



**TRAJECTORY OF THE CONFLICT:
THE MODEL OF UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS
IN THE NEAR-TERM OUTLOOK**

CHANCES, PATHS AND OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

Information Materials for the Trilateral Expert Meeting
20-23 August 2017, Cadenabbia, Italy

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

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This publication, which was prepared by the Razumkov Centre with the assistance of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Office in Ukraine, is a prelude to the meeting of Ukrainian, Russian and German experts. Since 2015, the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has held regular (semi-annual) trilateral expert discussions dedicated to the problems of settling/minimising the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

During the previous meeting in Berlin (February 2017), within the discussion “Eastern Ukraine – the Forgotten War?”, participants discussed the prospects of the Minsk agreements, assessed the attitudes and interests of the parties to the conflict, and considered the nature and specific features of Moscow-Kyiv relations within this protracted conflict. The possibilities and ways of minimising the Moscow-Kyiv conflict were discussed, including in the context of geopolitical changes associated with the US presidential election.

How do the geopolitical changes in Europe and worldwide in the last six months (including the election results in France, the UK and the upcoming German vote and NATO, G-7 and G-20 summits) affect the nature and prospects of the Moscow-Kyiv conflict? What path should be taken to stop deterioration of Ukrainian-Russian relations and to prevent the threat of conflict escalation? The discussion will be focused on these issues.

This publication contains the attitudes, assessments and forecasts by Ukrainian, Russian and German experts on the possible model for Ukrainian-Russian relations in the near future; and (most importantly) certain proposals and recommendations are summarised with regard to settling/minimising the conflict. Indeed, this is the main objective and target of current discussion and the Ukrainian-Russian-German expert dialogue as such.

In addition, this publication presents some results from sociological surveys performed by the Razumkov Centre during the Russia-Ukraine conflict (2014-2017).

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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CONTENT

PROPOSALS FOR THE SETTLEMENT (MINIMISATION) OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*Based on the Interviews with Ukrainian,
Russian and German Experts (June 2017)* 101

TRAJECTORY OF THE CONFLICT: THE MODEL OF UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE NEAR-TERM OUTLOOK

CHANCES, PATHS AND OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

Interviews with Ukrainian, Russian and German Experts (June 2017) 114

Positions of Ukrainian Experts 115

The Conflict Between Russia and Ukraine Will
Continue in the Foreseeable Future
Volodymyr FESENKO 115

There is No Question of Any Model for Normalising
Ukrainian-Russian Relations in the Near Future
Mykhailo GONCHAR 118

The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: Possible Steps by Russia,
Ukraine and the West
Vitaliy MARTYNIUK 121

Ukrainian-Russian Relations Will Develop for the Worse,
Plunging into an Even Greater Crisis
Olena SNIGYR 126

No Significant Changes in the Process of Conflict
Settlement Are to Be Expected
Maria ZOLKINA 129

Ukraine-Russia: the Matrix of Confrontational Coexistence
Mykhailo PASHKOV 132

Positions of Russian Experts 137

Efforts to Prevent the Conflict's Transformation
from Latent to Open Form Should Be Made
Tatiana PARKHALINA 137

Russian-Ukrainian Relations Are Poisoned by the Current
Crisis in Earnest and for the Long Term
Andrei ZAGORSKI 141

CONTENT

The State of Russian-Ukrainian Relations Can Be Called Catastrophic and Further Deterioration Is Quite Possible <i>Sergei UTKIN</i>	144
Only the Real Success of Ukraine Will Produce Some Prospects for Resolving the Conflict <i>Lev GUDKOV</i>	147
The Return to the Path of Neighbourly Relations Begins with the Establishment of Economic Cooperation <i>Mikhail SUBBOTIN</i>	152
Temporary Transitional Models Can Be Expected to Arise, Within Which All Parties Will Be Interested in Demilitarising the Conflict <i>Lilia SHEVTSOVA</i>	155
Degradation of Bilateral Relations Is Intensifying, and the Political Resources for Overcoming the Crisis Are Being Reduced to a Minimum <i>Dmitry DANILOV</i>	158
Positions of German Experts	163
Reformed Russia Must Become an Equal Partner, and Then Russian-Ukrainian Relations Can Be Normalised <i>Armin STAIGIS</i>	163
The International Community and Ukraine Itself Must Do All They Can to Ensure the Democratic Development and Prosperity of the Country <i>Eckart D. STRATENSCHULTE</i>	166
Ukraine Will Need to Demonstrate That It Is Moving Towards Genuine Structural Reforms <i>Susan STEWART</i>	169
One of the Scenarios for the Development of Russian-Ukrainian Relations is a Continuation of the Current State of Affairs <i>Andreas UMLAND</i>	171
CAUSES AND THE FUTURE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN MOSCOW AND KYIV: OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS	173
State of Relations Between Ukraine and Russia	173
Prospects for Relations Between Kyiv and Moscow	174
Geopolitical Preferences of Ukrainian Citizens	175

PROPOSALS FOR THE SETTLEMENT (MINIMISATION) OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT

*Based on the interviews with Ukrainian,
Russian and German experts (June 2017)*

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

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

Expert proposals are published in a generalised form.

I. UKRAINE-RUSSIA RELATIONS

Ukrainian experts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Russian experts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

German experts

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II. THE CONFLICT IN DONBAS

Ukrainian experts

❖ **In line with the Minsk and Normandy format, instead of discussing a broad agenda, it is necessary to concentrate the negotiation process on specifically the most acute problems.** In particular, the de-escalation of hostilities in the hottest spots of conflict (Avdeevka, Maryinka, Shirokino); the mutually agreed (under the control of the SCKK and OSCE SMM) withdrawal of forces and assets from both sides in the village of Luhansk; ensuring the safe operation of infrastructure facilities (Donetsk filtering station, etc.) serving territories on both sides of the line of demarcation; the creation of a rapid reaction system to issues in the activities of OSCE SMM patrols, and others.

❖ **In negotiations on the exchange of prisoners and hostages, it may be worth changing the very paradigm of exchange.** Instead of exchanging everyone for everyone, although it is stipulated as such by the Minsk agreements, there should be a transition to a stage-by-stage exchange of individual groups on the agreed lists (which, in fact, has been happening over the past two years).

❖ **It is advisable to strengthen the relationship between Normandy and Minsk format negotiations** at the level of advisers to the leaders of Normandy format states and individual working groups.

❖ **Create an informal non-governmental expert group (composed of authoritative experts of the four Normandy format countries) under the auspices of Germany and France** for brainstorming and working out alternative proposals on the Roadmap for the implementation of the Minsk agreements, as well as on resolving the most acute problems in the conflict zone. Such a group will be freer to seek various compromise proposals than the official representatives of the four countries.

❖ **Concentrate efforts on “freezing” the conflict in Donbas.** Isolate the first three points of the Minsk agreements (ceasefire, arms withdrawal and the effective monitoring of the implementation of these actions by the parties). Arrange these items in a separate Agreement (Memorandum) on armistice and coordinate in the Normandy format.

❖ **Promote the internationalisation of the process of settling the conflict in Donbas** – i.e., connect various international players to the peacekeeping process using the available international mechanisms and platforms. Expand the presence of missions from the UN, OSCE, PACE, EU, Red Cross, Reporters Without Borders, and international human rights and humanitarian organisations in Donbas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

❖ **Within the framework of the OSCE/ODIHR, develop an algorithm for assessing the possibility of holding free, democratic, safe elections in the ORDLO**, allowing for their monitoring, including on the basis of reports from the OSCE SMM and other international organisations, and regular relevant reports.

❖ **Abandon the idea of expanding the current format of negotiations** – at least, the Normandy format – until new circumstances form that signal Russia's enhanced interest in negotiations.

❖ **Not remove the issue of a special peacekeeping mission from the agenda.** Even if there is no hope for the approval of such a mission in the short term, insisting on its necessity is beneficial to Ukraine because it is: a) an informational occasion related to an unresolved conflict; b) a reminder of the issues surrounding the implementation of the Minsk agreements and a kind of safeguard against pressure on Ukraine to carry out certain political actions before ensuring security; c) preparation for the possible use of the mission in the future, as the conflict is long-term in nature, and discussions over the format and mandate of the mission will take years.

❖ **To continue the Security First policy.** Not agree to a version of the Roadmap that combines the concurrent implementation of both items of military de-escalation and political regulations.

❖ **Intensify activities aimed at the declaration of the DPR and LPR as terrorist organisations at the international level**, which will either force the Russian Federation to abandon the support of terrorist organisations, or rank it among the states that support terrorism.

❖ **It is necessary to turn the conflict in Donbas into a problem for Russia.** To this end, Ukraine should minimise damage to its territory and infrastructure from the influence of the occupied territories and the Russian presence there. An effective internal policy towards the occupied territories and the use of international legal mechanisms to influence Russia can make this conflict unprofitable for Moscow.

❖ **Raise the price of Russia's aggressive policy** by expanding Ukraine's targeted sanctions and economic restrictions, and increasing international pressure on Russian authorities by ignoring international events held by Russia and gradually restricting economic cooperation with Russia.

Russian experts

❖ **The most promising plan is to restore this region of Ukraine in cooperation with the European Union.** The cessation of hostilities depends on the political will of Kyiv and Moscow.

❖ **Organise international conferences on both Crimea and Donbas.** At the same time, the conflict in Donbas can be considered in a broader context of frozen conflicts on the territory of the former USSR, which in many respects are similar in nature.

❖ **Expand the international presence in the conflict zone.** This would help ensure the transparency and predictability of the actions of the parties. The existing OSCE Special Monitoring Mission carries out important work, but does not have the mandate and resources to implement the full range of tasks an international staff could undertake, whether under the flag of the OSCE or the UN. Such tasks could include full-fledged control over and the prevention of incidents on the contact line and the section of the border uncontrolled by Kyiv, ensuring public safety, administrative management and compliance with election procedures in certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

❖ **Start a real dialogue between Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk** on the implementation of the Minsk agreements in their entirety in the subgroups of the tripartite contact group.

❖ **To intensify the activities of the Joint Centre on Control and Coordination,** conferring it broad powers to ensure a ceasefire in the conflict zone in the east of Ukraine.

❖ **Kyiv must stop its anti-terrorist operation and develop a realistic national reintegration strategy** (taking into account the Minsk agreements). Ensure demilitarisation of the conflict, not only measures to separate the parties and the ceasefire (demilitarisation involves a comprehensive solution to issues related to the status and level of the armed groups of parties to the conflict, amnesty, international control, etc.). **The conflict cannot be resolved without Kyiv's consent to a direct dialogue with the DPR and LPR.**

German experts

❖ **Progress (even incremental) should take place squarely within the framework of the Minsk agreements.** Withdrawal from these agreements and the search for new approaches will take too much time, and it is unclear what the result will be.

❖ **The first step in resolving the conflict must be “humanitarian in nature”, i.e. it is necessary to put an end to the violence.** This is possible only if the separatists are involved in the negotiations, but this does not mean that responsibility will be deferred from Moscow. All this is known from the lessons of

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

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

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

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

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

III. CRIMEA

Ukrainian experts

❖ **Ukraine must continuously promote the topic of the occupation of Crimea on the agenda of international organisations**, seek the release of political prisoners in Crimea and Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia, and raise the issue of human rights violations in occupied Crimea.

❖ **The sanction regime in relation to occupied Crimea should be maintained further**, making full-fledged economic and commercial activities impossible on the peninsula.

❖ **The Ukrainian side should prepare and file suit in international court instances** in compensation for material damages caused by Russia to Ukraine because of their occupation of Crimea, with the further possibility of reimbursing damage at the expense of Russian assets abroad.

❖ **Insist on providing access to international organisations (UN, Council of Europe, OSCE) to occupied Crimea** in order to monitor the observance of human rights.

❖ **Initiate the creation of the international Crimean Forum** (including politicians, public figures of Ukraine, representatives of various countries and international organisations) that would support attention to the problem of the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia, monitor the situation in Crimea regarding human rights violations, the militarisation of the peninsula and other problems, and also influence the international public opinion on Crimean issues.

❖ **Create a Ukrainian-Russian working group** to include well-known human rights defenders, which will be linked to international human rights organisations for prompt responses to problematic situations related to the persecution of Ukrainian and Crimean-Tatar activists in Crimea.

Russian experts

❖ **It is advisable not to consider the issue of Crimea in conjunction with Donbas**, as this intensifies the crisis and complicates the settlement process in eastern Ukraine. It is necessary to establish channels for pragmatic cooperation between the concerned departments of Russia and Ukraine on such issues as cross-border crime, financial crimes, etc.

❖ The positions of Russia, Ukraine and most countries around the world on the issue of Crimea will remain unchanged. **In these conditions, the minimisation of conflict potential implies limiting military activity in the region, as well as creating understandable conditions for communication between people**

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

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

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

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

German experts

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

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

TRAJECTORY OF THE CONFLICT: THE MODEL OF UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE NEAR-TERM OUTLOOK

CHANCES, PATHS AND OPTIONS FOR CONFLICT SETTLEMENT

Interviews with Ukrainian, Russian and German experts (June 2017)

This round of interviews is planned as a prelude to the next round of a face-to-face dialogue between Ukrainian, Russian and German experts initiated by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in 2015. The upcoming expert meeting in Italy in August 2017 is devoted to problems and prospects of settling/minimising the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

In interviews, which have been summed up by the materials presented in this publication, experts from three countries assessed the impact of geopolitical changes in Europe and the world on the prospects of the Normandy format, the Minsk talks, and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. Will Macron's victory in the French presidential election give new impetus to the Normandy negotiation process? How will relations develop between Moscow and Washington, and in what way will the new US President take part in resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv?

The second part of the virtual discussion was devoted to the prospects of settling the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv and predicting the possible state of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years.

Have the Ukrainian-Russian relations hit rock bottom? Experts answered this question differently. However, the prospects of Kyiv-Moscow relations were assessed very pessimistically in general due to both the "insolubility" of the Crimean problem and the uncertain situation in Donbas, where combat operations go on for fourth year at varying levels of intensity, and where people continue to die.

Obviously, the following tasks should be of the highest priority both for the Normandy four and the trilateral contact group: prevention of conflict escalation, minimising confrontations, and halting the critical downgrading of Ukrainian-Russian relations. Indeed, this is the main subject of both the forthcoming discussion and the Ukrainian-Russian-German expert dialogue in general.

UKRAINIAN EXPERTS

THE CONFLICT BETWEEN RUSSIA AND UKRAINE WILL CONTINUE IN THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?



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The main effect of this situation so far is the hampering, delaying and even freezing of the negotiation process, both in the Normandy format, and in US-Russia and US-Ukraine relations. And if the negotiations in the Normandy format are being hampered, this inevitably affects the negotiations in Minsk, as the two negotiating tracks are linked. This situation was expected and predicted. The new leaders of the country and its foreign policy (the change of leadership in the United States and France and change of the foreign minister in Germany) should be put on the agenda and content of the negotiation process before effectively joining it. Adaptation in communication with colleagues in negotiations will take some time as well. However, we see that the change of leadership in the United States and France did not affect the overall paradigm of negotiations on the settlement of the conflict in Donbas. They are still based on the Minsk agreements. At the same time, over the past six months, the sense of an impasse in the process of implementing the Minsk agreements has only intensified.

Thus, the freezing of the negotiation process on the settlement of the Donbas conflict is not solely caused by elections in the US, France and Germany. In my opinion, there are three other, more important factors freezing the negotiation process.

The first factor is the unchanging, rigid, inflexible and unconstructive stance of Russia, which has insisted on the immediate enforcement of the political part of the Minsk agreements throughout the implementation of the Minsk peace process. From other negotiators, there were at least new ideas and proposals: Germany and France suggested their project of a phased Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk agreements, which linked the political clauses of the Agreement with security issues in the conflict zone; Ukraine proposed a plan for using the OSCE police mission in the conflict zone. Russia has not offered anything new.

President Putin has been waiting all this time for the situation to change in his favour, including after the elections in the US, France and Germany. Apparently, these expectations are not being met, although Putin has still not lost hope of coming to an agreement with the new US President Trump. How this will affect Russia's further behaviour towards the West and Ukraine? Various scenarios are possible: from a new burst of Russian aggression to a gradual freezing of the conflict in Donbas and the continuation of the negotiation process.

The second factor is the lack of fundamentally new ideas and proposals for settlement of the conflict in Donbas. All the proposals from the critics of the Minsk agreements come down to two basic ideas: Minsk-3 or a change in the format of negotiations. But how would Minsk-3 meaningfully differ from Minsk-2? **The only realistic alternative is freezing the conflict with a provisional ceasefire.** Would Russia, to which Minsk-2 is tactically advantageous, agree to this? In my opinion, the emergence of a new agreement regarding Donbas would be possible only in three cases: 1) a new large-scale escalation of the conflict in this region between Russia and Ukraine; 2) Angela Merkel's refusal of Minsk-2 or her withdrawal from politics; 3) a proposal from the US of an alternative to Minsk-2. Various proposals on changing the format of negotiations also essentially amount to the direct involvement of the US in negotiations on Donbas. And here we come to the third factor of freezing the negotiation process.

The third factor is the lack of sufficient interest in the problem of settling the conflict in Donbas on the part of the new US administration; its internal political weakness; and the ambiguity, eclecticism and opportunism of Trump's position in relation to Russia and Ukraine, which also affects the position of the new US leadership on the conflict in Donbas. On the one hand, we see the desire of Trump to come to agreement with Putin, to find some kind of mutual understanding. On the other hand, it is obvious that there will be no "Big Deal" that includes Ukraine and the conflict in Donbas among its components. Donald Trump has fallen into a "Russian trap". His team is accused of unofficial ties with Russia. The investigation of "Russia ties" in last year's presidential elections in the United States is ongoing.

Under these circumstances, Trump and his administration are forced to demonstrate a certain degree of rigidity in relation to Russia, and also periodically use pro-Ukrainian rhetoric to neutralise accusations of "pro-Russian-ness". Thus we observe the same political position towards Ukraine and the conflict in Donbas that was used under President Obama (requiring implementation of Minsk-2, including by Russia, and the continuation of sanctions against the Russian Federation). However, this is less a value-based than an involuntarily opportunistic position. Another serious problem is the unpreparedness of the current US

administration for active participation in negotiations on the conflict in Donbas. Here is one indicative example: so far (as of early June 2017) the US State Department does not have a successor to Victoria Nuland, as a “shuttle” negotiator and mediator between Russia and Ukraine. It is also obvious that the conflict in Donbas is not among the top priorities of the current US administration.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

The bottom has not been reached. The fall continues. Moreover, there are reasons to expect further deterioration in bilateral relations. The events of the first half of 2017 have shown that the influence of militant patriots is quite significant in Ukraine (this is a broader category than Ukrainian nationalists). The essence of their position is no compromises with Moscow on either Crimea or Donbas, a break-off of relations with Russia (either full or significant, immediate or gradual). Similar views (in various versions and forms) are shared by a wide variety of political forces, from the opposition (radical nationalists, “Samopomich”, “UKROP”, etc.), to the “People’s Front”, which is part of the ruling parliamentary coalition.

After the trade blockade of Donbas, which was actively supported by a large part of the population of Ukraine, the country’s leadership, for tactical and opportunistic reasons, began not only using anti-Russian and patriotic rhetoric more often, but also taking the corresponding actions (for example, the ban on Russian social networks and Internet services).

Representatives of the “People’s Front” and a number of other political forces started to voice proposals for the reintroduction of a visa regime with Russia. The idea of terminating direct railway connections with Russia has started being talked about. Public and political activists from among the militant patriots, as well as some veterans of the military actions, declare their intentions to carry out a blockade of trade relations with Russia. It is unlikely that all these ideas will be implemented in full, but they indicate a tendency towards the continuation and even intensification of the curtailing of bilateral relations.

Militant patriots do not represent the majority of the population, but they are very active (in social networks, in parliament, and on the streets) and their actions influence the position of the country’s leadership. They do not seek a war with Russia; their actions are rather aimed at cutting off relations and distancing the country from Russia. The sharp increase in the activity of militant patriots in Ukraine is caused by a growing disappointment in the Minsk agreements,

the inconclusive negotiation process, and the escalation of hostilities in Donbas (in February-March 2017); it is also a reaction to “peace initiatives” of individual Ukrainian politicians and public figures. In a broad sense, this is a consequence of the war in Donbas and Russia’s aggressive policy towards Ukraine.

