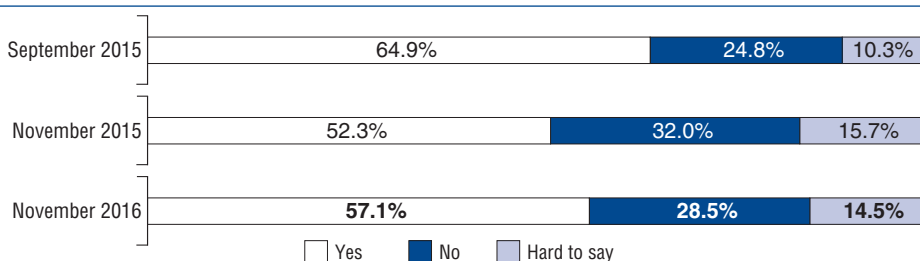




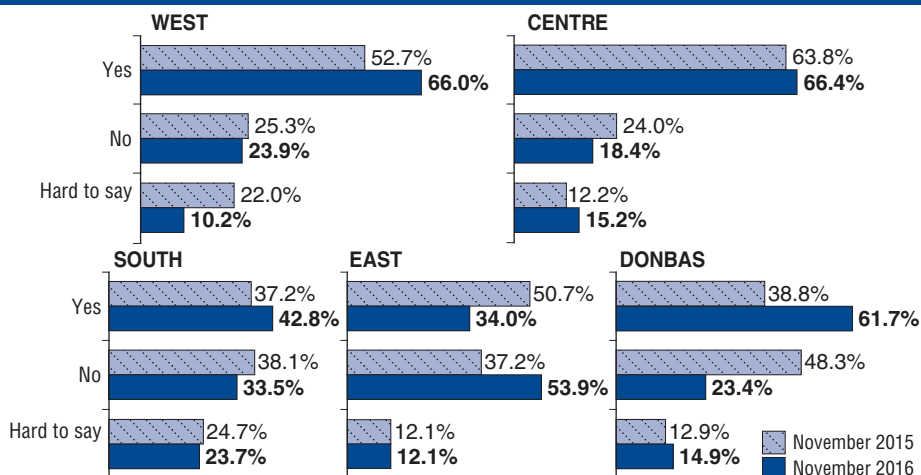
<b>What is your attitude to...?</b> % of respondents <span style="float: right;"><i>(Continued)</i></span>					
<b>REGIONS (November 2016)</b>					
<b>Russian citizens</b>					
	<b>WEST</b>	<b>CENTRE</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>DONBAS</b>
<b>Positive</b>	16.3	23.7	35.8	53.4	23.3
<b>Negative</b>	31.4	23.1	10.7	5.7	25.2
<b>Neutral</b>	44.9	39.6	40.0	29.1	40.1
<b>Hard to say</b>	7.3	13.6	13.5	11.9	11.4
<b>Russian President</b>					
	<b>WEST</b>	<b>CENTRE</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>DONBAS</b>
<b>Positive</b>	1.2	1.6	3.7	9.7	7.9
<b>Negative</b>	92.0	86.6	61.6	53.9	57.0
<b>Neutral</b>	6.1	9.3	20.8	25.9	26.9
<b>Hard to say</b>	0.7	2.5	13.9	10.5	8.2
<b>State Duma of Russia</b>					
	<b>WEST</b>	<b>CENTRE</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>DONBAS</b>
<b>Positive</b>	0.9	2.3	4.6	8.9	5.7
<b>Negative</b>	90.5	81.7	54.6	47.0	56.5
<b>Neutral</b>	7.1	12.3	25.5	29.3	28.1
<b>Hard to say</b>	1.4	3.6	15.3	14.8	9.8
<b>Russian Government</b>					
	<b>WEST</b>	<b>CENTRE</b>	<b>SOUTH</b>	<b>EAST</b>	<b>DONBAS</b>
<b>Positive</b>	0.9	2.3	4.2	8.1	7.0
<b>Negative</b>	90.8	82.6	54.0	49.3	55.7
<b>Neutral</b>	6.9	12.0	26.0	28.8	28.8
<b>Hard to say</b>	1.4	3.0	15.8	13.7	8.5