Ukrainian-Russian relations will only deteriorate and break off, at least until the presidential elections in Ukraine (in the spring of 2019). The pre-election situation in Russia, and then in Ukraine, will not contribute to the improvement of bilateral relations. In Donbas, these relations will take the form of a low-intensity war, but on the whole, it will be a “cold war” confrontation with the use of hybrid warfare tools: from the war of special services and cyber-attacks to propaganda wars and jurisdictional conflicts in international arbitration. **The conflict between Russia and Ukraine will continue in the foreseeable future (perhaps gradually and in less severe forms); it will be determined by the fundamental difference in positions on the status of Crimea and the confrontation around Donbas if Russia continues to support separatist quasi-states in this region.**

THERE IS NO QUESTION OF ANY MODEL FOR NORMALISING UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The chaos in the world is spreading. The reasons are the operating “generators of chaos”. There are two types of them: active and passive. Active generators include the Islamic State, Russia, and North Korea, while passive ones include those helplessly looking at what is happening, not trying to stop them or trying to stop some with the help of others. These are the United Nations, the OSCE, the EU, and NATO, whose policies are either weak or limited to verbal rhetoric and decorative actions. This makes the former much more active.

Europe has been heavily “pacified” since the 1990s and does not want to resort to preventive measures against Russia, a global violator of international law. It only reacts, and this reaction is largely delayed and rhetorical. And Russia sees this! Europeans reproach Trump for not confirming Article 5 of the Washington Treaty anywhere in his statements at the NATO summit in Brussels. However, the United



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States has not officially disavowed the Washington Treaty anywhere. The United States, as the largest military power in the Western world, demands that Europeans spend large amounts on defence, which is quite logical and justified. Europeans have long become a parasite in NATO, thus exacerbating the problem of global security, creating a vacuum, including in Europe.

With the exception of the United Kingdom and France, the armies of the rest of the NATO's European Member Countries, including the German Bundeswehr, cannot be considered in military terms: these are not the full-fledged armed forces, but amusing armed formations. It is not difficult to foresee that, hypothetically, if the Bundeswehr unit was attacked by Russian multiple launch rocket systems somewhere in the Baltics, and the remains of the bodies of German servicemen were delivered to Berlin, Germany's participation in operations to protect NATO allies would be completed in a few days.

The elections in France increased the probability of a positive scenario for the EU, slowing (but not overcoming!) the destructive processes. But the peak of problems for Europe has not yet been passed. The recent terrorist acts indicate that, despite the military defeat of the IS, the infiltration of terrorism into the West continues, not so much from outside as from within. And if Europe falls into the trap of situational politics, which is a familiar arena for Moscow, playing the card of the joint struggle against terrorism and flirting with anti-Americanism, which is characteristic of the French, Italian and German societies, this will only aggravate the situation.

I suppose that Russia, now and in the future, will continue trying to reform the pro-European sentiments of a number of new leaders in the EU countries after the elections, to make them pro-Eurasian, imposing a vision of the world order where there is a Greater Eurasia (from Vladivostok to Lisbon), with the dominant role of Russia and without a US presence in Europe.

Despite some positive trends in the domestic political areas in France and Germany, the political elites of both countries adhere inertly to the pre-war paradigm in which Russia is a mediator in the settlement of the "Ukrainian conflict", an ally in the fight against the IS. They are trying to make the war of Russia against Ukraine "forgotten" in Europe. If in France and Germany, as the leading tandem of the Normandy Format, the temptation to settle the "conflict in Ukraine" under the pretext of building a strategic anti-terrorist alliance with Russia gains the upper hand, then no prospects for a settlement regarding Ukraine can be envisaged. Russia's proxy intervention in elections in the US, France, and Germany should serve as an incentive for rethinking Western approaches to Russia as a whole and its aggression against Ukraine in particular.

One important point should be emphasised here. Compared to the leaders of the G7 and the EU, the military leadership of NATO has a clearer understanding of the fact that, **having set the fight against Islamic terrorism as the priority, but using, as it seems to them, the lesser of evils (the Russian regime) as an ally, Europe and the West thereby accumulate even more problems for themselves in the future.** European politicians and officials do not understand the obvious: the Russian threat to Europe is much more dangerous than Islamic terrorism. And one far-from-fine day, it may turn out that these two threats to Europe and the world are synergised.

The embryo of the new "Islamic State", whatever its name will be in the future, has already matured. And not somewhere in the Middle East, but in Russia. This is the Kadyrov regime in Chechnya, which helped the Kremlin introduce the "Russian World" in the east of Ukraine. Given a certain confluence of circumstances which may seem fantastic today, a merger of these forces and the formation of a hybrid of Eurasianism and Islamism – with a nuclear baton in their hands – may occur.

Has the Franco-German tandem ever thought about this?

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

No, they have not. There are no prospects for settlement due to the lack of will on the part of those who can do this, that is, the EU, the US, and NATO, sufficient to force the aggressor into peace and induce it to return to the Helsinki status quo ante.

In the May 2017 G7 Taormina leaders' communiqué, paragraph 13 was dedicated to Ukraine. In it, just as in a mirror, we can see the inadequacy of Western thinking in the fourth year of the war, Russia's aggression not only against Ukraine but also its crypto-war against the EU. Let us take but a few terminological items – we see the phrases "crisis in Ukraine", and "Minsk agreements" again. In fact, this needs to be the "war against Ukraine" and "Minsk arrangements" instead. They do not have the status of agreements, especially since this document of questionable legal nature did not pass parliamentary procedures.

What is this? Narrow-mindedness? No. I think that both in Paris and Berlin leaders are well aware that we are talking about Russian aggression, but this term is not used, because if you give such an assessment, then you need to act accordingly, and not just "express concern" or "deep concern".

The familiar rhetoric with the false orientation towards absolutism of the Minsk agreements on the part of Berlin and Paris continues, although it is clear that these arrangements have been dead since 31 December 2015, when they expired. Neither NATO nor the Group of Seven has arrived at any fundamentally new approaches; what we have here is the statement of the obvious and a call on the parties to implement arrangements that are practically impossible to implement.

Therefore, Russia continues its expansionist policy and, moreover, it expands the geographical scope of its subversive activities – the Balkans and North Africa. It continues to bring chaos to the space of international relations. Hybrid warfare against Ukraine continues, with efforts focused on undermining the country from within. **Thus, there is no question of any model for normalisation of relations in the years to come. Relations will tend to decline, which is positive for Ukraine** – amid the continuing aggression, the dependence on the aggressor should be minimised.

THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT: POSSIBLE STEPS BY RUSSIA, UKRAINE AND THE WEST

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The presidential elections in the US in 2016 and preparations for the presidential elections in France in 2017 have actually led the Normandy Format into a state of stagnation, as the last summit meeting of the heads of state took place in October 2016, and three follow-up meetings at the level of ministers and their deputies which have been held since then have produced no results. And even the agreement reached by the heads of state on the preparation of the Roadmap for implementation of the Minsk agreements has not been realised. There was every reason to believe that the Russian side did not want to follow the Minsk agreements, having frozen its position until after the elections in the US and France, and this is likely to last until after the election campaign in Germany in September 2017.

The corresponding stagnation was visible directly in Minsk, where the Trilateral Contact Group failed to achieve any results. In eastern Ukraine, where militant activities can be described as "positional disturbance", the situation also remained



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unchanged. At the same time, the Russian leadership continued to shift all the blame to Ukraine, trying to obtrude its vision of the situation as an “internal conflict”, which, in particular, was confirmed by President Putin in an interview with the French publication *Le Figaro* on 29 May 2017 in Paris.¹

An assessment of the current situation concerning the Russian-Ukrainian conflict shows that, given the new realities after the election of Donald Trump as the US President and Emmanuel Macron as the President of France, and the fragments of positions on the conflict articulated by them, Moscow is working on adjusting its line of conduct. At least at the time of the meeting in Paris with the French President Emmanuel Macron on 29 May, Russian President Putin did not have such a line established. In Versailles, he was actually in a “blind defence” and probed his French counterpart about his position and the agreements reached in May at the informal NATO summit and the G7 meeting.

The Russian leadership is pursuing its attempts not only to impose its distorted vision of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict on the world, but also to use it for establishing a new world order advantageous for the Russian Federation, in which it would obtain the desired spheres of influence, including Ukraine, even if this is done in violation of international law. **Thus, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be viewed as part of Russia’s “great game” on the global stage,** and its resolution largely depends on the positions of key stakeholders – the US and the European Union (Germany and France).

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Russian-Ukrainian relations have not hit bottom since the conflict in eastern Ukraine remains unresolved without visible signs of settlement in the near future (at least until the end of the year), and Moscow does not show any desire to return the illegally annexed Crimea to the jurisdiction of Ukraine. In addition, Russia has not yet achieved its main goal in relation to Ukraine, i.e. the consolidation of the Ukrainian state under its influence and control, which was the main reason for the war unleashed by Russia.

Such a situation, in which neither side has achieved its goals (and Ukraine’s goal is the restoration of the territorial integrity of the state), can be described as a “state of uncertainty” or a “restrained balancing on the brink”, which will

¹ Interview of the President of the Russian Federation V. Putin by *Le Figaro* newspaper, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54638>.

not satisfy either party. In this situation, the West (the EU, the US, NATO) is on the side of Ukraine, as the achievement of its goal – the restoration of the world order based on the inviolability of international law, violated by Russia, is seen as the restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Assessing the prospects for the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it is advisable to consider in the short term the possible steps of the parties aimed at achieving their goals.

The Russian Federation

more likely steps:

- propaganda and subversive actions in Ukraine aimed at destabilising the domestic political situation, discrediting the current Ukrainian leadership and bringing to power politicians loyal to the Kremlin;
- political, diplomatic, informational and targeted (cyber-attacks, use of special services, bribery, etc.) effects on the West aimed at the lifting of isolation, the termination of sanctions, discrediting Ukraine and taking it under Russia's control, the return of the Russian Federation to the global stage as one of the poles;
- continuing attempts to shift the Russian-Ukrainian conflict into the category of “internal Ukrainian conflict” and thus to absolve itself from accusations of incitement and support of this conflict;
- unceasing attacks by pro-Russian militants, Russian mercenaries and servicemen on the positions of Ukrainian forces and neighbouring residential areas, with attempts to take control over certain territories to provoke and discredit the Ukrainian side, to stimulate feelings of dissatisfaction and war fatigue among local residents, the Ukrainian military and population at large, as well as to keep combatants and residents of the occupied territories in a combat-ready and loyal state;

less likely steps:

- the intensification of military operations in the eastern part of Ukraine and reinforcement of the military forces there with regular Russian units (without identification marks and acknowledgement of their presence there). Simultaneous build-up of Russian forces along the Russian-Ukrainian border, in Crimea, Transnistria and Belarus (under the pretense of carrying out West-2017 exercises) to deter the Ukrainian army from adequate resistance, in order to expand the zone of control and pressure on Kyiv and the West, coercing them

to meet, at least partially, the conditions of the Russian Federation. (The deterrent to the Russian Federation is the readiness of the West to increase economic pressure on Russia, introduce additional sanctions, provide military assistance to Ukraine and increase their military presence in close proximity to the borders of the Russian Federation);

- the implementation of the Minsk agreements with regard to the withdrawal of troops, mercenaries and weapons, and restoration of Ukraine's control over the entire Russian-Ukrainian border (the deterrent to the Russian Federation here is that from the perspective of the presidential elections of 2018 such a step would be interpreted as a defeat for Putin).

Ukraine

more likely steps:

- retention of positions in eastern Ukraine by Ukrainian forces and “creeping” movement to the contact line as defined by the Minsk agreements;
- exerting information influence on residents of temporarily occupied territories aimed at increasing dissatisfaction with the self-proclaimed authorities of the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” and the Russian presence, as well as the desire to return to Ukrainian jurisdiction;
- continuation of the policy of sanctions and bans against the Russian Federation in Ukraine with a view towards increasing the cost of Russian aggression for the Kremlin;
- an active ongoing campaign to retain and increase international support and pressure on Russia with expressed readiness to comply with the political part of the Minsk agreements, but only after full implementation of clauses relating to security issues (paragraphs 1-3, 9, 10 of the Minsk agreements);

less likely steps:

- the liberation of the uncontrolled territories using military force (the deterrent to Ukraine is the influence of the West and its unwillingness to allow the escalation of the conflict);
- concessions by Ukraine in the implementation of all political clauses of the Minsk agreements prior to the full implementation of security clauses (the deterrent to Ukraine is the rejection of this decision by Ukrainian society).

The West

more likely steps:

- maintenance of the policy of sanctions, as well as financial and economic restrictions against the Russian Federation until the fulfilment of the clauses

of the Minsk agreements by Russia (gradual lifting of sanctions for step-by-step implementation of the Minsk agreements is not out of the question) and the possibility of expanding sanctions in the event of intensification of Russia's aggressive actions;

- the continuation of political and diplomatic pressure on the Russian Federation aimed at pushing it to comply with international legal norms, by restoring of Ukraine's territorial integrity;
- strengthening the deterrence policy through full implementation of the Final Communiqué of the NATO Summit in Warsaw and the EU-NATO Joint Declaration, limiting economic cooperation with the Russian Federation and Russia's participation in international activities;

less likely steps:

- strengthening the economic pressure of the EU on Russia by imposing new sanctions and restrictions aimed at forcing it to return to the international legal environment and restoring territorial integrity of Ukraine (the deterrent to the EU is the Russian lobby in Europe and the unwillingness of European business to lose economic profits from cooperation with the Russian Federation);
- providing Ukraine with military assistance (transfer of lethal weapons) aimed at strengthening its defence capabilities and demonstrating the determination of the West (the deterrent is the unwillingness to provoke Russia and be accused of escalating tension in Europe by the Kremlin).

Taking into account these probable actions of Russia, Ukraine and the West, the development of the situation in the short term (before the end of this year) is seen as follows. **Although the summit in the Normandy format has been held, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will remain unsettled, the Minsk agreements will be unfulfilled, and the Russia-Ukraine and Russia-West contradictions will continue unresolved.** The only possible option is the implementation of the clause on hostage exchange (the least painful for the Russian Federation), which Russia will try to use to mitigate the sanctions policy of the West and as a bargaining chip in relations with it. To charges from Ukraine and the West, Russia will respond with statements about its “non-involvement in the conflict” and counter-charges about “destructive actions”.

In this situation, Russian-Ukrainian relations will deteriorate, increasingly distancing Ukraine from Russia, including in terms of politics, economics, and information. **Therefore, the model of Russian-Ukrainian relations for the near future will reflect the nature of the military-political confrontation while maintaining the minimally permissible contacts.**

UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS WILL DEVELOP FOR THE WORSE, PLUNGING INTO AN EVEN GREATER CRISIS

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The situation in Europe and in the world is most affected by changes in US foreign policy. Obviously, Europe is not a priority for Donald Trump, and thus neither are problems of European security. At the same time, strategic Euro-Atlantic communication is the asset whose rejection would fundamentally undermine the world domination of the United States, and therefore, in the medium term, Euro-Atlantic unity will prevail. However, the peculiarities of the policy of the new US President have already provoked an adjustment in the positions of the European states and become an incentive for the pursuit of Europe's self-reliance in security issues.

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, like the Minsk negotiations and the Normandy format, are issues of intra-European security, and therefore the US is not currently interested in increasing its presence in these matters without the emergence of new circumstances. The Normandy format and the Minsk negotiations are mainly influenced by the development of events directly within Europe. The policy of France and Germany is of critical importance. Macron's victory in the French presidential election provides reason to talk about the stability of the positions of Paris in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and the Minsk process in future.

Internal political trends in Germany indicate a high probability of maintaining the current political position of Berlin in the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv. Given the influence of France and Germany on the development of the EU and on the common policy of the European Union, there is a high probability of maintaining the sanctions regime against Russia with the intention of maintaining and developing a dialogue at the level of civil society, as well as cultural and scientific ties. The EU will also seek to develop economic ties with Russia beyond the sanctions framework.

The continuity of the EU sanctions policy is conditioned by the awareness of threats from Russia for the security of European countries. The severity of sanctions depends directly on the escalation of the conflict in eastern Ukraine,



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as European countries no longer doubt that the management of the conflict on the part of the so-called “DPR-LPR” comes from Russia.

The stability of the positions of European countries in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is very important for Ukraine. The pressure of Western countries on Moscow might stimulate the latter to take the decision to end participation in the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Kyiv is fundamentally inclined to resolve the conflict in the east of Ukraine and restore territorial integrity (including Crimea) by peaceful means. This can be achieved through collective international efforts and a united position among the allies.

Western support is important for Ukraine as a deterrent to Russia, which gives Ukraine the opportunity and time to strengthen itself internally and increase its security and robustness in the conditions of war.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Russia has violated more than 400 treaties – international and bilateral – during the occupation of Crimea and de facto manages the military conflict in the east of Ukraine. It is noteworthy that Russia does not withdraw from agreements and does not terminate treaties, but instead Russian diplomats and lawyers distort their interpretation. Therefore, Russian-Ukrainian relations are experiencing a huge crisis of confidence. In this absence of confidence, interstate relations will develop on the basis that there is no alternative to coexistence and will be a constant source of conflicts until the conditions accompanying bilateral relations change.

Since the source of the conflict in the east of Ukraine, as well as its beneficiary, is Russia, talking about the prospects for its settlement is possible only when an interest in doing so arises in Moscow. While Russia sees the possibility of using the conflict in the east of Ukraine as an instrument of influence on Ukraine with the aim of destabilising and disintegrating the state, it will support the smouldering phase of the conflict.

In addition, the smouldering phase of the conflict is necessary to keep the contacts between people on both lines of demarcation to a minimum. Systematic shelling of civilian infrastructure and houses in the settlements controlled by Ukraine demonstrates the tactics of “squeezing” civilians from the territories adjacent to the line of demarcation.

The reduction of human contacts and ties with the territory controlled by Kyiv, the blocking of the information presence of Ukraine in the occupied territories,

the profound changes in educational programmes, the attraction of Russian citizens who have arrived in the occupied territories for permanent residence – all these activities are aimed at constructing an identity different from that of Ukraine, which should “cement” the artificially created conflict between the so-called “DPR-LPR” and Ukraine. This points to the long-term plans of Russia for destabilisation of Ukraine. In light of the foregoing, we can conclude that bilateral Ukrainian-Russian relations will develop for the worse, plunging into an even greater crisis. The main consequence would be the reduction of bilateral ties to the required minimum.

A common interest is needed for minimisation/resolution of the conflict. Ukraine is the concerned party, but Kyiv does not have a sufficient argument to convince Russia of the need to take a decision to end its presence in the conflict in the east of Ukraine.

Currently, Russia is not interested in conflict settlement as it continues to see opportunities for the exhaustion, destabilisation and destruction of Ukraine, and moreover this conflict itself is an instrument of Russian foreign policy, which solves several problems at once: firstly, through the use of hard power it consolidates Russia’s sphere of influence; secondly, it is still an instrument for promoting the Russian vision of the international legal order through a distorted interpretation of the norms of international law; thirdly, it serves the needs of Russia’s domestic policy, such as gaining combat experience on the part of the Russian military, propaganda and disinformation of Russian citizens, and the argumentation of the concentration of military forces to the West and South-West.

Russia’s aggressive and destructive policy towards Ukraine is forcing Kyiv to follow the path of gradual restriction of ties with the Russian Federation. As a result, over time, interstate relations will be maintained only at the minimum necessary level. Reducing the level of interdependence between Ukraine and Russia will create new conditions for the development of the conflict in the east of Ukraine and may initiate a scenario of “freezing” the conflict or escalating it to nullify the status quo and new peace negotiations.



NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE PROCESS OF CONFLICT SETTLEMENT ARE TO BE EXPECTED

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The round of electoral processes in the Western states, which are crucial in the context of Russia's aggression in Ukraine and attempts to resolve the ongoing conflict, is approaching the final phase – the parliamentary elections in Germany. Although there are still a number of “unknowns” on the agenda (first of all, in the activity of President Trump's administration), certain conclusions are already evident.

Firstly, the internal political processes in individual Member Countries of the European Union, in the EU as a whole, and in the United States have indeed pushed the issue of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian component in the overall complex of relations between the international community and Russia out of a position of priority. As predicted, France and Germany (as moderators of the Normandy process), and especially the EU as a political entity, de facto agreed to take a political break in the process of both negotiations and attempts to find new opportunities to implement the Minsk agreements.

Secondly, the tacit consent of these actors to the lack of progress in the implementation of the Minsk agreements automatically leads to minimising the political and diplomatic pressure on the party to the conflict more open to dialogue – Ukraine. The previous practice and focus on promoting the Minsk route for the sake of there being at least some new steps and arrangements, have been recognised as irrelevant and unpromising. At this point, it is absolutely clear that neither the issue of implementing any “specific” status for the uncontrolled territories, nor amending the Ukrainian Constitution, much less holding elections in the de facto occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, are realistic. They cannot be passed by Ukrainian parliament, and, more importantly, at this stage, they will find no legitimacy in Ukrainian society.

Thus, there is a sustained negative attitude towards all the key political components of the Minsk package, if the attempt to implement them runs counter to the achievement of stable security in the region (which has yet to be observed and is not expected in the foreseeable future). The international situation has



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developed in such a way that, despite the impossibility of moving forward through the implementation of the Minsk agreements, this does not cause either heavy criticism, or diplomatic escalation, or political pressure on any of the parties involved.

Moreover, it has now become apparent that a “Big Deal” between Russia and the US is out of the question, and Macron’s victory in the French presidential election is likely only to strengthen the political firmness of European moderators in the Normandy format. It is possible that, despite Germany’s obvious leadership in this process (by the way, the formal confirmation of the right to this leadership by Donald Trump is quite acceptable when his administration is not troubled by the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as the Chancellor’s Cabinet, for example), the Franco-German tandem will only become stronger, and France itself will be a more active participant under Macron than it was with Hollande. The forecasts for this scenario are supported by the rather strident rhetoric of both key parties of Germany competing for victory in the upcoming parliamentary elections.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

There is no question of any sort of “bottom” in relations between Ukraine and Russia at the moment. For example, the degree of military confrontation has decreased compared to 2014 and 2015, the front line is relatively stable, and clashes are mostly positional (which, however, does not mean the absence of casualties, and quite the contrary); economic ties between the states continue to exist, although reciprocal sanctions are being introduced; political tension continues and will obviously take on new forms.

Today, the possibility of introducing a visa regime with the Russian Federation or tightening the entry rules for Russians is being actively discussed in Ukraine. If this decision is approved, then in the very near future responses and asymmetric measures on the part of Russia are expected, and this will be one of the new forms of political escalation. However, it cannot be unequivocally said that at this stage there is no room for manoeuvre by the political leadership of both states.

Diplomatic relations have not been terminated, the official terminology of Ukraine is still limited to carrying out an anti-terrorist operation, rather than participating in an international armed conflict (the possible reformulating of this

approach is being discussed now), and the mediators from the Western community may actively promote political rapprochement.

In light of the present situation on the international stage and at the local level of the conflict, in particular, it can be noted that the current allocation of forces and circumstances may not be profitable, but it is nevertheless acceptable for Ukraine. Thus, with the obvious impossibility of regaining its sovereignty over the occupied territories, it is free from pressure to make concessions that indicate a loss and are dangerous for its statehood. For Russia, the current situation looks more complicated. There are several explanations for this.

First: less pressure on Ukraine increases chances for the implementation of Minsk-2 according to the logic and vision of Russia. The second (and perhaps the most important) explanation is that Ukraine could de facto tolerate the status quo (the occupation of the Crimea and parts of Donbas) and continue to exist in conditions of a practically frozen situation, but Russia cannot. Even the so-called “LPR-DPR”, unrecognised by the official Russian government, are totally dependent on Russia both politically and economically.

As long as Moscow fails to “return” these territories to Ukraine on its terms, it will most likely have to change and revise its own strategy regarding the “LPR” and “DPR”. The original plan has completely failed, and although the Minsk agreements will not be officially abolished they will remain the general background of negotiations, but not a real plan for the settlement of the conflict. Thus, the current state of affairs puts the greatest number of tasks and questions to Moscow.

Primarily: what, in the literal sense, should be done with the self-proclaimed republics? If the West remains equally “unconcerned” about the fact that Minsk agreements are unlikely to be implemented in the current situation, then Russia will most likely have to incrementally incorporate the so-called “DPR” and “LPR” into its legal and economic space. Recognition of the documents of these “republics”, for example, on the territory of the Russian Federation, is just an insignificant demonstration of the humanitarian “concern” of Russia about the fate of these self-proclaimed formations.

However, the longer the “frozen” status quo lasts, the more there will be a need for the Russian Federation to demonstrate that the “LPR” and “DPR” have not been abandoned by it. At the same time, Moscow understands that any significant step towards the integration of these territories will be followed by accusations in its direction regarding de facto violation of the agreements reached. Although the mere fact of condemnation or even a new batch of sanctions would not stop Russia, it would no longer be able to impose its own scenario on Ukraine and its Western partners.

This having been said, it can be assumed that no significant changes regarding conflict settlement are to be expected. This requires the emergence of fundamentally new variables and circumstances. These could include the revision of its position towards Minsk by the Russian Federation (reduction of the list of requirements or change in their nature), a more pliable position on the part of Ukraine regarding implementation of Minsk-2 (which is unlikely if the requirements of the Russian Federation remain the same), or a change in Russian leadership (which immediately pushes the probability of such a scenario to a medium-term perspective).

At the same time, it is important to note that in Ukraine, among the political and expert community, there is no strategic study of the scenario of co-existence with Russia even after the emergence of new factors. And if Russia's position to this point has seemed completely inflexible, a vacuum of proposals for the future format of bilateral relations can be observed in Ukraine.

The optimal way forward at present is defining the minimum limit of necessary relations and contacts in politics and economics, the analysis of possible social reactions (and, respectively, working with them), as well as the presentation of this vision to society. Given the beginning of the review of Ukraine's lawsuits against Russia in international courts, this methodical restriction of ties with the latter seems to be a practical and logical step.

UKRAINE-RUSSIA: THE MATRIX OF CONFRONTATIONAL COEXISTENCE

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

Unfortunately, the observed changes in the geopolitical landscape of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict have not brought predictability, positive dynamics, or any obvious prospects for settlement.

Firstly, the turbulence on the Washington-Brussels axis remains (the position of the US President at the NATO summit received mixed reaction in Europe). It is no accident that on 7 June 2017 the European Commission published a paper on the future of European defence, which offered three different options for the development of the EU in the area of security and defence. It is troubling for



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Europeans that the foreign policy pursued by Trump is impulsive, hardly predictable and largely conditioned by the temperature and intensity of internal conflicts (incidentally, the domestic state of affairs is one of the reasons for the meeting by Donald Trump with Petro Poroshenko).

Secondly, after last year's Berlin meeting of the Normandy Four, there has been another break in the negotiation process in the Normandy format, due to a more precise geopolitical self-determination of Emmanuel Macron after the parliamentary elections, the expectations of the G20 summit in July (Trump's meeting with Putin) and possible autumn launch of the key European tandem of Macron and Merkel following the elections in Germany.

Thirdly, in the countries directly involved in the conflict, i.e. Russia and Ukraine, the impending elections are being anticipated more and more. The war in Donbas will increasingly become a pre-election factor for both the Kremlin and the Bankova, which will strengthen the rigidly patriotic rhetoric of the authorities and minimise the opportunities for any concessions and compromises. For example, we can assume that Russian policy in Donbas will somehow be tied to the H-hour – March 2018, the date of the presidential elections in Russia (referring to the sacred anniversary of the Crimea annexation).

Therefore, taking into account the maximum “personification” and “non-triviality” of the decisions made in the Kremlin, one cannot rule out the possibility of a transitory “Ossetian-Abkhazian” scenario (recognition of the independence of the “DPR/LPR” and signing treaties on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance). Or the “Crimea” scenario, with recognition of the “DPR” and “LPR” and their inclusion in the structure of Russia. This would be very advantageous in the electoral terms if the “reunion” is implemented before 18 March 2018. “Crimea is ours! Donbas is ours!” And if the reunification of North and South Ossetia within the structure of the Russian Federation occur by this day, any international indignation will pale in comparison against this background.

However, these are rather hypothetical assumptions.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

In the first half of 2017, the de facto status of the Crimea issue was “deferred”. The European Union extended sanctions against Russia for the annexation of Crimea for another year. Meanwhile, there have been some milestone events concerning the war in the east of Ukraine, indicating possible changes in the tactics and strategy of the Kremlin with regard to Donbas. A gradual and purposeful process of the “hybrid annexation” of Donbas has noticeably intensified.

Firstly, on 18 February 2017, the President of the Russian Federation signed Decree No.74 on the recognition of the “documents” issued by “the authorities” of the “DPR/LPR”, from passports to vehicle registration plates. This is an act of recognising their legitimacy by Russia.

Secondly, on 1 March 2017, militants seized 40 large Ukrainian enterprises in the territories under their control. Zakharchenko “declared a blockade” to Kyiv. On 14 March, he was already reporting the departure of the first 95 railcars full of coal to Russia. And Plotnitsky said that the “LPR” has signed a two-year contract with Crimea for the supply of 3.5 million tonnes of coal. On 15 March, the Ukrainian side set up a transport blockade in the CTO zone.

Thirdly, on 17 March 2017, the first meeting of the “Russia-Donbas” integration committee, with participation of the leaders from the “DPR/LPR”, was held in Livadia Palace in Yalta. A course of integration into the Russian Federation was proclaimed and a “special project” for the cooperation of Moscow with Donetsk and Luhansk in all areas was proposed. The idea of creating a “Russian Region” in the east of Ukraine was voiced; the leaders of the “republics” declared a transition to Russian legislation and intentions to hold referendums on accession to Russia. On 12 May, in Donetsk, the second meeting of the committee was held, at which Zakharchenko made a statement: “We have one goal – reunification with Motherland, and the Motherland is Russia. The ultimate goal of this committee, all its work is aimed only at one thing – return to the motherland”.

Fourthly, the participants of the parliamentary hearings in the State Duma (20 March 2017) proposed establishing full “migration amnesty” for residents of the “DPR/LPR”, developing a list of preferences and abolishing permits for working in Russia. Another landmark came on 13 April 2017, when the Chairman of the Union of Theatre Workers of the “DPR”, Natalya Volkova, speaking before the Committee for Public Support of Residents of South-Eastern Ukraine of the Federation Council of the Russian Federation, reported that there was a spike in humanitarian contacts between the “DPR” and Russian regions – 64 joint events were held in November-December 2016, and 124 in the 1st quarter of 2017.

During the entire period of the occupation, Russia has been actively pursuing a “hybrid annexation” of Donbas. The socio-economic sphere of the “DPR-LPR” is managed by the Government of the Russian Federation through an interdepartmental commission (six working groups set up by five Russian ministries).

The “republics” have their own (Russified) system of “patriotic” upbringing of youth based on Russian methods, praising acts of courage of the rebels. The “separate” history of the “republics” is being written. The system of higher

² Just before this, on 11 May, the “DPR” and South Ossetia signed a treaty on friendship and cooperation.

education in the “DPR-LPR” is completely tied to the Russian Federation. An overt and extensive Russification of the occupied territories is being carried out. The Russian ruble is being introduced as the mandatory currency; all accounting and payments are conducted in rubles. The armed forces of the “LPR” and “DPR” are a “combat branch” of the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, the backbone of which consists of Russian special forces, officers and generals. The situation in the “republics” is totally controlled by Russian special services.

The hybrid annexation of Donbas has turned the “DPR/LPR” into a militarised zone hostile and alien to Ukraine, saturated with the ideology of the “Russian world”, filled with weapons, covered with a dense network of informants and stations of Russian secret services, controlled by an army of militants led by Russian officers.

Therefore, for the near future, the most likely path of development is the “Transnistrian” scenario – the preservation of a “simmering”/“half-frozen” conflict with the maximum integration of “republics” into the Russian Federation, the conclusion of agreements on cooperation between the “DPR/LPR” and the regions of the Russian Federation, the maximum migration incentives, the influx of Russian capital, a unified financial-monetary, banking, and administrative-economic system, as well as legislation, education, and socio-humanitarian programmes, etc. In practice, this “hybrid annexation” preserves the current status quo and blocks reintegration of this region into Ukraine.

Prospects for Ukrainian-Russian relations. The annexation of Crimea and Russian expansion in Donbas, from the entire model range of interstate relations (not to mention war as such), leave Ukraine for the long term only the format of transitory confrontational coexistence with the Russian Federation – limited, forced, cold – depending on the current situation and the complex of internal and external factors.

The topics of introducing a visa regime with the Russian Federation, severing diplomatic relations, curtailing trade contacts, etc., are being actively discussed among the Ukrainian political elites today. At the same time, there is a debate on changing the format of the CTO and the transition to a new model of “protecting the country from Russian hybrid aggression” – by this I mean the introduction in the Parliament (as of early June 2017) of the new draft Law “On State Policy for the Restoration of Ukraine’s Sovereignty over the Temporarily Occupied Territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts”.

In general, the dynamics and specific nature of the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv in the context of the “deferred issue” of Crimea and the “simmering” conflict in Donbas, give reason to foresee predominant negative trends for the near future. **First:** further political and ideological self-determination of Kyiv with regard to Russia (with the preservation of “frozen” diplomatic relations) and the

gradual formation of a model of contacts with Russia as the aggressor country. Over the years of the conflict, an array of relevant legal and regulatory documents has been developed (from resolutions of the Verkhovna Rada to the new Military Doctrine and the National Security Strategy). **Second:** the inertia of curtailing economic contacts with the Russian Federation, a break-off of remaining cooperation ties, and energy confrontation. Gradual diversification of trade and economic contacts of Ukraine with an orientation towards the EU and third-country markets. **Third:** limitation of contacts in all areas, including interpersonal contacts, cultural and communication ties, interregional cooperation, book publishing, scientific contacts, etc. **Fourth:** Revision of the agreement framework. Taking an inventory of the array of previous agreements and arrangements. Return to the subject of a Big Treaty, the formalisation of Ukraine's non-participation in the CIS and termination of the relevant obligations. **Fifth:** confrontation on the international stage. Confrontation within the OSCE, PACE, permanent conflict within the UN General Assembly and in other international institutions. **Sixth:** continuation of the "hybrid war" in cyberspace. In recent years, the CERT-UA under the State Service of Special Communications has recorded a sharp increase in cyber-attacks on government portals and government agencies. The most extensive cyber-sabotages from the Russian side were recorded in December 2015 and December 2016. **Seventh:** Ukraine-Russia confrontation in international courts. There are long-term trials with great resonance taking place in the UN International Court of Justice, the Stockholm Court, etc. The Ukrainian side brought five interstate lawsuits against the Russian Federation to the European Court of Human Rights. A number of lawsuits have been filed with international courts by Ukrainian companies and banks.

In other words, the relations between Kyiv and Moscow have not yet hit "bottom".

Obviously, this is not a complete list of the tendencies towards confrontation. Ukrainian-Russian relations are pitched and the fall will continue. What important now is to understand on what principles Kyiv will build its relations with Moscow. The following options are possible here.

First: a continued fundamental and large-scale curtailment of contacts and cooperation in a mode of "hostile coexistence". A de facto cold war.

Second: "limited coexistence" – a strong advocacy of national interests with reasonable compromises. Defining a package of issues where compromise is impossible.

Currently, it is unreasonable to consider an option that provides a course for step-by-step settlement of the conflict, with mutually acceptable concessions and the prospect of normalisation of relations.

RUSSIAN EXPERTS

EFFORTS TO PREVENT THE CONFLICT'S TRANSFORMATION FROM LATENT TO OPEN FORM SHOULD BE MADE

– *In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?*

The wave of populism born on both sides of the Atlantic – in the UK (due to Brexit) and in the US in the context of the presidential election — was stifled in continental Europe. Old World elites and citizens, conscious of their responsibility towards the future of Europe, voted for the forces that ensure continuity in the development of the European integration project.

The American president has abandoned many of his electoral promises concerning domestic and foreign policy, with a speed that boggles the mind. These promises include: *assessment of NATO* – from “obsolete” to a fundamental security organisation; *the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP)* – from the intention to suspend negotiations to their resumption; *the role of the EU* – from building bilateral relations to the recognition of the key role of this institution; *the sphere of international order and security* – from staking all on the policy of non-interference in the affairs of other countries to the strike by cruise missiles (“Tomahawks”) on the Syrian military airfield and sending the aircraft carriers to the shores of North Korea; *regarding Russia* – from declarations on the establishment of friendly relations and recognition of Crimea as part of the Russian Federation to the distancing (under the pressure of the American establishment) from contacts with the Russian President until the G-20 summit in Hamburg in the summer of 2017.

Despite the visits by Rex Tillerson to Moscow and Sergey Lavrov to Washington, it is already clear that the so-called “big deal” between the United States and Russia (with possible involvement of Ukraine) will never happen. In the field of international politics, Washington will have to take into account the opinion of the European allies, and Moscow will have to accept the fact that it is not an option to make a deal with Washington behind Europe’s back. Therefore, all participants in the Euro-Atlantic security system will have to adhere to the norms and standards developed and established in the post-bipolar era, i.e. in the last 25 years.



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It is quite obvious that in the conditions of unpredictability emanating from the American administration, Europe must assume more responsibility for the security policy of the Euro-Atlantic space. However, the difference in the perception of threats in the EU member states in Eastern and Southern Europe makes it difficult to develop a common understanding of the new role of the European Union. In this context, Germany is making efforts to support the development by NATO and the EU of mutually complementary, rather than competing, strategies.

NATO and the EU have formulated their policy towards Russia as follows: in the case of the EU, the choice is selective cooperation, and in the case of NATO, it is deterrence and dialogue. In essence this means that both sides will continue to exist in the paradigm of deterrence, which we have seen since 2014, but at the same time they will cooperate on key issues related to their security (for example, combating terrorism, drug trafficking, and human trafficking) and economic projects that determine their development and, first and foremost, their energy security.

Some elements of this approach resemble the philosophy of the Harmel Report of 1967, when the then Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium suggested following two core principles in relations with the USSR: deterrence and détente. The détente principle entailed the development of the arms control process, economic cooperation and humanitarian contacts, which subsequently formed the basis for the so-called “three baskets” of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, which changed the political landscape on the European continent.

It can be assumed that some representatives of the Russian political class and the expert community have dispelled illusions about the possibility of agreements on a “second Yalta” or the division of spheres of influence, and of reaching agreements on the establishment of new rules of the game or behaviour in Europe that can replace the principles of the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter for a New Europe.

The elite of the so-called collective West has come to realise that Russia does not want to be part of this kind of West, with its institutional and regulatory framework, and that Russia is a different essence with a different political and strategic culture. Apparently, both sides have arrived at an understanding of the need for coexistence (or cohabitation, as the French would say). And the best option is peaceful coexistence, but only under certain conditions. At least a minimum level of trust (lost due to the events in Ukraine and Syria) is required to create these conditions.

As for the situation in and around Ukraine, the leaders of all Western countries and Russia repeat, like a mantra, the declaration of the need to implement the Minsk agreements, but with different interpretations of what this means. These interpretations include the following: Western countries and Ukraine repeat the thesis that Russia is a party to the conflict and must fulfil its obligations. Russia

does not recognise itself as a party to the conflict and evades all responsibility for implementing the Minsk agreements, considering itself only a guarantor. Regardless of the political situation within the country, Kyiv will never agree to fulfil political obligations without security guarantees, because this would be suicidal for the government; on the other side, Russia and the LPR-DPR insist on strict implementation of the articles of the Minsk agreements, understanding that Kyiv cannot do this. Under these conditions, there are no options to fulfil the Minsk agreements, which have performed their function as a ceasefire and rescue of the Ukrainian army after Ilovaik and Debaltsevo.

The involvement of the United States seems necessary. The White House has already spoken about such a possibility, Ukraine and the European allies would welcome it, and Russia does not object to it. Undoubtedly, a lot will depend on agreements achieved by the presidents of the United States and Russia on the threshold of the G-20 summit in Germany in early July.

However, serious changes in the “Ukrainian dossier” should not be expected until the end of the electoral cycle in Germany. However, Angela Merkel, who most likely will be re-elected for one more term, is determined to take on herself, her country, and Europe the responsibility for the fate of European security, and this responsibility is greater than ever before. Such determination is driven, first of all, by the situation in Washington, the unpredictability of the new administration and the nature of the threats.

It is already becoming clear that the solution to the Ukrainian crisis will be associated with the strengthening of the Macron-Merkel tandem. After the NATO summit and the G-7 Summit in Taormina, these European politicians realised that Trump would most likely hand the fate of the post-Soviet space over to European countries, unless, as noted above, any special agreements are reached with President Putin in Hamburg.

As we know, the activation of the “Normandy format” and the OSCE’s role, which declined after the death of one of the mission members on the ceasefire line, were discussed during President Putin’s visit to Paris. Of course, all the participants in the format would be interested in finding a solution that reduces the level of tension.

However, at this point the situation remains generally unchanged: the Ukrainian side believes that the DPR-LPR are under the control of Russia (required by Kyiv, but also by Berlin, Paris and Washington, to fulfil the Minsk agreements in terms of ensuring security); the republics claim that they are at war with the Ukrainian occupation forces. The Russian side points out that the Minsk agreements are not about Russia’s obligations, and representatives of the Russian Federation participate in the negotiation processes, including the “Normandy format” having same status as representatives of Germany and France.