<b>What is your attitude to...?</b>					
% of respondents					
<i>(Continued)</i>					
<b>AGE (November 2016)</b>					
<b>Russian citizens</b>					
	<b>18-29 y.o.</b>	<b>30-39 y.o.</b>	<b>40-49 y.o.</b>	<b>50-59 y.o.</b>	<b>60 y.o. and older</b>
<b>Positive</b>	19.5	26.3	32.6	28.8	35.6
<b>Negative</b>	21.9	21.8	18.4	22.8	18.8
<b>Neutral</b>	45.0	37.9	39.0	37.2	36.1
<b>Hard to say</b>	13.6	14.1	10.0	11.1	9.5
<b>Russian President</b>					
	<b>18-29 y.o.</b>	<b>30-39 y.o.</b>	<b>40-49 y.o.</b>	<b>50-59 y.o.</b>	<b>60 y.o. and older</b>
<b>Positive</b>	1.7	3.4	4.5	4.6	6.5
<b>Negative</b>	76.0	75.6	75.9	75.9	69.8
<b>Neutral</b>	18.0	15.4	14.8	12.5	17.1
<b>Hard to say</b>	4.4	5.6	4.8	7.0	6.6
<b>State Duma of Russia</b>					
	<b>18-29 y.o.</b>	<b>30-39 y.o.</b>	<b>40-49 y.o.</b>	<b>50-59 y.o.</b>	<b>60 y.o. and older</b>
<b>Positive</b>	2.2	2.7	4.2	4.6	5.9
<b>Negative</b>	72.4	72.9	70.5	72.6	65.1
<b>Neutral</b>	19.1	17.8	18.7	14.4	20.3
<b>Hard to say</b>	6.3	6.6	6.6	8.4	8.7
<b>Russian Government</b>					
	<b>18-29 y.o.</b>	<b>30-39 y.o.</b>	<b>40-49 y.o.</b>	<b>50-59 y.o.</b>	<b>60 y.o. and older</b>
<b>Positive</b>	2.2	3.2	3.6	4.1	6.1
<b>Negative</b>	74.7	73.2	71.3	73.1	64.8
<b>Neutral</b>	17.5	16.7	19.0	14.9	21.5
<b>Hard to say</b>	5.6	6.9	6.0	7.9	7.6

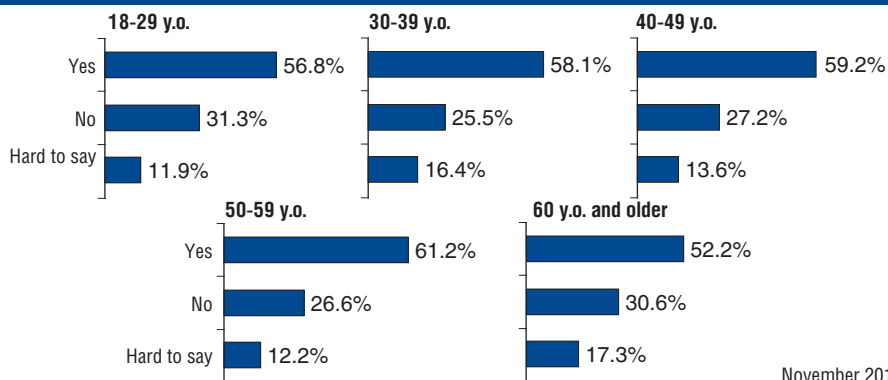
**Do you feel the alienation between the citizens (societies) of Russia and Ukraine?**  
% of respondents