The OSCE representatives in Vienna will try to find out what is actually happening. They will also visit Kyiv and some locations of the Donbas in the area of military operations.

Some politicians in Ukraine and Russia state that it is possible to resolve the conflict only through direct negotiations between Kyiv, Donetsk and Luhansk. Official Kyiv excludes this possibility since the Ukrainian authorities are never going to integrate the DPR and LPR into Ukraine in the form of a “Russian enclave”; at the same time, Kyiv is focused on the liquidation of the republics in order to restore Ukrainian jurisdiction throughout the entire pre-war territory of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

Despite the complexity of the situation, the German Chancellor has initiated meetings within the “Normandy format”. She is supported in this by the new president of France, Emmanuel Macron. Through their efforts, another meeting was held in Berlin in late May 2017 for the purpose of elaborating proposals on the “road map” for implementation of the Minsk agreements. However, to achieve this, one of the parties (Ukraine or Russia) must make concessions. Both Moscow and Kyiv are urging the West to put pressure on the other side.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

It must be noted with deep regret and concern that Russian-Ukrainian relations have not hit bottom. Such bottom could be the break of diplomatic relations and the beginning of open military operations against each other.

The prospects for settling the conflict are vague, as it is a conflict connected with Ukraine’s desire to remove itself from Russia’s zone of influence, causes great anguish among both Russian elites and the Russian population. **The success of Ukrainian reforms would mean, in the perception of many Russians, the failure of the political and socio-economic system that exists in the Russian Federation.** At the same time, we must unfortunately state the fact that Ukraine has not demonstrated sufficient progress on the way to reforming the country, although much is actually being done.

The model of relations between Russia and Ukraine for the next few years is, unfortunately, a continuation of confrontation, i.e. the confrontational model with a strong element of information warfare.

What should be avoided is the breakdown of diplomatic relations and the conflict’s transformation from latent to open.

RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS ARE POISONED BY THE CURRENT CRISIS IN EARNEST AND FOR THE LONG TERM

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The international situation in recent months obviously has not contributed to resolving the crisis in and around Ukraine. It has largely led to a break in the settlement process giving rise to all parties' expectations (in all cases, most likely unjustified) of changes that would make it possible to shift the political balance in their favour. The current situation also does not contribute to certainty.

The US policy after the elections remains uncertain. The administration of President Trump sends conflicting signals: starting from the reduction of military assistance to Ukraine, to the intention to toughen sanctions against Russia, while simultaneously aiming at improving relations between Washington and Moscow. In any case, Trump's foreign policy remains his domestic policy and largely depends on his confrontation with his opponents in the United States. It is difficult to expect that this situation will melt away and that Washington's policy will become more predictable in the coming months.

It is clear only that the issue of resolving the crisis in Ukraine, along with the situation in Syria, is one of the central topics on which Washington and Moscow are working on resolutions in order to remove obstacles and reach at least a partial normalisation of relations. The involvement in the search for resolutions on the informal tracks of "heavy artillery" from the Republican political establishment bears witness to the intensive search for such solutions but does not guarantee the success of this work, given Trump's complex relations with the political establishment of the country. **In the near future, US policy will obviously remain a major factor of uncertainty in the process of resolving the Ukrainian crisis.**

The past and upcoming elections in Europe are more likely to support the conclusion that a high level of continuity in the policies of the leading countries of the continent remains unchanged, including with regard to the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis. The elections in Great Britain and Italy, despite all their



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contradictions, confirmed the positions of the current leadership of these countries. According to public opinion polls and forecasts, elections in Germany in September 2017 should retain the position of Angela Merkel as Chancellor. The only unclear issue is the structure of the coalition formed based on the election results.

Probably the greatest intrigue was associated with the elections in France. The election of Emmanuel Macron as president of the country was (at least at this stage) a landmark both in terms of opposition to populist movements in European countries and in terms of the defeat of François Fillon, on whom Moscow might indeed have wagered at the beginning of the election campaign (only the hottest heads or political fantasists could have expected the victory of Marine Le Pen in the second round of elections). The broad support that the new political movement of Macron received during the first round of the parliamentary elections in June 2017, promising him the majority of seats in the new National Assembly, allows us to predict the consolidation of his commitment to strengthen the EU and the continuation of the commitment to settle the Ukrainian crisis.

The continuation of the policy of sanctions against Russia and the **lack of dialogue on a wider range of issues of European security** and the prospects for Russia's relations with the EU and NATO also hinder the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis, because, among other reasons, the pan-European framework conditions for settlement of this crisis have not yet been determined.

The preliminary result of recent months is obvious: the stagnation of the Minsk process in all its dimensions, including the work of subgroups, since mid-2016. Kyiv is expending great effort to **cut off and break away the rebellious "separate areas" of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts and make their reintegration even more problematic, if not impossible.** The most significant step in this direction was the economic blockade of these regions, which doomed them to economic integration into the Russian economic space (they have no other choice) with great losses in the long-term future.

All this leads to a scenario involving formation of yet another protracted (frozen) conflict in the East of Ukraine, which obviously suits Kyiv, but is hardly optimal for Russia.

The confirmation of seeking a solution to the crisis within the Normandy format is another tentative result of recent events. However, the effectiveness of this format today depends not only on the willingness of the parties to the conflict to cooperate constructively, but also on what US policy will be with regard to the crisis in the foreseeable future.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

It seemed that Russian-Ukrainian relations had hit bottom long ago. Both sides follow the logic of a “zero-sum game” and test who can hurt the other the most. In my subjective opinion, Ukraine is the undisputed leader in this kind of exercise. Nevertheless, despite the fact that we hit bottom long ago, we are diligently continuing the dredging.

Daring to predict the development of Russian-Ukrainian relations in the immediate and more distant future is the job of forecasters and visionaries. We can think in the categories of possible scenarios. In this context, we must clearly understand that Russian-Ukrainian relations are poisoned by the current crisis in earnest and for the long term.

The first fork in the road of these scenarios is largely associated with the choice that Ukraine has made and that Ukraine can make in the foreseeable future. Since the crisis started, Kyiv has done a lot to internationalise the crisis. The reasons are clear: Ukraine does not have enough resources on its own to resolve it. However, internationalisation has its price: Kyiv must comply with the conditions that it adopted in the framework of international mediation (specifically, the Minsk agreements of 2015). It seems that Kyiv is not yet ready to pay this price, and counts on the unilateral support of its policy from the US and the EU.

Another option, which could be chosen by Kyiv but which is still far from it at the moment, is to take the crisis settlement process back into the bilateral realm, which involves both the search for agreements with leaders of Donetsk and Luhansk, and the achievement of bilateral agreements with Russia on the settlement. If necessary, international institutions (primarily the OSCE) could be involved, as agreed upon by the parties, to ensure the implementation of agreements. This second choice at present, after the internationalisation of the crisis, is limited, but, essentially, it is possible if the parties demonstrate good will.

Theoretically, the possible scenarios for the further development of relations between Russia and Ukraine in the long term are wide-ranging: from a full (or incomplete) break with the placement of high barriers (or walls) to normalisation (full or partial). However, even in the event of breaking ties with Russia, Ukraine can hardly expect to join NATO, let alone the EU, in the foreseeable future.

The most likely version of the development of these relations does not exclude the “Finlandisation” of Ukraine, in which it will pursue an independent policy with an “eye” on Moscow and/or in close coordination with it, nor does it exclude a policy based on the Austrian “model”: permanent military and political neutrality with the preservation of political community and economic integration in the European space.

THE STATE OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS CAN BE CALLED CATASTROPHIC AND FURTHER DETERIORATION IS QUITE POSSIBLE

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The EU countries, on the one hand, feel somewhat more confident, having orientated themselves in the situation that has developed following the results of the recent election campaigns. They have so far managed to avoid a new escalation of the migration crisis. On the other hand, it is not easy for the EU, as it often happens, to act as a single voice in the international arena on the most pressing issues. The continuation of sanctions against Russia is often openly criticised by influential European politicians, although this does not change the position previously formulated.

The prospect of Britain’s exit from the EU demands significant time and administrative resources from the Union. In the coming months, Germany will be engulfed by the internal political struggle on the eve of the Bundestag elections. In France, if Emmanuel Macron succeeds in consolidating his leading position, he will also be primarily concerned with internal development issues. The attempts of François Hollande to compensate for the failures inside the country by active foreign policy did not give him any points, and this lesson is likely to be taken into account.

In the long view, Emmanuel Macron will try to strengthen the Franco-German tandem and promote the deepening of European integration, but will not rush into undeveloped initiatives. **In this context, there is no sufficient reason to expect leadership on the part of Germany and France, represented in the Normandy format, or the EU as a whole in settling the Ukrainian conflict.** In general, the



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majority of analysts, both within and outside the EU, do not expect significant progress in negotiating on the basis of any initiatives by the mediators. The approaches of the direct participants of the conflict must evolve, but this has not happened yet. Both EU functionaries and representatives of member states will try to promote the implementation of key reforms in Ukraine in the foreseeable future and maintain a working dialogue with Moscow, realising that neither the first nor the second component of such a policy promises miracles.

The United States are now also highly absorbed in internal political struggles. A significant part of the American political class is seriously considering the possibility of impeaching Donald Trump. And Trump demonstrates only a very limited interest in settlement of the conflict in the Donbas. The probability the US putting forth a well thought-out strategy of action in this direction, as well as in many others, is small in the coming year.

For the world, the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation has become a familiar part of the landscape. Among those who do not have a special relationship with Russia or Ukraine, only a few political activists take the events to heart. Most countries of the world have learned that the severity of the conflict and the irreconcilability of the positions of the parties do not exclude the preservation and development of relations both with Russia and with Ukraine on a wide range of issues.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Although the state of Russian-Ukrainian relations can be called catastrophic, further deterioration is quite possible and entirely likely. The parties do not demonstrate readiness for compromise, continue to strengthen and exploit caricatured “images of the enemy” against each other.

A fundamentally new depth of the fall may be tested if Ukraine adopts a decision on introducing a visa regime for Russian citizens, which is likely to be followed by a symmetrical response from Moscow. In spite of the severity of the conflict, a significant number of people have managed to continue cross-border communication with friends, to make tourist and business trips. These people, probably, are first of all those who consider themselves to be “apolitical”, but not only them. Such communication can not reverse the negative political dynamics, but still undermines the images and logical constructions formed by propaganda.

The risks of escalation in the conflict zone in the Donbas remain unchanged, although the situation here seems somewhat more stable than before. Certainly,

escalation would strike a blow, both directly to the prospects for a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict, and to the general state of Russian-Ukrainian relations.

The political fate of Donetsk and Luhansk will also inevitably affect the state of Russian-Ukrainian relations. **Over the course of time, the process of reintegrating the territories outside Kyiv's control begins to look not only difficult to implement, but also dangerous rather than desirable from the point of view of the Ukrainian political mainstream.** Pragmatic political calculations, however, in no way mean that Ukraine would be willing to formally renounce the uncontrolled entities.

The tools of historical politics applied by Ukraine in the context of the “de-communisation” campaign caused further changes in the demarcation line, which has been used to denote a certain (Soviet) identity of the Donbas. Changes in symbolism are often as difficult to “rewind” as material gains and losses. A significant part of the Soviet symbolic heritage is integrated into Russians’ everyday life, providing official Russia with additional arguments in favour of positioning itself as the sole defender of the Soviet cultural and historical traditions, who are refused an audience in Kyiv.

A protracted conflict inevitably affects public moods, the political process, and foreign policy orientations. Since the stake on the weakening and collapse of the opponent is not a winning option now, a surrogate for victorious feelings is sought in rhetorical battles, where gloating about the neighbour’s failures is becoming normal. Although the nature of the development of the Russian and Ukrainian societies is still very similar, rooted in a common history, the parties will deliberately emphasise and strengthen their differences, and cultivate mutual rejection. **A contribution to the process of degradation in Russian-Ukrainian relations may be made by Ukraine’s plans to join NATO, as declared by Ukrainian politicians.** Even in the absence of significant visible achievements along this path, the image of the North Atlantic Alliance feeling as though it owns Ukraine will be actively used to formulate and popularise the Russian official line towards Ukraine.

In view of the fact that the parties are expending significant efforts to create distance between each other, **the prospect of a breakdown of diplomatic relations has become more real than before.** Georgia was pushed to such a step by Russia’s recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but the formal break of relations did not take the form of actual cessation; on the contrary, Georgia was able to restore and expand economic and tourist interactions with Russia. Nevertheless, the absence of diplomatic relations establishes a very low and hard-to-break ceiling in official bilateral contacts and creates perceptible humanitarian problems for citizens.

ONLY THE REAL SUCCESS OF UKRAINE WILL PRODUCE SOME PROSPECTS FOR RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?



Lev GUDKOV,
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I do not see any circumstances that could lead to changes in the positions of the parties in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.

The cause and source of the conflict are the actions of the Russian leadership, which also bears the responsibility (political, moral, and legal). The elections in France marked the weakening of the far right forces who are aligned against European integration and are Putin's sympathisers in supporting the lifting of sanctions on Russia. But the victory of the provisional "centre" is still not convincing enough to begin talking about the possibility of a radical change in the course towards Russia.

It seems that the upcoming elections in Germany will lead to the victory of Angela Merkel, but if she succeeds, she will be forced to balance between different interest groups, trying to maintain the status quo. Her room to manoeuvre is very limited and it is hardly reasonable to expect any major solutions to the problem of Crimea and the Donbas or interaction with Russia. I do not see any political and social forces that are ready for a tougher policy towards Russia, based on an understanding of the danger that it potentially presents for the preservation of international peace and stable conditions for development, and the maintenance of legal mechanisms for the regulation of conflicts between the countries.

The change of policy in this regard will require financial costs that are too burdensome, and no one will do this in the current situation of almost zero growth in the European economy. At present, no one wants to take on risk, and in fact, this is the wager and the main expectation of the Kremlin. The situation in the United States is even more uncertain and unpredictable because of the personality of Donald Trump and his political future.

In my opinion, Europe's position on the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation is quite ambiguous: **on the one hand, the EU condemns Russia for the annexation of Crimea and the provocation of a hybrid war in the east of Ukraine, while on the other hand, the condemnation and sanctions imposed on Russia are obviously insufficient to force the Putin regime to reconsider the nature of**

its policy. Sanctions are unpleasant, and the longer they continue the more problems they cause for Russian corporations, but the Russian population suffers from them most of all and it bears all the costs of Putin's policy. In the foreseeable future (3-5 years), state corporations and oligarchs, which form the economic basis of the Putin regime, will not feel serious difficulties caused by the imposed restrictions. It would be unreasonable to think about the longer term.

Europe is not united in respect to this issue (which is partly the result of the efforts of Russian services focused on splitting EU unity). European governments are under strong pressure from lobbyists of influential corporations and their own businesses, insisting on the lifting or at least easing of sanctions (that is what Putin actually hopes for and what his game is aimed at).

Europe and European politicians do not have any ideas or reasonable proposals on how to get out of this deadlock, about what can be done to change the policy of Russian leadership in this regard (to say nothing of the numerous "Putinverstehers" with proposals of concessions). There is neither political will, nor moral imperatives. Clearly, there is a desire to stall for time, hoping that the problem will somehow be resolved without any efforts. This position has its own reasons and rational grounds – the desire not to worsen the state of things in the absence of obvious and effective tools to change the position.

In the long term, this may prove to be the optimal strategy, since Putin's regime is doomed to degradation and inevitable weakening due to the logic of its internal evolution. But this way of acting is clearly unsatisfactory for many people (living now and concerned about actual problems). In this position, there are also some vulnerabilities associated with underestimating the subjective logic of dictatorial regimes and their priorities. In addition, this may lead to a propensity for rapid solutions, i.e. solutions "by force" (following the advice of the military: it's better to act immediately, while there is enough power), and such possibility is caused precisely by the growing weakness of Russia as an aggressive power.

I cannot rule out a new aggravation of the situation in the Donbas, a direct invasion by the Russian army to "protect local Russians" from genocide by Kyiv's punitive forces, as Russian propaganda claims. This worked once and it is tempting to repeat the success, although it seems that the plans of "Novorossia" have been pushed to the back burner due to their unrealistic nature. If the West had reacted differently to the war with Georgia in 2008, the current hybrid war between Russia and Ukraine would not have happened. The Kremlin would never dare to get involved in such an adventure if the "analysts" were able to calculate all the options. But despite loud condemnation and declarations, there was no clear position and reaction from Europe.

Today, Russia's potential for such adventures is slightly less than it was in 2008. There are some signs that Putin's entourage has begun to realise the long-term consequences of such policy. But again, this is my subjective opinion, and it may be mistaken, as has happened with my political forecasts more than once. **The objectives of the regime are to preserve the conflict in a frozen state (this is the most "economical" way) with periodical exacerbations of the situation in the Donbas, thus blocking the process of Ukraine's integration with Western structures (EU, NATO) for an indefinite period.** Even partial success of such rapprochement would undoubtedly facilitate the economic development of Ukraine and its emergence from the state of protracted social crisis.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Russian-Ukrainian relations are completely dependent on the state of the Putin regime, which experiences a totalitarian system's decay. Russia's foreign policy is determined by a narrow circle of people who come from the Soviet special services and have a specific type of consciousness that can be characterised as a mixture of imperial mindsets of the late Brezhnev era with anti-Western and anti-liberal ideas that originate not in any particular ideology (totalitarian or conservative), but in weak legitimacy of power and understanding that the main threat to the regime is those who advocate democracy, the rule of law, and public control of the government.

The Russian establishment (I can not call them "elite") is consolidated by a sense of clientelism or a kind of clan pledge, generated by an undeniable understanding of their vulnerability to criticism and accusations of violating all basic laws, arbitrariness, corruption, abuse of power and many other things that usually are typical for usurpers who use state means of violence.

But in addition to fear (constant fear of being held responsible for their crimes if they lose power), these people are united by the deep cynicism inherent in KGB officers and the nouveaux riches who believe that power is the only real value. Neither "universal" nor "European values", "morality" in general, but an understanding inherited from Stalin's times that any person can be broken or bought if "tactics of working-through" are developed "correctly" as prescribed by the KGB Academy's textbooks as concerned the dissidents of the Soviet times.

Therefore, in the context of analysing the foreign policy course of the current Russian leadership, it is important to take into account the transfer of the experience of the “internal operations” of the secret police to the sphere of interstate relations, namely: “separation” and the combination of temporary alliances with counterparties which are currently advantageous for tactical reasons. Therefore, if we follow the approximate way of thinking of the Russian leadership, we must admit that the main methods of foreign policy are blackmail and provocation, demonstration of strength, demagoguery and discrediting an opponent (declaring oneself a victim), with public declarations of the noblest and loftiest motives of one’s own behaviour, such as protection of public welfare, humanitarian intentions, aspiration for peace and mutual security.

There is neither consistent foreign policy strategy based on any philosophical principles and ideas, nor long-term policy in Russia, and these things are not possible, because the ideological and value resources of this leadership are not just poor – they are all from the recent past.

There will be no new goals and objectives (except for “geopolitics” and the greatness of Russia). The main purpose of such a policy is to ensure mass support within the country by activating the chafed and old trivial representations of the Soviet or even earlier time (moreover, such an appeal to the past and hence to the increasingly vulgar philosophy of imperial greatness, surrounding enemies, Russophobia, etc. is now intensifying).

And it works. Using the almost complete monopoly on the media, turned into a very effective means of propaganda, the Kremlin can impose on the population the belief in total enemy encirclement of the country, the threat emanating from the West, from NATO, from Ukraine, if it joins NATO and the EU, from Poland or the Baltic countries. Only one mechanism is used here: to suppress and sterilise the independent press and the Internet with their more critical and educated audience, and to rely on the poor and uninformed periphery, living mostly according to old Soviet ideas and complexes.

Judging the propaganda by the strength of its impact on mass consciousness, we have to admit that this is an exceptionally powerful and effective tool. The wave of anti-Ukrainian sentiment that has been raised, the resentment and enmity, were stabilised by 2016 as open hostilities transformed into a positional confrontation. Public attention to the state of affairs in the conflict zone was gradually weakening. A temporary pause in Russian-American relations caused by the Russian side’s expectations of a reset and bilateral negotiations after Trump’s election, resulted in

the fact that the propaganda has tempered its aggression and stirring up of hatred towards the Ukrainians. But this spring, it became clear that these hopes are nothing more than illusions, and a new spiral of growth in the antipathy towards Ukraine has begun. **This means that it is possible to raise hostility between nations, and it will be very difficult to erase the memory and consequences of such a policy, even if a radical change in the political course occurs and others come to power in Russia.**

After 2015, such policy (subject to the preservation of the personal composition of the country's leadership) can indefinitely continue the economic crisis and the decline in people's incomes until it causes serious problems for the continuation of the regime, and state patriotic propaganda provides a fairly successful mobilisation of the population based on "pushing back the enemies of Russia" and the willingness to endure difficulties for the sake of the country's prestige.

The danger comes from the possibility of the internal situation being exacerbated, but the growth of social protests may lead to opportunism in foreign policy. Therefore, Russian policy can only be brought to its senses by a decisive counteraction by the world community based on real forces and capabilities, not words and sluggish diplomatic games. The main achievement of Minsk is the

minimisation of hostilities. But this is a postponement, not a solution to the problem. In this situation (lack of ideas and resources), this is the best option. But again, it is not a fundamental solution to the problem (which consists only in the change of the Kremlin's course, but it would be an illusion to anticipate and hope for such a solution now). Nobody – neither in Kyiv, nor in Europe, nor in Moscow, nor in Washington – is seriously interested in a principled solution to the problem, and nobody will do anything – neither Putin, nor the EU, nor Trump, who continues to have nothing to do with Ukraine.



Only the real success of Ukraine – and by this I mean first of all the formation of an effective and strong Ukrainian state (with a strong economic policy and liberation from corruption and betrayal) – will produce some prospects for resolving the conflict. But this will not happen in the coming years.

THE RETURN TO THE PATH OF NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS BEGINS WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

It has not been long since Brexit and the results of elections in the United States were perceived as global political phenomena increasing risks and uncertainty. However, the more recent elections (at different levels) in France, Germany and the United Kingdom, as well as the changed assessments of the prospects for the upcoming elections in various European countries have shown that, apparently, the EU has lived through another growth crisis. After the victory of Emmanuel Macron, the success of the pro-presidential movement “La République en Marche!” at the National Assembly elections demonstrated support for the actions of the new president both inside the country and on the international stage.

The pillars of the European Union – France and Germany – are gradually overcoming the internal political crisis caused by the growth of populism. The importance of populism is decreasing, in part because society and political systems have absorbed it into themselves, made it part of a new “normality”.

Euro-sceptics reached the peak of success in the case of Brexit... and began to retreat. At the same time, there was a consolidation of integration supporters and an understanding developed of the economic consequences of the exit from European structures. As a result of the recent elections in the United Kingdom, the positions of both the ruling party (on the eve of two years of difficult negotiations with the EU) and the Scottish National Party have weakened and this is a hint about the attractiveness, primarily economic, for voters and Europe. Moreover, the positions of the unity of Great Britain itself have weakened too.

In the United States, the new Trump administration is still in the process of forming its own political views. In March, Donald Trump told Angela Merkel that Europe was responsible for the crisis in the southeast of Ukraine and that the United States does not intend to participate vigorously in its resolution, but two months later he appointed Secretary of State Rex Tillerson as the person responsible for the Ukraine issue, and Ukraine is becoming for Tillerson the key to Europe and to improving relations with Russia. In the latter case, there is also a hope that the parties will switch from mutual accusations to constructive dialogue.



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The time factor is of particular importance. The gradual nature of the tightening of sanctions was seen by many as their weakness. The legislative initiative announced in June in the US Congress provides for the transfer of the Russian sanctions program from the President's purview to that of Congress: the bill would unite the five presidential decrees (the so-called "executive orders") which were enacted for a period of one year and could be cancelled or simply not extended by the President himself. If sanctions are adopted in the form of US law, this will be a headache for the relationship between Russia and the United States for many years to come, and Russia will be required to intensify cooperation, including under the Minsk agreements.

The new US sanctions against Russia are said to be imposed on natural persons, certain branches of the Russian economy, and will differ from those already in force, above all, by the extent of the restrictions. In addition, a special unit will be created in the US Treasury to track the financial flows associated with the Russian Federation.

In the period from 2014 to 2016, the trade turnover between Russia and the United States, which was already small, decreased even more, by almost a third, according to Putin, and bilateral ties with the US "were at the lowest point since the Cold War period", which "could not but affect both the economy and our business partnership". "Help us to restore a normal political dialogue. I ask you on behalf of Russia and I appeal to the United States: help both the newly elected president and his administration", said Putin to the representatives of the business community at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Business is a very effective lobbyist, but dialogue is a two-way street. The state of relations between Russia and the United States is predetermined not only by the so-called "Russia-gate", but also by the sanctions regime that followed the aggravation of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. Therefore, the business community, in its turn, needs the help of politicians, which should consist in eliminating the causes of these conflicts. While the internal investigation conducted in the US against Trump takes its normal course, it is politicians who need to take initiative, showing creativity and goodwill in order to resolve the conflict with Ukraine. Without this, the efforts of business alone will not be enough...

Thus, the political processes in the United States and the consolidation of Europe open the possibility to activate the Normandy format and even possibly to unite it with the Budapest format. The United States and the United Kingdom, as signatories of the Budapest agreements, can and should participate in the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In its turn, the situation has been clarified, and Russia no longer needs to rely on the arrival of a new US administration which supposedly will treat Russia better. Russia also no longer

needs to expect changes for the better from the governments of Germany and France, the Minsk agreement participants.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

As concerns the active stage of the conflict, there is hope that the bottom has been hit. As for the possibility of aggravating the alienation of the parties, this possibility remains. The lack of real reform success in Russia and Ukraine provokes mutual insults, and both the aggravation of sanctions against Russia and the feeling of being a rogue state provoke “independent” behaviour and thus exacerbation of isolation: the result may not be a move towards each other, but actions according to the Old Testament “eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth” principle.

There is an internal contradiction in the fact that economic sanctions weaken the desire to strengthen mutually beneficial economic cooperation, which can be the basis for a political settlement, and at the same time, the lifting or weakening of sanctions can be seen as encouraging continuation of the policy that led to such sanctions...

An old Kyrgyz proverb says that if two bulls plough the rocky soil for a long time, they start to look disapprovingly at each other. **Therefore, the return to the path of neighbourly relations begins with the establishment of economic cooperation. International consortia with the participation of European companies could include Russian and Ukrainian companies and have priority in implementing investment projects in the neighbouring countries that are parties to the conflict.**

The case has been the subject of legal investigation: in the UN court and in Stockholm. The dispute between Gazprom and Naftogaz of Ukraine over multi-billion counterclaims of energy holdings that were submitted to arbitration as early as the summer of 2014 (as of the beginning of April 2017, the mutual claims of Gazprom and Naftogaz under the gas purchase and sale contract, taking into account fines and interest, amounted to about \$45.7 billion and \$17.9 billion, respectively) has entered the decision phase.

The interim decision of the Stockholm Arbitration (the full official name is the Arbitration Institute of the Stockholm Chamber of Commerce) rejected claims to the Ukrainian side under the “take or pay” contract rule, canceled the ban on Naftogaz’s re-export of gas supplied by Russia and decided to revise the price formula starting from 2014.

In the meantime, Ukraine has begun actions to recover from Gazprom the so-called “antimonopoly fines” approved by the republican courts, but the fact that Gazprom does not have any assets within Ukraine comparable to the amount of the claimed fines makes it necessary to go beyond the perimeter of national borders in order to look for assets in those countries of Europe where Gazprom operates and try to arrest its property there. Of course, sooner or later, the principle “a bad peace is better than a good quarrel” will prevail in this confrontation too, but this is a matter of timing and costs...

The paradox is that the current situation stimulates gas cooperation between Russia and Ukraine. On the one hand, the Ukrainian rhetoric regarding the preliminary conclusions of the Stockholm court and the start of the campaign to seize Gazprom’s assets encourage Europeans to accelerate preparations for the new heating season and buy gas from Gazprom, and, on the other hand, the Qatar crisis strikes a blow against one of the most important players in the gas market and works in favour of the reputation of Gazprom as an “island of stability”.

The cold weather and low prices of Russian gas continue to boost Gazprom’s export supply to Europe. At the same time, just as in the previous year, the main growth is provided by transit through the gas transit system of Ukraine. Recent years have already shown the efficiency (price and response to peak loads) of this gas transit route, and the weakening of Qatar and, indirectly, of another gas giant, Iran, may give an additional impetus to the cooperation between Gazprom and Naftogaz in the midst of the cannonade of legal trials.

**TEMPORARY TRANSITIONAL MODELS
CAN BE EXPECTED TO ARISE, WITHIN
WHICH ALL PARTIES WILL BE INTERESTED
IN DEMILITARISING THE CONFLICT**

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?



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Today, we can ascertain the next phase in the crisis of the global order, which coincided with the crisis of the liberal system. This refers to the exhaustion of both the previous model of international relations that took shape after the fall of the Soviet Union and the inability of liberalism to respond to new challenges. But this double crisis came to the surface a decade ago. At the present time, its

major contradictions have been revealed, in particular, after the coming to power of Donald Trump, the personification of the failure of the American elite to cope with their own problems.

Meanwhile, despite the paralysis of the leading civilisation and the dysfunctional nature of the international system, the very existence of this crisis is positive, as there is no other means of development for the world community. A crisis is the only instrument for reforming non-functioning systems. The coming to power of Emmanuel Macron in France and the strengthening of the positions (including international ones) of Chancellor Angela Merkel make it possible to talk about the possible **formation of a “German-French” axis that can facilitate the restoration of the EU’s effectiveness and will function as compensation for the movement of the United States into the shadows.** This is clearly a positive step and it can testify to the beginning of the consolidation of liberal forces in overcoming the current global crisis.

How does the possibility of an exit from the Ukrainian-Russian conflict look in this context, and what is the potential of the mechanism for its resolution – the Normandy format – and the prospect of implementing the Minsk agreements? Unfortunately, in the current situation, in which the double crisis – the crisis of the world order and liberalism – has not ended yet, it is hardly possible to talk about the possibility of overcoming the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. As its essence is primarily in the clash of two civilisational vectors – pro-European and anti-European. It is hardly possible to find a compromise between them. After all, Ukraine is not ready to renounce the movement “towards Europe”, and the Kremlin is not ready to renounce its desire to retain Ukraine in its sphere of influence, which is a confirmation of Great Power status for Russia. This status is the basis of the Russian system of personality-based power.

Moreover, the departure of the US from the old sphere of responsibility in Europe could lead to an intensification of Moscow’s attempts to enforce its vision of the Minsk agreements. At the same time, it is obvious that key Western players are not ready to admit their defeat in the struggle for Ukraine. What do we get as a result? I do not rule out the temporary prevalence of the “Kissinger line,” the essence of which is to find a formula that does not irritate Moscow. Supporters of such a compromise can be found not only among influential business circles, including in France and Germany, but also within the Trump administration.

Much depends on the effectiveness of Kyiv’s diplomacy and its ability to consolidate its supporters in Western capitals. An equally important question is whether the leading Western players are ready for a deal with Russia on global issues, primarily in the joint fight against terrorism and the fight against nuclear non-proliferation, at the expense of Ukraine’s interests. To this point, they do not seem ready for this.

But if a stable “Franco-German” axis is formed that will seek to reform the EU, we can expect the Paris and Berlin efforts to intensify within the Normandy format and attempts to implement the security package defined in the Minsk agreements. But the success of these attempts requires two conditions: Washington’s active involvement in the search for a “peace formula” in the Donbas and recognition of the need to use international forces to maintain peace in the region (including securing a military armistice and closing the border between Russia and Ukraine).

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict is a reflection of several processes: the aspiration of the Russian autocracy to restore great power status as the basis of its own survival; aspirations of Ukraine to leave the Russian “galaxy”; the crisis of the global order; the crisis of world liberalism; the shift of US out of the sphere of global responsibility. Therefore, the settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict will depend on the state of each of these factors. It is unlikely that this conflict can be resolved during the presidency of Donald Trump, who rejects not only the values but also the global responsibility of America. It is unlikely that this conflict can be settled until the Western nations preach pragmatism and the rejection of a normative dimension in their foreign policies.

But at the same time, we also take into account the fact that Moscow is not ready (yet) to exacerbate the conflict and expand countersanctions against the West. Moscow is interested in lifting sanctions and complete removal from isolation, which will enable the Russian system to return to using Western resources for its own survival.

Therefore, in the current transition period, temporary transitional models can be expected to arise, within which all parties will be interested in demilitarising the conflict. But this will not mean its final and unconditional resolution, but only temporary stifling and freezing.

In the context of the prospects of Russian-Ukrainian relations, if the Russian system of autocracy and the current leadership in the Kremlin is preserved, complete normalisation of these relations can hardly be expected. For the Russian political elite, Ukraine will remain a hostile factor and a factor for patriotic mobilisation. Although this mobilisation is proving to be decreasingly successful.

Therefore, for the near future, we can expect the continuation of tensions in relations between the two states and attempts on both sides to use these relations for internal mobilisation. We cannot rule out a transition of hostility to an open military conflict. Frozen conflicts always run the risk of thawing. Especially when these conflicts are not only the result of irreconcilable contradictions between the two countries, but also of two incompatible trends – the European and anti-European authoritarian trend.

DEGRADATION OF BILATERAL RELATIONS IS INTENSIFYING, AND THE POLITICAL RESOURCES FOR OVERCOMING THE CRISIS ARE BEING REDUCED TO A MINIMUM

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The change of political elites in the United States, France, Germany, and the new electoral cycle in Russia and Ukraine create both new “windows of opportunity” and additional “variables” and constraints within the Normandy format and the Minsk process. In the meantime, a deadlock in the Normandy and Minsk process has been reached, exacerbated by the current technical/electoral break, which it is desirable for all parties to overcome as soon as possible.

The first and most obvious question is: whether the new leaders will be willing and able to maintain political and diplomatic continuity, including in consultation and negotiation formats, and, on the other hand, whether attempts will be made to review their activities. The context for settlement of the Ukrainian crisis will largely be determined by changes in external geopolitical balances in the US-Europe/EU-Russia configuration.

Of course, the main variable is Donald Trump, who is constantly changing the pictures in the kaleidoscope of international and European politics. A “beautiful” picture today can change its shape and colours tomorrow. In addition, it changes when transferred from hand to hand, i.e. it is perceived by viewers in different ways.

The position of the new US administration regarding Ukraine remains uncertain and depends on how successful negotiations with Moscow are on a new cooperation format (on Syria/ISIS and the arms control agenda), as well as



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on how Washington's relations with the allies in Europe develop. President Trump's intentions to restore the US-Russian track and establish pragmatic cooperation (while preserving the constants of the US position on the "Ukrainian question") are running up against the growing "anti-Russian" lobby in Congress.

However, the Russian question is considered by opponents of Donald Trump not strategically, but instrumentally – as one of the key points of pressure on his political positions. The bill passed by the US Senate on new anti-Russian sanctions is an illustrative example. In this respect, the transfer of lethal weapons to Ukraine remains a hot-button issue. Not only the Russian aspect, but the entire foreign policy agenda of the United States is determined by the internal opposition that is growing after the inauguration of Donald Trump.

For this reason, it is difficult to predict the stability of Trump's intentions to establish a new link with Moscow in his confrontation with "environmental resistance", both internal and external. Trump's visit to Europe in May showed that it would be wrong to draw a linear correlation between his course on the revision of US-European relations, with the obvious demonstration of his controlling stake in the transatlantic board of directors, on the one hand, and with US-Russia relations, including the issue of settling the Ukrainian crisis, on the other hand. In both directions, Trump aspires to retain the "decisive word" and to maintain freedom to manoeuvre. The problem is whether his word can be (and be perceived as) decisive and to what extent it can be a reliable indicator of American foreign policy. The agreed-upon harsh criticism from the tandem of Germany and Austria (the previous and current OSCE Chairmanships) regarding US Senate's sanctions decisions should be viewed not only as support for the administration in the matter of key European interests, but also as a clear signal of Europeans' readiness for fundamental rigidity in creating balances with Washington.

However, we can make a number of assumptions about the US role in the Ukrainian crisis settlement. **Washington is still not interested in increasing its direct participation.** Moreover, the line of the American administration is aimed at getting rid of direct links of the Minsk process and the Ukrainian crisis with other issues on the international and Russian-American agenda. Moscow, which was previously interested in increasing Washington's pressure on Kyiv in order to stabilise (at least relatively) the Donbas situation, is now probably not inclined to press this issue, given the various uncertainties in the US foreign policy guidelines, and the mechanism for the development, adoption and implementation of decisions, which has yet to be fully configured by the new administration.

In addition, the Ukrainian crisis will not be a priority topic for Trump or the United States, and new attention will be brought to it only by other motives not

directly related to the settlement (domestic politics, relations with Europe and Russia). Therefore, a number of belated efforts from the Ukrainian side aimed at strengthening the American role in the resolution of the Ukrainian issue is hardly in keeping with the present realities and the interests of Ukraine itself, as there is still no clarity regarding the United States' medium-term political line. Moscow previously tried to agree with the Obama administration regarding greater responsibility in the Ukraine settlement (with an eye towards greater pressure on Kyiv), but now Moscow is rather afraid that such attempts can only unravel the situation.

The election of Emmanuel Macron, an “alternative politician”, leader of the “en Marche!” movement, as the **French** president also brought to the forefront the dilemmas of French foreign policy related to European priorities and “axes” (with Germany and Britain), on the one hand, and the strengthening of the independence of the French Republic with the specific nature and content of its relations with the United States and Trump's new administration, on the other hand. President Macron has already demonstrated his intention to build a foreign policy “on all azimuths” and within a short period of time he held bilateral meetings with Angela Merkel and, on his initiative, with Vladimir Putin.

Macron's pragmatism (characterised by the former French Prime Minister Manuel Valls as: “there are no rules of conduct, no restrictions”) does not yet have clear landmarks with regard to the Ukrainian issue and the Normandy format. Macron, who won a victory over “all the rest”, must preach and pursue a new policy. What moods and motives will determine it? (A) Before the election, Macron demonstrated fatigue from the Ukrainian agenda and a desire to unblock the Minsk process, to cut the tight knot of settlement. (In this respect, it is quite possible that he would be ready to act decisively and quickly, following the example of Nicolas Sarkozy during the events in Georgia.) (B) Nevertheless, “fatigue” and “desire” are not productive when combined; the focus on quick results during the short period of electoral reboot (USA-France-Germany) will not yield results given the situation of increased uncertainty in the relationship between the main players of the Ukrainian party and the fundamental differences in their interests refracted through the Ukrainian crisis. (B) The desire of Emmanuel Macron (after the apparent failure of François Hollande to do the same) once again to secure a place for France in the club of leading international players may complicate the Normandy process.

It is not out of the question, for example, that the struggle for active leadership may provoke Paris into a kind of new “Macron initiative” (or Marcon/Merkel), as a development of the German “Steinmeier formula”. However, the poor chances

for quick results, as well as potential problems in relations with partners in the Normandy Four will demotivate the French side from taking a proactive role; Emmanuel Macron shows “fighting qualities” such as ambition and stubbornness in the attempt to cut through the accumulated knots of internal and external problems. But even his support for Chancellor Angela Merkel is not a sufficient contribution to the political weight of France after the German elections.

The question of the influence and role of Paris in Europe, to say nothing of international affairs and formats, remains open. The French position in the Normandy Four also remains uncertain and there seem to be no signs of potential changes there, even in the context of the updated guidelines of the French leadership. Moreover, the foreign policy team of Emmanuel Macron will obviously try to keep Moscow at arm’s length and, therefore, to refrain from any bilateral concessions. On the contrary, the probable victory of Angela Merkel in the German election gives the French President the opportunity to strengthen the liaison in the framework of the conservative Normandy position regarding settlement on the basis of the Minsk agreements.

The election in September 2017 in **Germany** contain no intrigue in view of the predicted fourth victory of Chancellor Angela Merkel. The intrigue is elsewhere: to what extent will Angela Merkel defend the provisions of her electoral programme consistently, and to what extent will the “carte blanche” for a new period allow her to go beyond the previous restrictive frameworks. Of course, Berlin will have to deal with the shaping of its European leadership, taking into account Brexit and the need to form new political pillars within the EU (primarily, by recreating the faltering Berlin-Paris connection). Merkel will have to find common ground with Donald Trump, including on the Russian issue; the “new” chancellor will need to build new balances with other partners – the elected leaders in Europe and in America, and, probably, with President Putin.