**REGIONS**

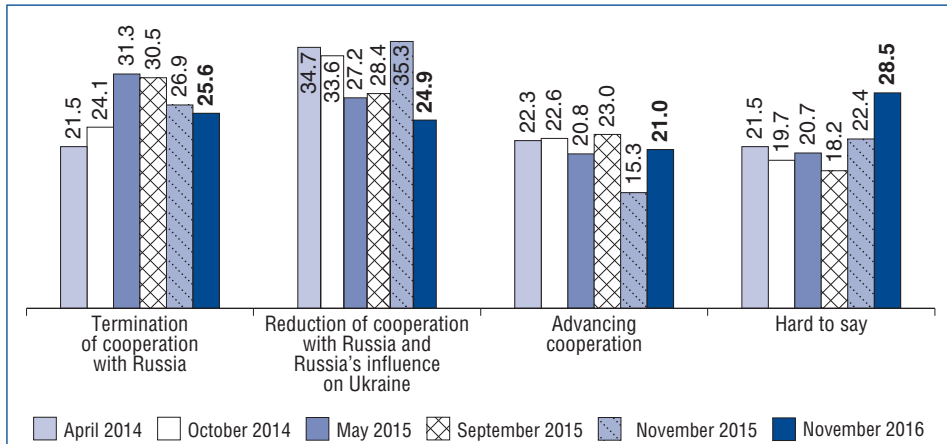


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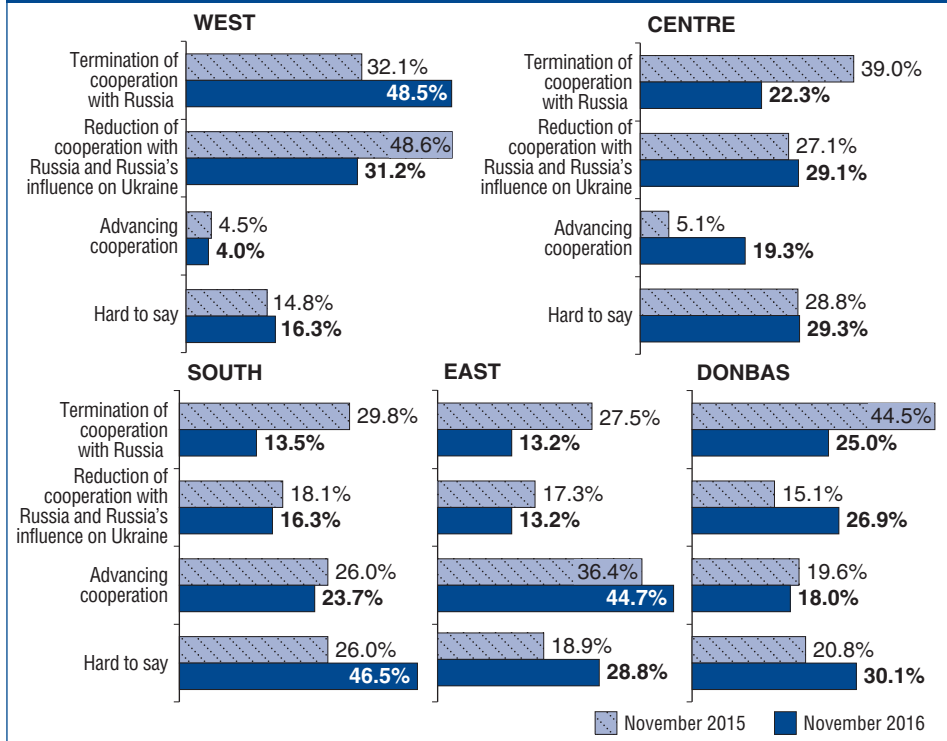


November 2016

**What should be Ukraine's policy in regard to Russia?**  
% of respondents



**REGIONS**

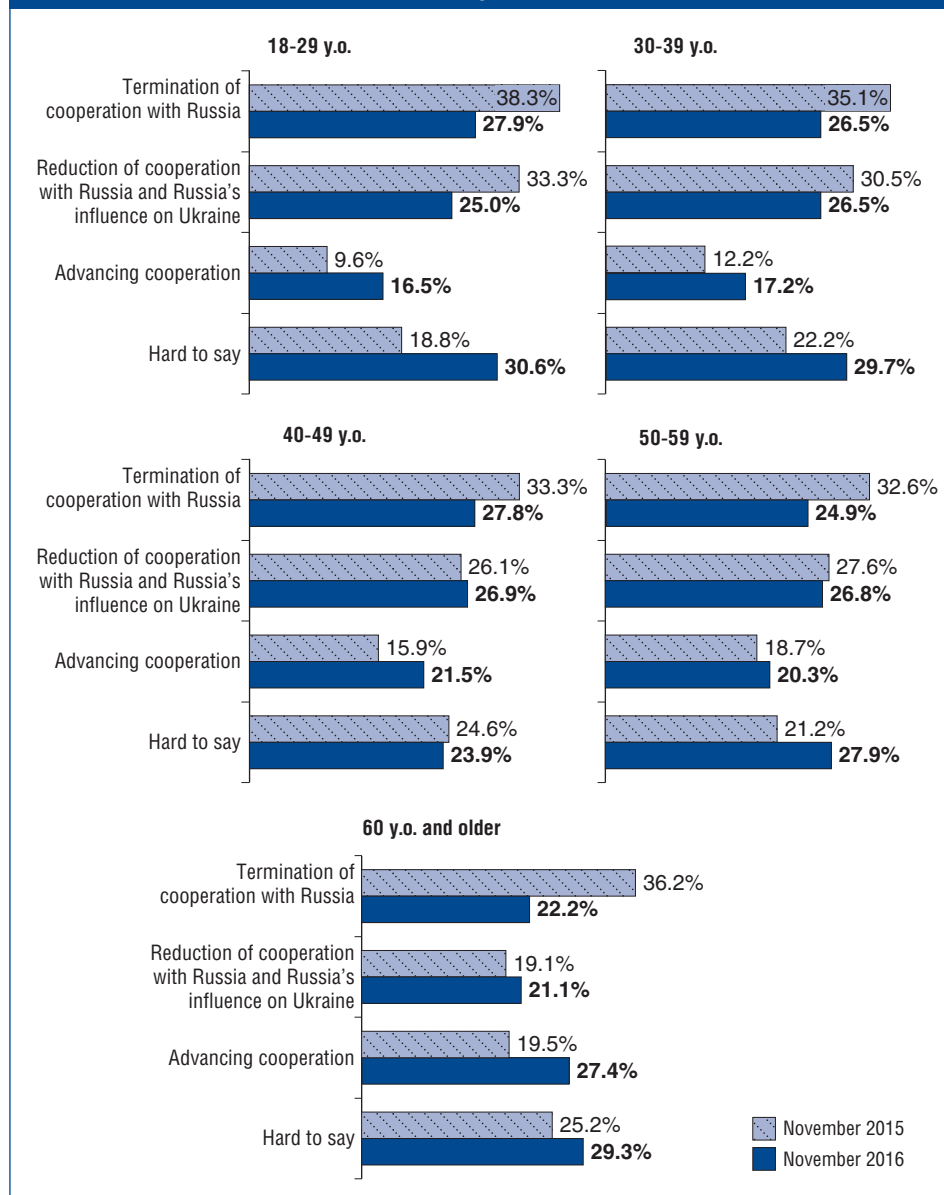