The planned visit of the President of the FRG Frank-Walter Steinmeier to Ukraine indirectly indicates that the federal government itself is not terribly interested in managing the “Steinmeier formula” process. The mutual fatigue of Merkel and Putin also creates a certain atmosphere of a heavy “political cloud” hanging over the Donbas shooting field. But still, it can not be ruled out that the political “old-timers” – Merkel and Putin – who have more knowledge of the situation than anyone else and, having received another mandate of national administration, will be able to formulate updated pragmatic approaches related to settling the Ukrainian crisis. However, the opportunities for Moscow to manoeuvre are minimal, both in fundamental terms and under the conditions of the electoral campaign, and the potentially greater freedom of Berlin will continue to be limited by the sanctions policy of the EU and the trans-Atlantic alliance.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Answering this question is as difficult as sending greetings to a neighbour from the second store while falling from the top of a multistorey building. On 31 May 2017, the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation turned 20 years old, and now relations between Russia and Ukraine are “far from the spirit and letter of the 1997 Treaty”, according to a statement of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

The situation that has arisen is fundamentally critical. Everyone understands that the Treaty exists, but there is no “friendship and cooperation”. Trade and economic relations are not decreasing, but being purposefully curtailed, including with regard to energy, as a strategic “European” area. The prospect of a deep reduction or even termination of Ukrainian gas transit marks a critical point of no return to relations based on interested cooperation and significantly increases the risks associated with the future energy supply of the eastern regions of Ukraine.

The prospect of Kyiv’s introduction of a visa regime with Russia also threatens serious damage and poses great risks for both sides. The President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko quotes “Farewell, unwashed Russia...” with a curtsy to the West. Russian society cannot help but perceive this as a direct insult and enmity towards the “Moskals”. The Ukrainian thesis “But what else could you expect? After all, we are in a war with the invaders” is working well, not only at the level of state relations but in the area of profound deformations of Russian-Ukrainian relations at all levels, even family ties.

Putin’s thesis about brother peoples is perceived in Ukraine as a projection of Russian imperialism and a weapon in the hybrid war. The direction towards imposition of martial law in the occupied territories means not only a change in the legal framework for the conflict but also a step that provokes Moscow to define a more rigid position towards Donbas and relations with Ukraine. **Despite the fact that Moscow considers using a large Treaty as the foundation for the restoration of bilateral relations, the inertia in the degradation of bilateral relations is intensifying, and the political resources for overcoming the crisis are being reduced to a minimum. In these circumstances, the possibility of an escalation of the Ukrainian conflict and the Russian-Ukrainian crisis must not be ruled out.**

GERMAN EXPERTS

REFORMED RUSSIA MUST BECOME AN EQUAL PARTNER, AND THEN RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS CAN BE NORMALISED



Armin STAIGIS,
Brigadier General (retired)

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The constants that until recently served as reference points in decision-making in the field of global and regional policy are changing drastically. It seems we are only now approaching the end of the post-war period and the redistribution of forces in the current multi-polar world.

Both the “new America” and the future of trans-Atlantic relations with NATO should be considered in this context. Under President Trump, America’s focus is now on its own interests – “America First”. This makes its foreign policy unpredictable, and America itself is increasingly moving away from addressing serious global issues, such as international security, climate change and trade.

This leads to internal uncertainty in the West, in Europe and far beyond its borders. The US role as a global liberal power is increasingly collapsing. The president, who renounces the role of the United States as a country that brings balance to Europe and the world, is decreasing rather than increasing the importance of America. Therefore, in the coming years we will miss America as a reliable partner. Instead we will have to see a country mired in internal disputes, a weakened country.

In other words, the time of Europeans, the European Union, has come. This does not mean a distancing from the US, but a demonstration of the EU capacity and power to the “new America” and others, including Russia. We must show how important it is to have allies and partners in this globalised world in order to preserve our values and interests.

In light of America’s unpredictability, the development of Asian powers, the expansion of Russian influence, and the devastation and deaths of our southern neighbours, it is imperative to implement the Common Foreign and Security and Defence Policy of the EU.

Perhaps this is the best that Donald Trump could give us: he has woken up the Europeans. And right now is a pretty good time to wake up, despite Brexit and the crises that have not been overcome yet, we need only look at the people

with the EU blue-star flags that flooded the streets and squares of Europe, and recall the results of the elections in the Netherlands and France.

The “German-French motor” and active implementation of European policy should be restarted immediately after the parliamentary elections in France and Germany. Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel clearly formulated her idea that Europeans should “take their fate into their own hands”, since they cannot “completely rely on others”.

And President Putin in Russia can continue his policy of limiting democracy, compensated by nationalism within the country, and foreign policy aimed at reviving the status of a world power and exerting influence on neighbouring countries, including using military means and violating international law. And uncertainty remains the symbol of his policy. In this respect Trump and Putin are very similar.

However, it should be understood that Putin, in his aspiration for power, relies on the alleged weakness of the West. He may still be hoping for a “deal” with Trump, and thus in the near future he cannot be expected to compromise and cooperate.

Therefore, in the coming months, it is highly unlikely that there will be any changes in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Of course, economic sanctions are hurting Russia, but Putin continues to control the conflict politically and militarily, and, if necessary, will be ready to escalate it. In this regard, Ukraine is in a difficult, unstable situation, although European partners provide it with various types of support. However, its integration with Western structures, either NATO or the EU, is currently not on the agenda for obvious reasons. And this is the issue where Russia has managed to achieve one of its significant goals.

At the same time, Putin should pay attention to the development of political events in Washington. To this point President Trump has seemed to support the consistent policy of the West towards Russia in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, including at the G-7 summit in Taormina, although it seems that this issue, which is so important for European security, is not one of his main priorities. Putin has understood this and adopted a wait-and-see approach. It is important for him to see which way the US policy towards Russia will be developing, particularly in the context of possible cooperation by Trump’s team with Moscow and Russia’s influence on the results of the American election. Perhaps, the future development of US-Russian relations will become clearer after the first meeting of the two presidents at the G-20 summit in Hamburg in early July.

And the Europeans must, first of all, move away from the “shock” caused by America, hold elections in France and Germany and set things up for further work. It should be expected that Germany, after the victory of Angela Merkel – or

Martin Schulz – as well as France, led by President Emmanuel Macron (as the Western members of the Normandy four) will adhere to their positions towards Russia, just as the EU as a whole, including the position on continuing sanctions if Putin does not change his behaviour and the Minsk agreements are not implemented.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and what can be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

Russian-Ukrainian relations have unequivocally hit “bottom” in connection with the occupation of Crimea and military actions in the east of Ukraine, which are both overtly and covertly supported by Russian regular armed forces. Relations remain extremely tense, which is understandable, given that Ukraine, since March 2014, has lost 10,000 people in this conflict. The more so, since the Minsk agreements more than two years have gone without the most important point being fulfilled, which is an immediate and complete ceasefire in Donbas.

Every day, the OSCE monitoring mission registers up to 1,000 cases of weapons fire and up to 400 so-called explosions. In other words, no basis for trust or any kind of cooperation has been created.

This is why the improvement of bilateral relations is possible only with pressure on Moscow and Kyiv from the outside, only in this way can real prospects for the settlement of the conflict be ensured.

That is why the Normandy format and the Minsk process are essential for making progress. In this context, great responsibility in restoring peace and security on the European continent still lies with the EU, especially Germany and France.

It is especially difficult to make any predictions for the future. In the end, this is about reconciliation in the zone of the geopolitical “Zwischeneuropa”, which is possible only in the European context. This may take a long time, because it is difficult to achieve any kind of reliable solution with Moscow’s authoritarian leadership. On the other hand, to protect Ukraine’s right to self-determination within the framework of universal values and Western principles.

This is possible only if Russia returns to the principles of the Paris Charter and is ready to be reintegrated into the European world order and security system. To the same extent, the EU and NATO should, more than ever, open up to Moscow: politically, economically and militarily. Reformed Russia should become an equal partner with whom it will be possible to lay the foundations of a new strategic partnership. Then Russian-Ukrainian relations can be normalised, with benefits for both sides.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY AND UKRAINE ITSELF MUST DO ALL THEY CAN TO ENSURE THE DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT AND PROSPERITY OF THE COUNTRY

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?



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The conflict between Ukraine and Russia is a European conflict, developing in the framework of the competition of the inner integration processes between the EU, on the one hand, and Russia-led unions (the Eurasian Economic Union, CSTO), on the other hand. **For Russia, it is important not to gain part of the Ukrainian territory, but to exert influence on the whole of Ukraine and thus to prevent Ukraine's rapprochement with or entry into Western structures.** Luhansk and Donetsk have become hostages. And like any terrorist who has taken hostages, Russia does not want to leave them under its own patronage, but rather to use them for its own benefit.

In this case, Russia's minimum programme is to prevent Ukraine from being integrated with the EU and NATO, and the maximum is to include Ukraine in the Eastern structures in which Russia plays a dominant role. This means that regional resolution of the conflict is an illusion.

Because the goal of the EU policy and its various instruments (expansion, Eastern Partnership, Association Agreement, Free Trade Agreements) is a peaceful, integrated and democratic Europe (including outside the EU), the EU pursues its own interests when supporting Ukraine. Therefore, it is important that the topic of Ukraine remains on the EU agenda, although there are a number of other issues that are still unresolved, and this agenda is changing over time.

The Normandy format misfired. The European Union as an international player is now somewhat weakened, and it is quite difficult for the EU to act as a united front in confrontation with Russia. This is why Chancellor Angela Merkel, together with the President of France, had to take the initiative.

In these negotiations, the German Chancellor and the French President actually do not represent the European Union, although, of course, they are trying to convey this impression. Generally speaking, the President of the European Council, Donald Tusk, and the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign

Affairs, Federica Mogherini, should be at the negotiating table and would be given broad powers of the whole European Union.

In this respect, current developments in the European Union, taking into account the withdrawal of Great Britain and the resistance to integration by some member countries, hinder resolution of the conflict. Moreover, the US has turned into a truly unpredictable partner, not ready to shoulder part of the EU burden.

Therefore, the new principles for the development of the European Union “at different paces and intensity” (the Rome Declaration of the EU leaders as of 25 March 2017) are of great importance for resolution of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, since the EU, though it will be smaller, will also be stronger in achieving its goals. At the same time, the German-French tandem will play a decisive role in Europe, striving to become more capable (this is exactly the point). The results of the presidential election in France create the necessary prerequisites for this, but only if Germany (whoever is its leader) is also flexible and shares France’s views on economic and monetary policies. In this regard, the four years after September 2017 will be the most decisive, that is, the period with no elections either in Germany or in France.

The Minsk agreements are not the basis for resolving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. And this is not surprising, because the matter is not a conflict with Luhansk and Donetsk, although Russia continues to pretend that it is in no way connected to the separatists and the most it can do is to give them friendly advice. **But Minsk is the only platform where any demands can be put forward and to this point it has been the basis for introducing sanctions by the EU.**

Therefore, the Ukrainian side should not question the decisions of Minsk, but merely implement them to the greatest possible extent. In view of the fact that the actual goal of the Russian leadership is not the special status or independence of the occupied territories of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, the situation would not be resolved even if the independence of these “people’s republics”, which probably would quickly join Russia, were recognised. The Russian Federation would seek and find other means of interference.

In the current crisis, Ukraine cannot offer any solution except to fully agree with Russian dominance. In any case, Russia will heat up the conflict, unless the commonwealth of Western states is able to jack up the price of the conflict such that the Russian Federation abandons this venture. **Therefore, there is no other way than to inflict maximum economic damage on Russia through sanctions.** However, in this regard, we should not expect a change in the Russian position in the short term, because such sanctions have their effect only in the long term. In addition, the situation is complicated by the fact that Russia remains an important

supplier of energy for the EU. This is why a significant priority for the European Union is to reduce its energy dependence on the Russian Federation.

On the other hand, the international community and Ukraine itself must do all they can to ensure the democratic development and prosperity of the country in order to create an attractive alternative for people living in the occupied separatist areas. At the same time, human connections and exchange of information must not be cut off. The fight against corruption in Ukraine, the creation of an administrative system based on the standards of effective public administration, the development of democratic foundations and the gradual overcoming of the influence of the oligarchs are important steps in this confrontation of integration interests – the steps that Ukraine itself must take, but with obligatory support from the West, including in material terms.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

A worse option is always possible, so it's hard to say when relations “hit bottom”. At the moment, there is no realistic prospect of a conflict settlement, except that Kyiv will accept Russia's demands in terms of integration with the East and withdrawal from the West. **The real goal of the coming years is deterrence of the conflict.** If people in the East of Ukraine stop dying due to military hostilities, which unfortunately we observe every day now, this will represent definite progress.

It is important for Ukraine not to create the impression that people living in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts are its enemies. They are countrymen living in areas of the country which are currently occupied. In Germany, they managed to differentiate between the regime and the people living in the GDR and to foster communication.

In Ukraine, they should prevent any kind of discrimination against anything connected with Russia, people with roots in Russia or people who feel a connection with Russia and its language. Many people in Ukraine speak Russian to communicate at home and on the streets. This does not mean that they support Putin's policy, and they should not be targets of the Ukrainisation policy. It is very important not to permit the spread of the narrative of the Russian elite, according to which they must protect all Russians who feel themselves to be somehow deprived. **The more democratic and diversified Ukraine is, the less effective this propaganda will be.**

UKRAINE WILL NEED TO DEMONSTRATE THAT IT IS MOVING TOWARDS GENUINE STRUCTURAL REFORMS

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

The current international situation is not conducive to accelerating the resolution of the various levels of conflict between Ukraine and Russia. The extreme uncertainty created by the election of Donald Trump in the United States and his erratic style of governing have created myriad problems on various fronts, including the Russian-Ukrainian one.

First of all, each side can and does interpret his statements and actions, and those of his administration, in the way most advantageous to that particular side. Thus each party chooses to feel strengthened by – or at least continues to hold out hope for – significant US support, which may or may not be forthcoming. Since no coherent US line has emerged on Ukraine, Russia, or the Minsk process, it is impossible to determine which side's assessment is more correct. *Second*, this lack of a consistent and coherent approach means that it would be extremely risky to incorporate the US into a new or revised format to deal with the issues currently discussed under the Minsk framework.

On the other hand, the election of Emmanuel Macron to the French presidency has made it clear that the Normandy Format will continue to be pursued. However, despite Macron's decision to invite Vladimir Putin to Versailles just weeks after the former's inauguration, Russia has never been a major priority for France and is not likely to become one. This is all the more true for Ukraine. This speaks for the likelihood of the continuation of the Normandy Format without much added momentum, even after the German Bundestag elections in September. It is possible that high-level meetings will be kept to a minimum and that the emphasis will be placed more on the trilateral contact group until a window of opportunity arises for advancing the negotiations on the implementation of the Minsk agreements in a substantive manner.

In general, the European Union and its member states are currently mired in a number of difficult situations, some of which have taken on crisis proportions in the past and may do so again. Not to mention that both the EU and its member states are having to consider how to recalibrate their relations with an unpredictable



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US, the president of which has called fundamental values and principles of the transatlantic relationship into question.

This implies that the issue of Ukraine's future development, and of Ukrainian-Russian relations, have relatively low priority on the overall European agenda at the moment. Since the various difficulties and crises confronting the EU are not of a short-term nature, it is likely that this low priority will not change in the foreseeable future unless Ukraine and/or Russia catapult themselves to the top of the agenda through either very positive or extremely problematic behaviour.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

It is not at all clear that the worst is over in terms of Ukrainian-Russian relations. The situation could easily degenerate into a state of more intense fighting, since the two sides are often separated on the ground by only a few hundred metres on Ukrainian territory, and the Russian army inside Russia is positioned in a way, which allows it to attack on short notice. Neither the Russian nor the Ukrainian side seems to have a genuine interest in implementing the Minsk agreements in their current form at this time.

If one or the other decides that there could be political or other types of benefits to be achieved by escalating the situation, we could quickly see a deterioration on the ground. The interests of the separatists, who are by no means a monolithic group, also play a role in determining developments and could contribute to making the situation worse.

Since the Russian leadership appears determined to retain its leverage on Ukraine (through control over parts of the Donbas as well as by means of other types of influence), only two basic models of Russian-Ukrainian relations would seem to be possible in the upcoming years.

Either Ukraine returns to a situation in which it de facto cedes part of its sovereignty to Russia, or it continues to oppose Russia's attempts to subordinate it. Such opposition cannot succeed without a certain amount of international support, however, since Ukraine is militarily and economically weaker than Russia. In order to continue to secure such support Ukraine will need to go beyond its insistence on security-related arguments and demonstrate that it is moving substantively towards a functioning state which is committed to genuine structural reforms and systemic change.

ONE OF THE SCENARIOS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS IS A CONTINUATION OF THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS

– In your opinion, how does the current situation in Europe and the world (including after elections in the US and France and on the eve of German elections) affect the prospects of the Normandy format, the negotiations in Minsk and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in general?

In connection with these and similar risks, an intensification of negotiations within the Normandy and Minsk format, as one of the few frameworks of continuous contacts between Ukraine, Germany and France, on the one side, and Russia, on the other, is paramount.

This is all the more urgent as the United States may be too consumed by internal political strife or even an impeachment procedure during the next months or years. The recent rise of Emmanuel Macron in France, and probable confirmation of Angela Merkel as chancellor after Germany's September 2017 parliamentary elections are creating beneficial preconditions for an effective continuation of the Normandy Format.

Recent hawkish statements, by both Merkel and Macron, towards the Kremlin are indicating a high likelihood of unity and steadiness of their positions, as well as close future cooperation. France and Germany will need considerable energy and coordination to preserve the entire EU's coherent stance vis-à-vis Moscow and a consistent continuation of the sanctions regime against Russia.

– Have Russian-Ukrainian relations hit bottom? What are the real prospects for resolving the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, and, in your opinion, what will be the model (status) of Russian-Ukrainian interstate relations in the coming years?

One of the scenarios for the development of Russian-Ukrainian relations and the Donbas conflict is a continuation of the current state of affairs for several years. During the last months, Russia has been refraining from triggering another escalation similar to those that led to the battles at Ilovaisk and Debaltseve. Yet, Moscow occasionally turns up the heat, for certain periods of time. During these increases of tensions, the number of wounded and killed Ukrainian soldiers and civilian raises markedly. These brief escalations are sufficient to frustrate and enrage the Ukrainian public. Yet, most of these confrontations are purposefully kept below the level of warfare that would raise broad attention in the West where many have come to believe that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is "frozen".



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Cooperation (Kyiv)

The purpose of the Russian behavior is to worsen slowly, but continuously the general public climate in Ukraine, and especially so in the country's Eastern regions adjacent to the occupied territories. Should this strategy be successful, large parts of eastern Ukraine can become economically, socially and psychologically depressed, on a permanent basis.

Kyiv has only few opportunities to counteract Moscow's continuing hybrid war as the Ukrainian state remains too weak to adequately prevent the Kremlin's various military and non-military operations on its territory. Sometimes, the Ukrainian leadership shoots itself in the foot with inadequate counter-measures and over-reactions in such fields as trade, transportation, culture, and social networks. Ukraine's domestic and foreign affairs remain hampered by various forms of populism, a lack of bureaucratic professionalism and rampant corruption.

A mere continuation of the current state of affairs with weekly wounded and killed in action may not even be the worst-case scenario. Russia is purposefully building up its military capacity and installations including a railway line along the Russian-Ukrainian border from Zhuravka to Millerovo – a new infrastructure that would make possible quick movement of large troops in the region. Renowned Russian military expert Pavel Felgenhauer, who in June 2008 predicted Russia's August 2008 assault on Georgia, warns, in connection with this project and the general build-up of the Russian army, that these developments could lead to an open Russian invasion into mainland Ukraine.

The aim of such a foray could, for instance, be to create a land connection between the occupied parts of the Donetsk Basin and Crimean peninsula, along the shores of the Azov Sea. This issue may become especially acute, if the geological and climatic conditions for a successful erection and stable functioning of the currently built Russian bridge through the Kerch Strait turns out to be too demanding.

In such a case, the entire project of Putin's annexation of the Crimea may be questioned by the Russian public which would constitute a grave danger to the legitimacy of Putin's regime. Such a risk may trigger further Russian military aggression against Ukraine after some engineered incident that would provide a seemingly legitimate pretext and secure public approval for such action.

The resulting major Russian-Ukrainian war and possible collapse of the Ukrainian economy as well as currency would have far-reaching repercussion for East-Central European security. Among the most obvious risks would be new large refugee flows into the European Union, or a malfunctioning of the Zaporizhzhia NPP – Europe's largest atomic power station.

CAUSES AND THE FUTURE OF CONFLICT BETWEEN MOSCOW AND KYIV: OPINIONS AND ATTITUDES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

The findings of the recent opinion surveys conducted by the Razumkov Centre in 2014-2017 give grounds to speak of steady and broad trends of estrangement, and a lack of trust and alienation from Russia.¹ These deep and long-term changes in the opinions and attitudes of Ukrainian citizens are caused by Russian aggression, i.e. the annexation of Crimea and military expansion in Donbas. Throughout the years of war, a relatively stable Ukrainian attitude has been formed towards Moscow policy on Kyiv, Russian government institutions, and prospects for future relations with Russia.