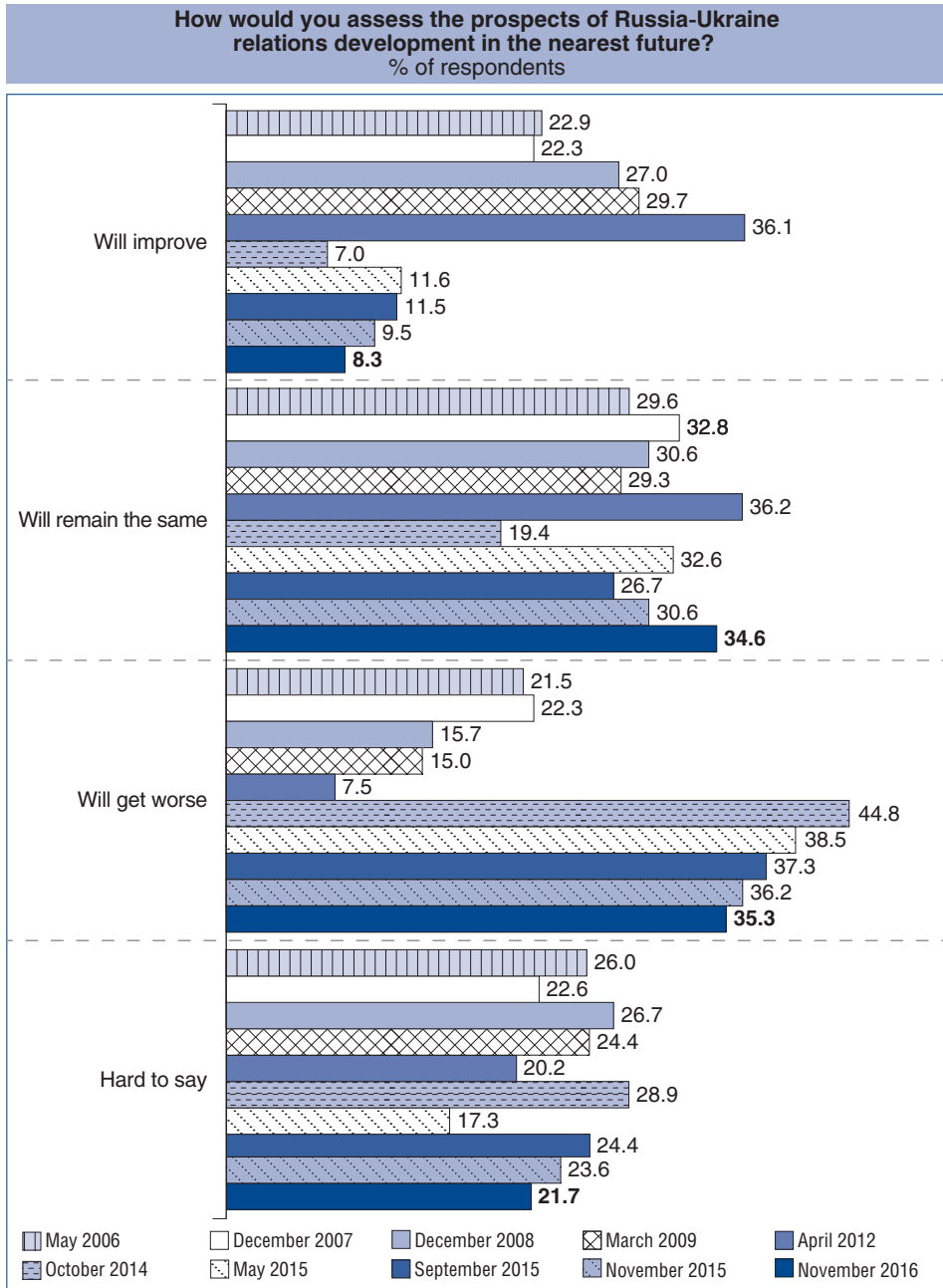
## What should be Ukraine's policy in regard to Russia?

% of respondents

(Continued)

## AGE





### How would you assess the prospects of Russia-Ukraine relations development in the nearest future?

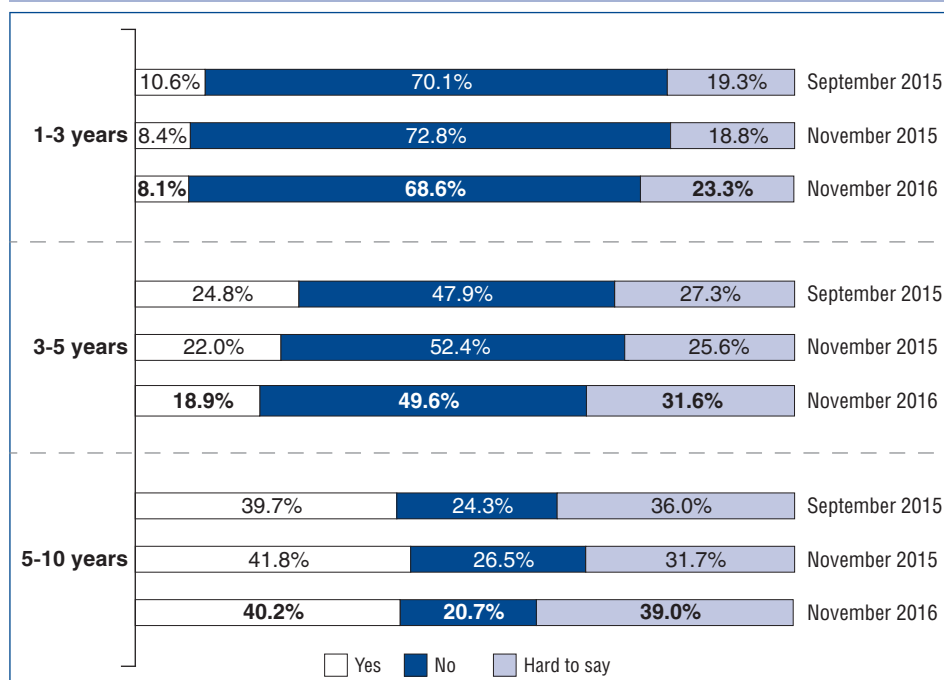
% of respondents

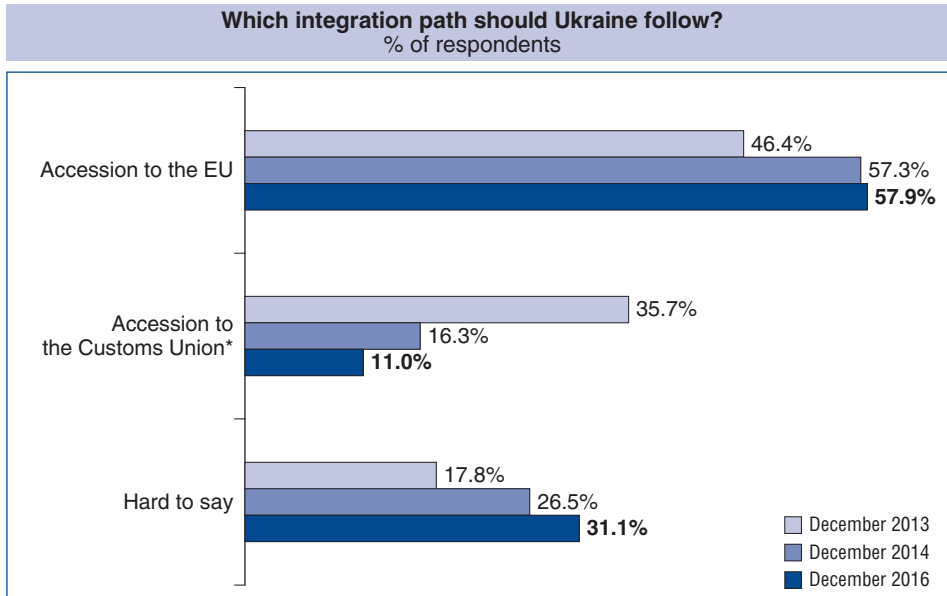
(Continued)

	REGIONS				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST	DONBAS
Will improve	3.8	8.4	7.9	12.9	8.9
Will remain the same	39.7	35.6	31.5	34.2	28.2
Will get worse	41.4	35.8	29.2	27.2	40.2
Hard to say	15.1	20.2	31.5	25.6	22.8
	AGE				
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Will improve	4.1	7.2	6.9	10.0	12.2
Will remain the same	33.7	36.6	33.5	36.5	33.1
Will get worse	35.7	34.5	37.2	37.3	33.3
Hard to say	26.5	21.8	22.4	16.2	21.5

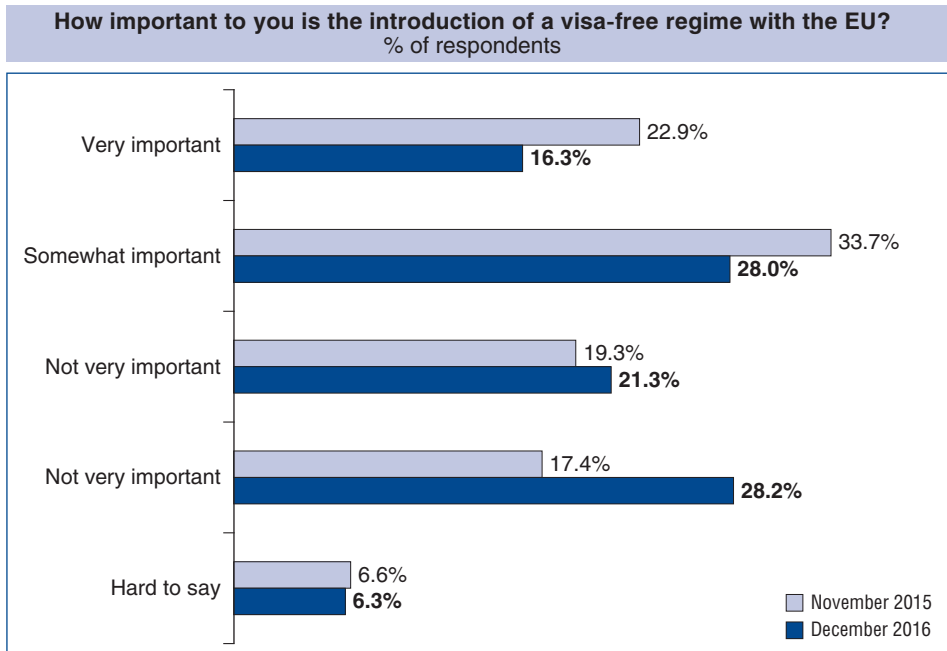
### Can there be changes for the better in Russia's policy towards Ukraine?

% of respondents

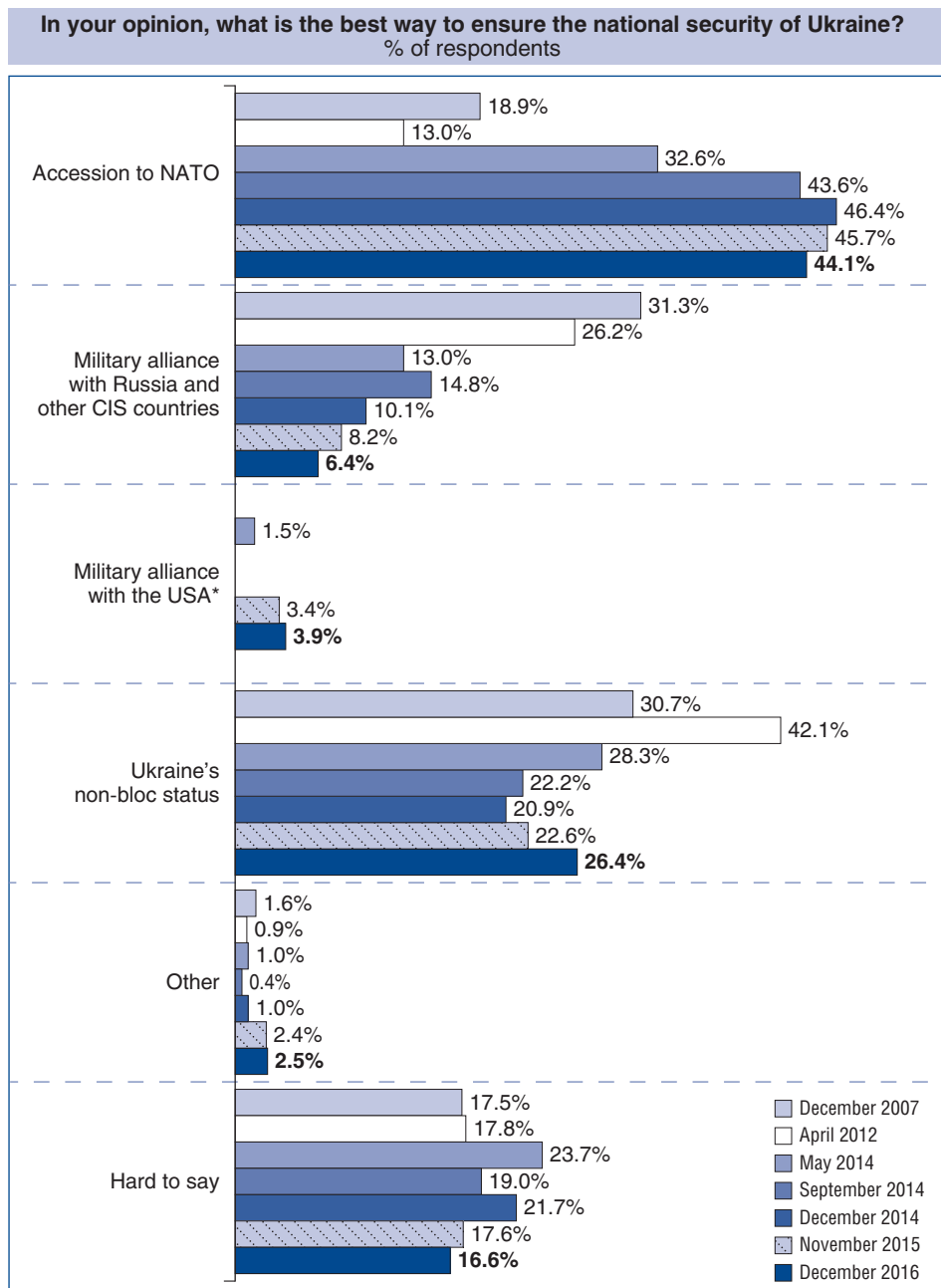




\*Now – the Eurasian Economic Union.

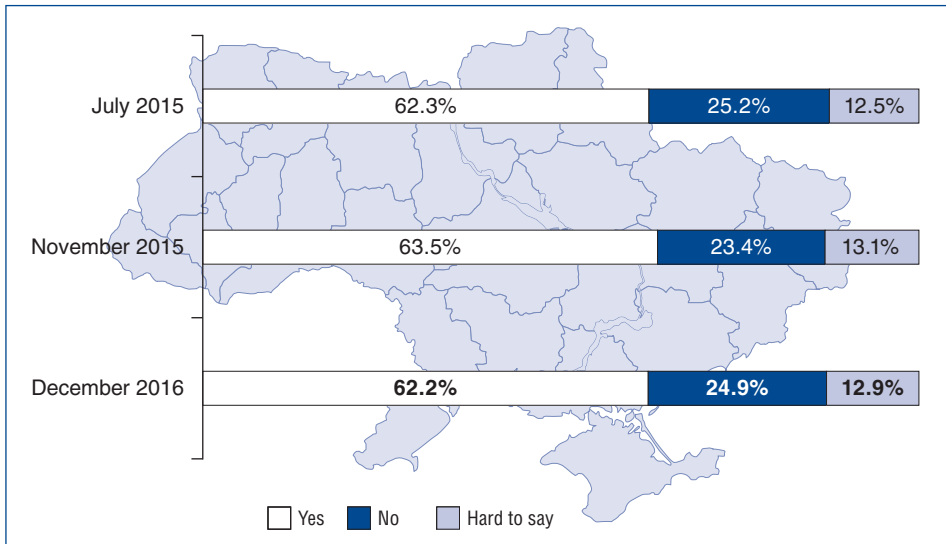






\*In the 2007, 2012, 2014 questionnaires this option was not offered.

**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