In another (June 2017) opinion survey, citizens were asked to evaluate the state of relations between Ukraine and Russia, determine the causes and consequences of the conflict between Moscow and Kyiv, evaluate Russian policy on Ukraine, and forecast further development of bilateral relations.

STATE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINE AND RUSSIA

The majority of the citizens describe relations between Ukraine and Russia as hostile (50%) or bad (38%). Approximately every tenth citizen (9%) looks on them as unstable, and practically no one refers to them as good. Taking into account the impossibility of solving the issue of Crimea's annexation under the existing circumstances, and the uncertainty of settling the armed conflict in Donbas, it is hardly worthwhile to predict a change in assessments of the situation for the better in the near future.

In the opinion of residents, the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is caused by the attempt of Ukraine to move beyond Russia's control, and Moscow's denial to accept Ukraine as an independent state and its focus on European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Only a small part (5%) of respondents believe that the cause of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the violation of rights of the Russian-speaking population in eastern Ukraine.

¹ The findings of surveys conducted by Razumkov Centre over the last several years were used. The most recent survey was conducted by the Razumkov Centre's Sociological Service together with Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation on 9-13 June 2017 in all regions of Ukraine, except Crimea and the occupied territories of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. 2,018 respondents over 18 years old were surveyed. The theoretical sampling error does not exceed 2.3%.

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; Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts (except the occupied territories).

The most negative consequences of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, according to citizens, are the disruption of economic ties, increase of mutually negative relations between the citizens of Ukraine and Russia, and the deterioration of politico-diplomatic relations.

Relations between the citizens of Ukraine and Russia deteriorated over the last year. This is acknowledged by most (60%) of the respondents. Such a tendency has been observed since 2014. Moreover, 27% of respondents note that these relations (which are now hostile or bad) have not changed.

The majority (57%) of Ukrainians experience alienation among the citizens (societies) of Ukraine and Russia, while 29% of respondents hold opposite opinions.

Throughout the conflict in 2014-2017, the citizens of Ukraine held a stable negative attitude towards Russian policymakers and Russian state institutions. In June 2017, the portion of citizens with a negative attitude towards the President of the Russian Federation reached its maximum of 79%. Such negative dynamics are observed towards other state institutions of the Russian Federation as well: the Government and State Duma.

The attitude towards citizens of the Russian Federation is more moderate, and mainly neutral. However, in June 2017 (compared to April 2014), the number of Ukrainians with a positive view of Russians abruptly decreased from 45% to 27%, while the level of negative attitudes increased from 17% to 22%, and the portion of those with a neutral attitude increased from 33% to 43%. Indeed, these variations in opinion may be generally considered as the process of estrangement, lack of trust and alienation of Ukrainians from Russians.

At the regional level, respondent opinions are rather predictable. Opinions regarding the state of bilateral relations and Russian policymakers are the most critical among the residents of the Western and Central regions of Ukraine.

PROSPECTS FOR RELATIONS BETWEEN KYIV AND MOSCOW

The citizens of Ukraine most often predict a deterioration of bilateral relations in the years to come. Such an opinion is shared by 41% of respondents; at that about one-third (35%) of respondents think that relations will remain unchanged, which cannot be considered positive either. From the start of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, a drastic decrease in positive expectations has been observed. (While in April 2012, 36% of respondents expected an improvement in relations between Kyiv and Moscow, in June 2017, that figure fell to 6%).

The majority of Ukrainian citizens do not expect changes in the Russian policy towards Ukraine for the better in the years to come. 75% of respondents do not believe in positive changes over the next 1-3 years, and 59% – over the next 3-5 years. For a longer period (5-10 years), only one-third (32%) of respondents admit the possibility of improvements in Russian policy towards Ukraine.

The majority of citizens support decreasing or curtailing cooperation with Russia. In the pre-war period, the majority of the respondents supported expanded cooperation with Moscow. The beginning of the conflict reversed these preferential tendencies. In June 2017, 31% of respondents stood for a decrease in cooperation with Russia, and 30% for a curtailment of cooperation.

To summarise the opinions and attitudes of Ukrainian citizens, some conceptual elements of Ukrainian policy towards Russia supported by the majority of respondents can be distinguished.

One. Russia is the country-aggressor. Its purpose is to eliminate the independence and sovereignty of Ukraine. The normalisation of relations with Russia is impossible during the presidency of Vladimir Putin.

Two. The Russian threat has been minimised, but not completely neutralised. Under these circumstances, it is possible to counter Russian aggression only by means of joint international efforts.

Three. Ukraine will not take part in integration projects under the aegis of Russia in post-Soviet space. There is no alternative to European integration, and the process is non-reversible.

Four. Today, the phrases of “strategic partnership”, “good neighbourly relations”, and “fraternal peoples” as well as the Russian state and political model are unacceptable.

Five. There are certain problems, regarding which no compromise is possible with Russia. This includes the Crimea question, Ukraine’s state structure, and its European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

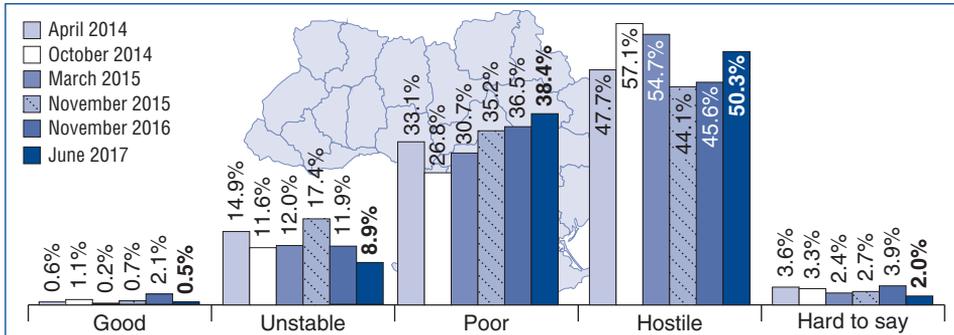
Six The conditions of the gradual normalisation of relations between Kyiv and Moscow shall be: Russia ceases aggression towards Ukraine, liberates the occupied territories, compensates the damages caused by annexation and military actions, and abandons the practice of intervention in Ukraine’s internal affairs.

GEOPOLITICAL PREFERENCES OF UKRAINIAN CITIZENS

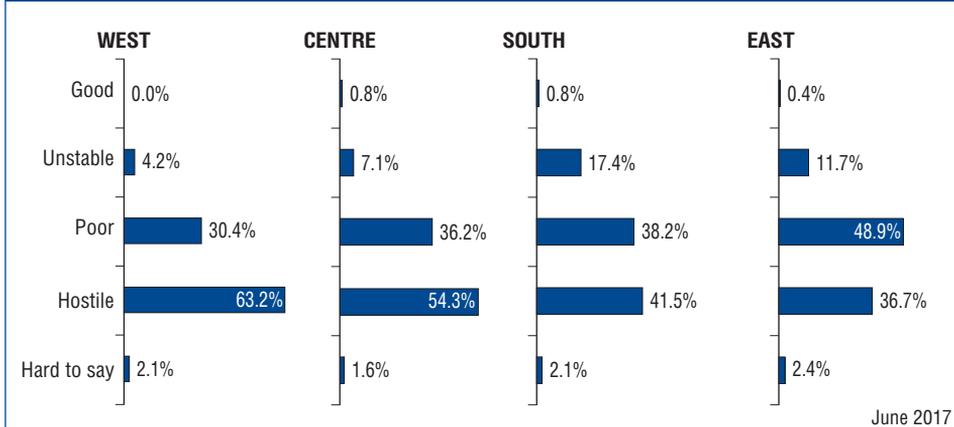
The focus on European and Euro-Atlantic integration is supported by the majority of Ukrainian citizens. 57% of respondents speak in favour of Ukraine’s accession to the EU, and only 8% of respondents believe Ukraine should accede to the Eurasian Economic Union uniting five post-Soviet countries. However, it is worthwhile noting that one-fourth of citizens (26%) support neither the country’s accession to the EU, nor to the EAEU.

Throughout the years of conflict between Russia and Ukraine, citizens’ attitudes towards Euro-Atlantic integration have changed greatly. In 2014, a noticeable increase of supporters of Ukraine’s accession to the Alliance was recorded. In June 2017, the largest portion of respondents (47%) believed that joining NATO was best to guarantee national security. Hypothetically speaking, 66% of citizens were ready to take part in a referendum on NATO membership, and 70% stated they would vote for accession to the Alliance.

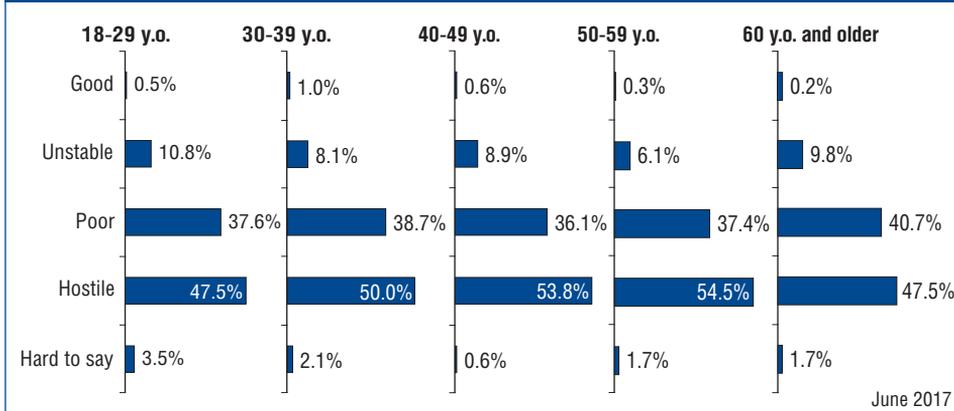
How would you describe current relations between Ukraine and Russia?
% of respondents

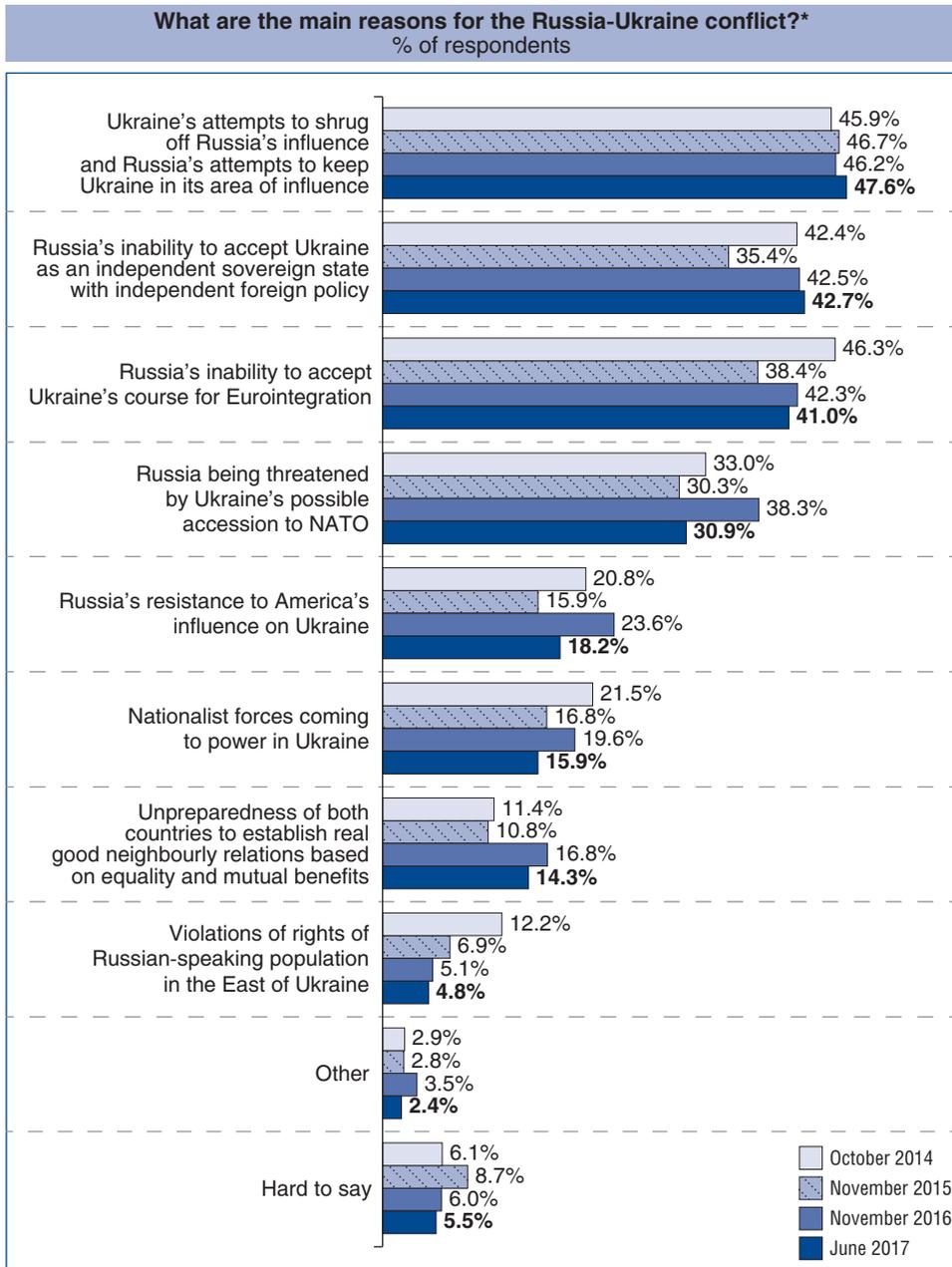


REGIONS

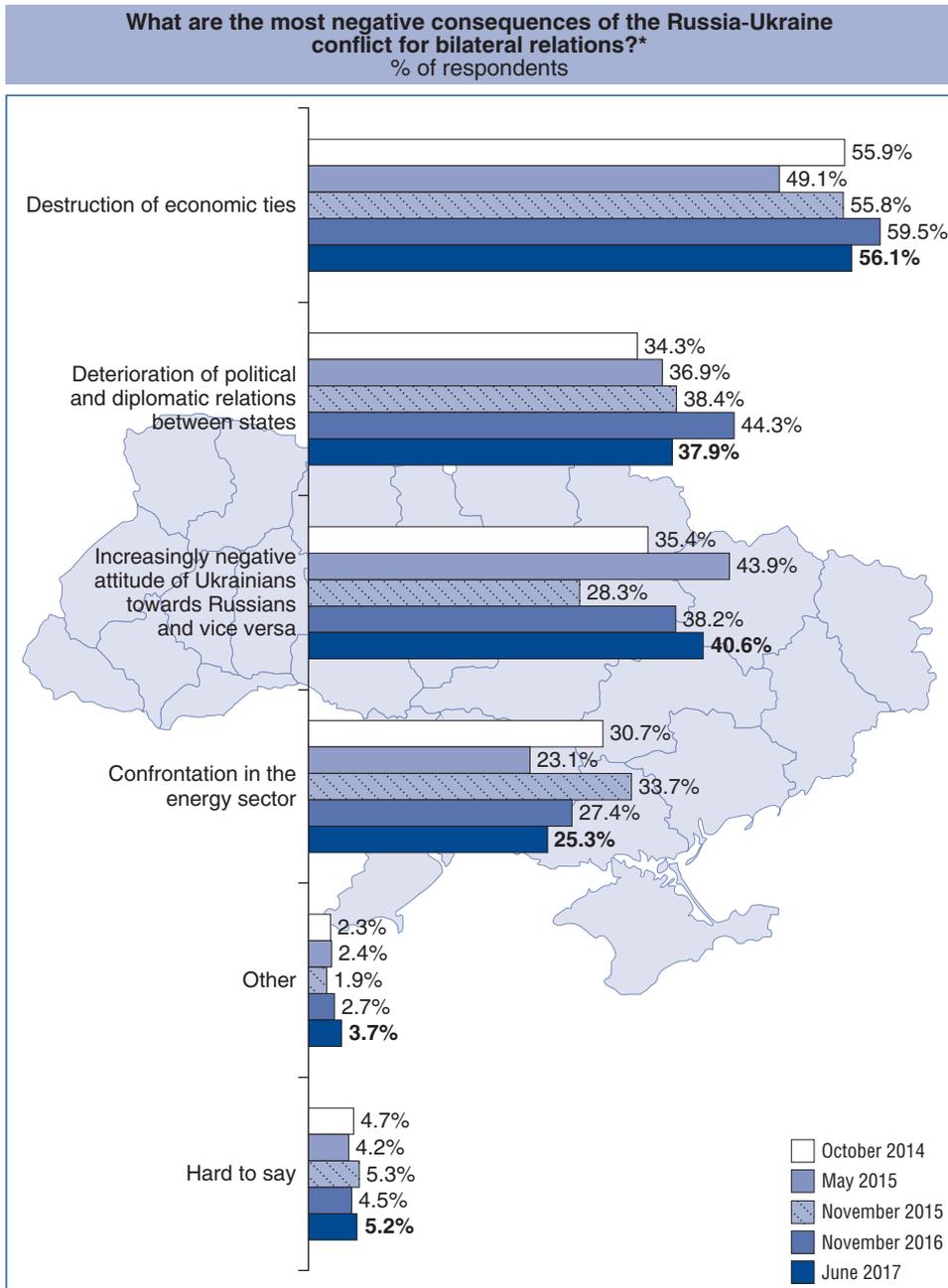


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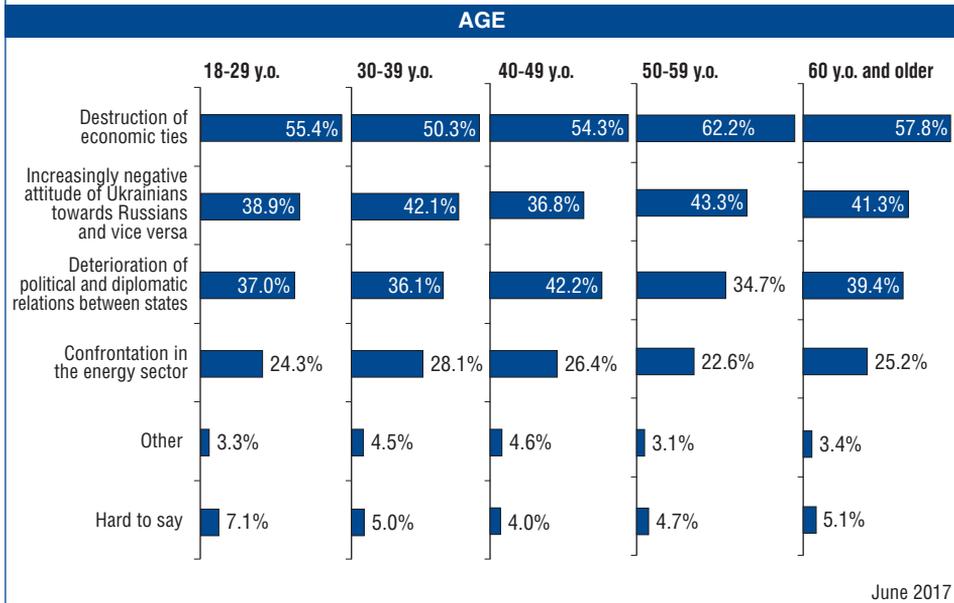
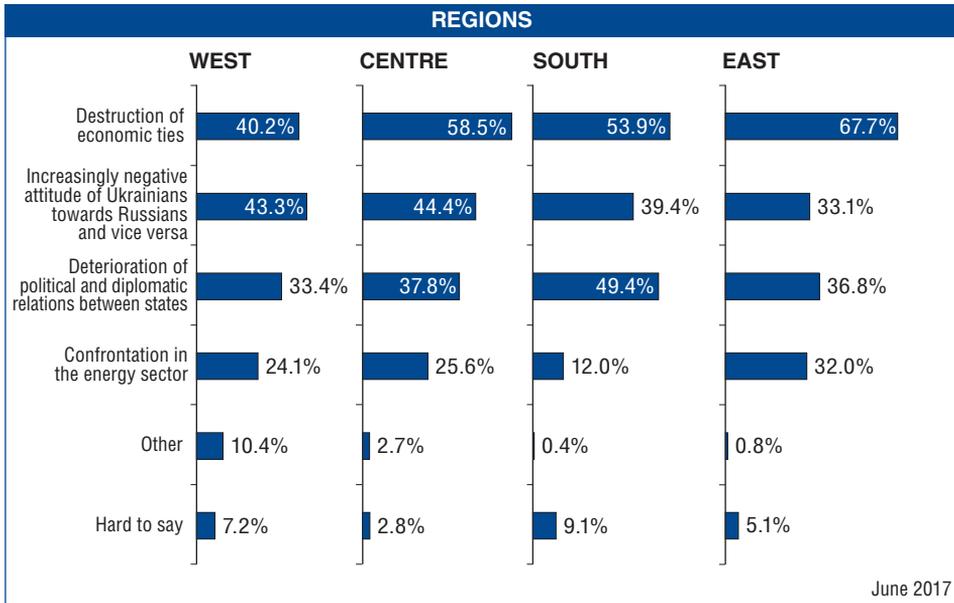
* Respondents were asked to select all acceptable answers.



* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.

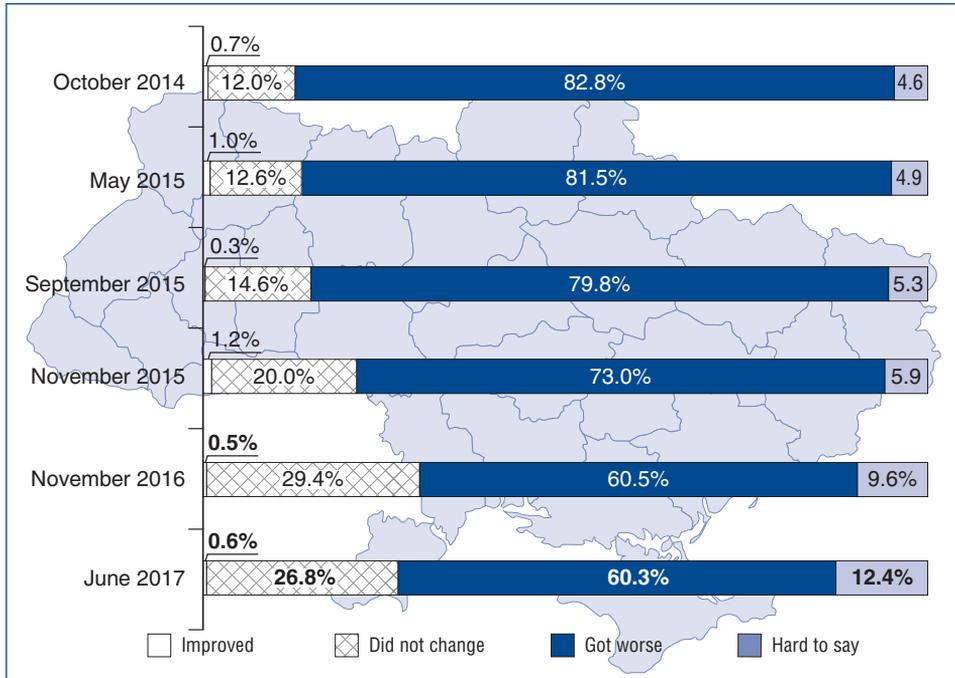
What are the most negative consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict for bilateral relations?*
 % of respondents

(Continued)

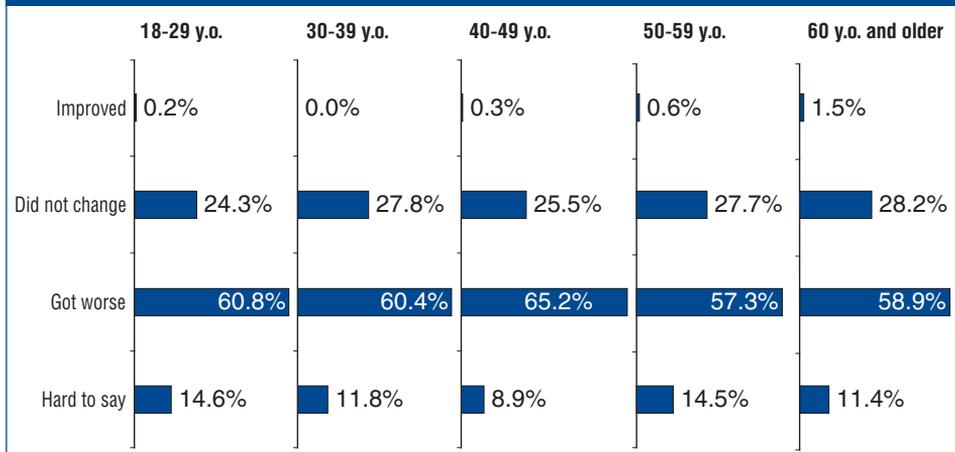


* Respondents were asked to select two acceptable answers.

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



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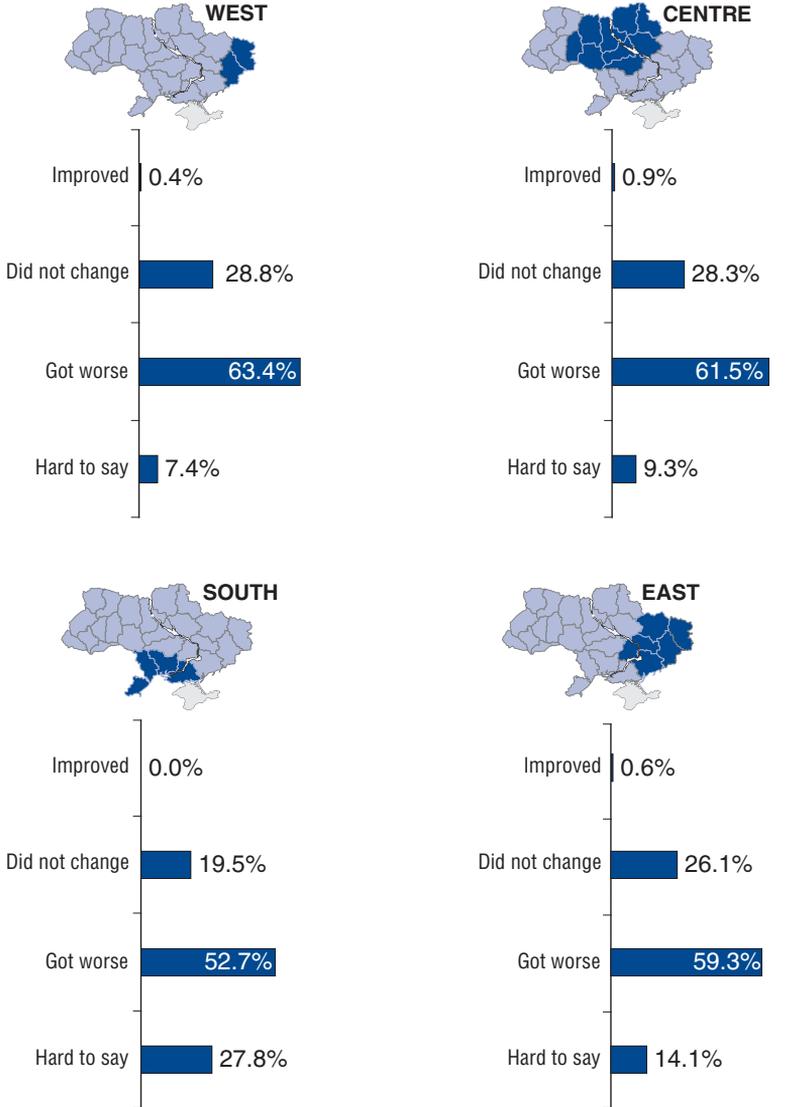


June 2017

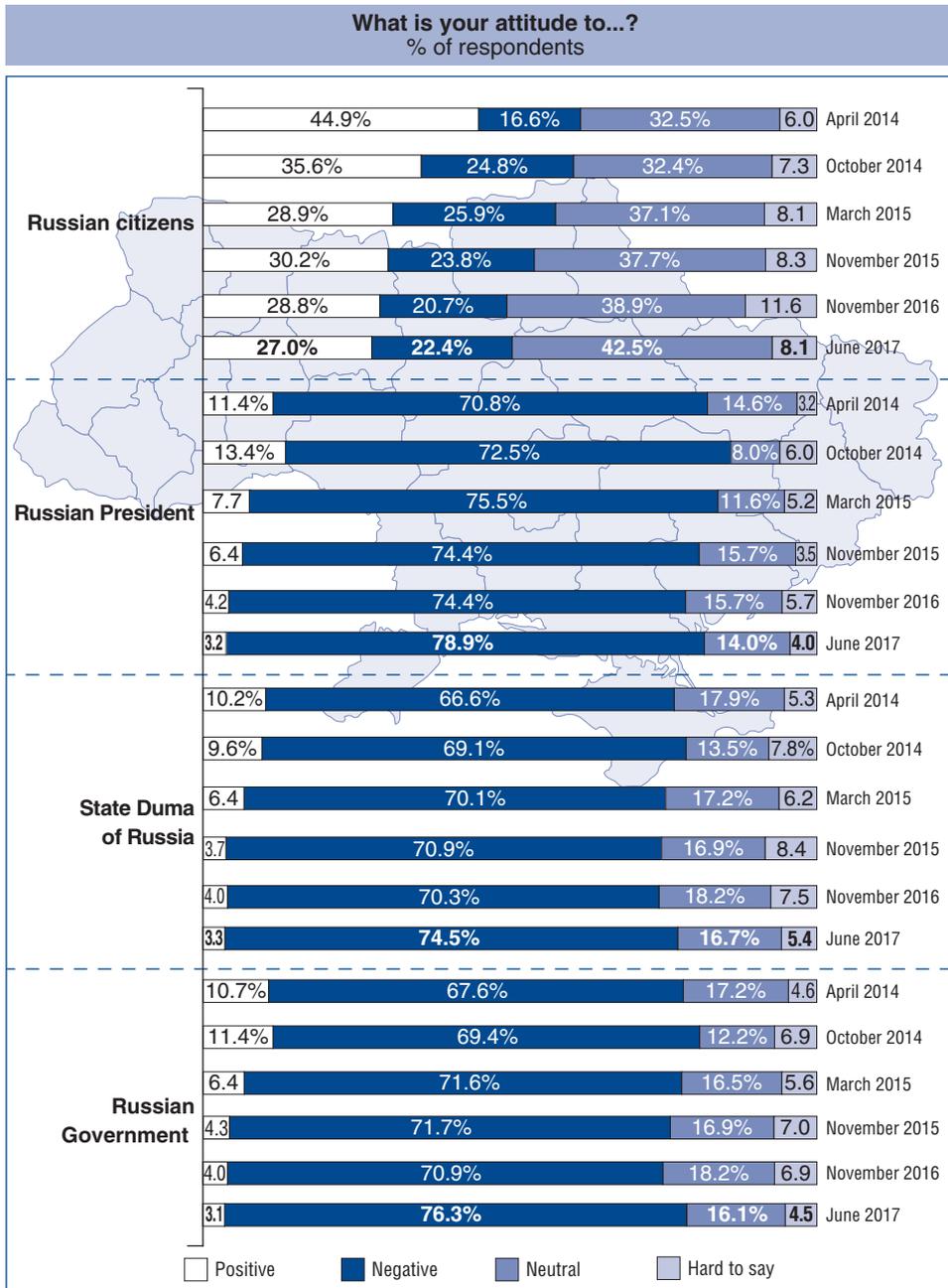
How did relations between the peoples of Ukraine and Russia change in the past year?
 % of respondents

(Continued)

REGIONS



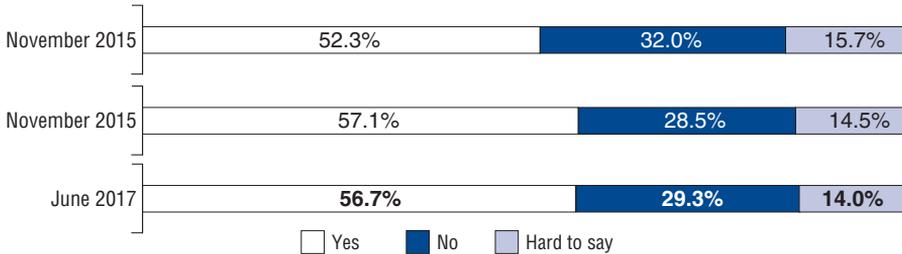
June 2017



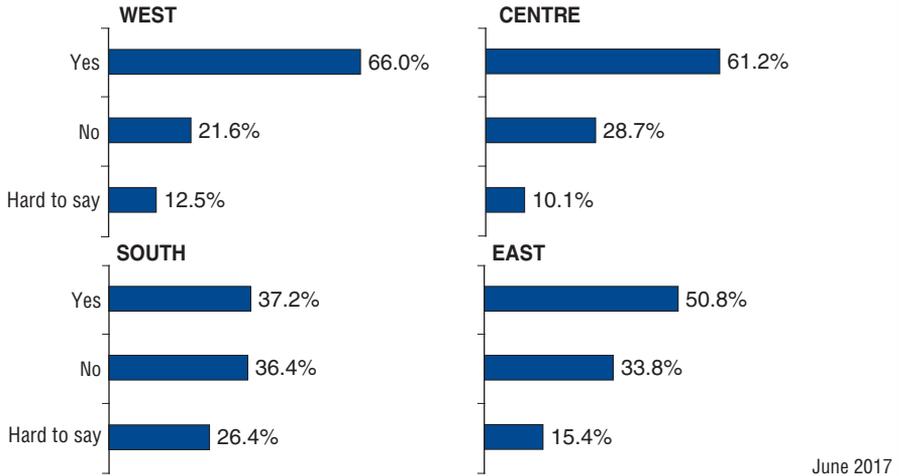
What is your attitude to...?				
% of respondents				
<i>(Continued)</i>				
REGIONS (June 2017)				
Russian citizens				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST
Positive	13.9	22.0	40.2	39.7
Negative	31.2	27.1	12.4	12.2
Neutral	46.2	42.9	36.9	41.2
Hard to say	8.6	7.9	10.4	7.0
Russian President				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST
Positive	1.1	0.8	5.8	7.3
Negative	91.5	90.5	64.5	57.5
Neutral	5.1	5.6	25.2	28.8
Hard to say	2.3	3.1	4.5	6.4
State Duma of Russia				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST
Positive	1.1	0.6	5.8	8.1
Negative	88.2	87.4	56.6	51.7
Neutral	6.6	8.2	29.3	32.6
Hard to say	4.2	3.8	8.3	7.7
Russian Government				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST
Positive	1.1	0.4	6.6	7.0
Negative	89.6	89.2	60.6	53.0
Neutral	5.9	7.1	27.4	33.1
Hard to say	3.4	3.2	5.4	7.0

What is your attitude to...?					
% of respondents					
<i>(Continued)</i>					
AGE (June 2017)					
Russian citizens					
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Positive	21.7	27.0	22.4	32.9	30.1
Negative	23.2	23.3	25.8	19.8	20.8
Neutral	44.9	42.4	43.9	38.7	42.2
Hard to say	10.2	7.3	8.0	8.6	6.8
Russian President					
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Positive	2.4	2.4	1.8	4.2	4.9
Negative	80.9	77.5	81.7	78.2	76.7
Neutral	12.7	16.5	13.5	12.6	14.4
Hard to say	4.0	3.7	3.1	5.0	4.0
State Duma of Russia					
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Positive	2.1	3.1	3.7	3.9	3.8
Negative	76.2	73.4	76.8	75.4	71.9
Neutral	15.3	18.8	15.0	15.4	18.4
Hard to say	6.4	4.7	4.6	5.3	5.9
Russian Government					
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Positive	2.1	2.6	2.5	3.9	4.0
Negative	78.3	75.9	78.8	76.0	73.5
Neutral	14.6	17.3	15.3	15.0	17.6
Hard to say	5.0	4.2	3.4	5.0	4.9

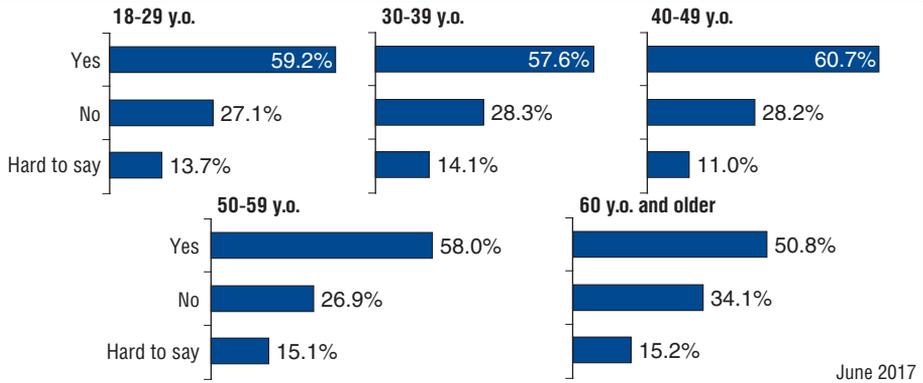
Do you feel the alienation between the citizens (societies) of Russia and Ukraine?
% of respondents



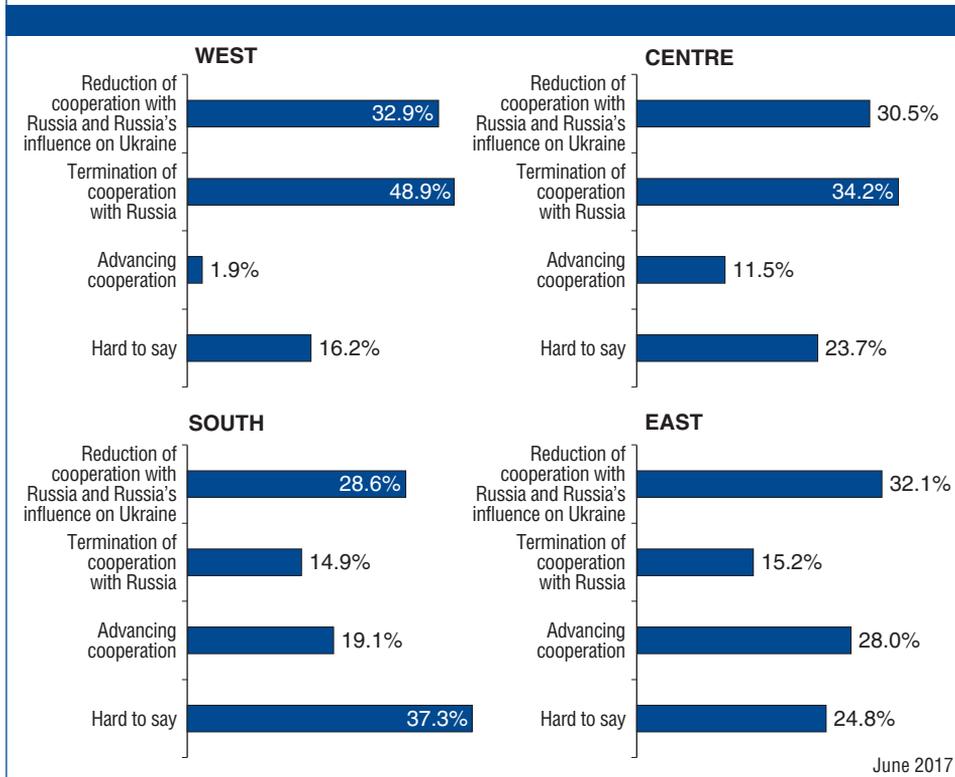
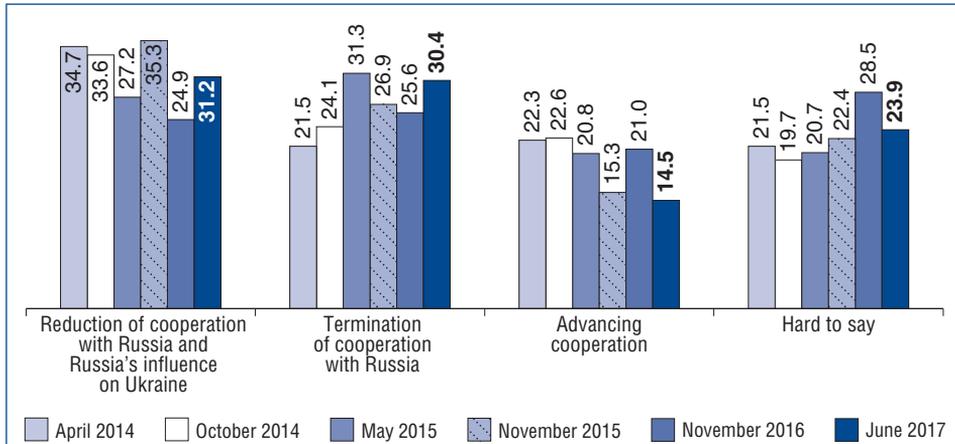
REGIONS



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



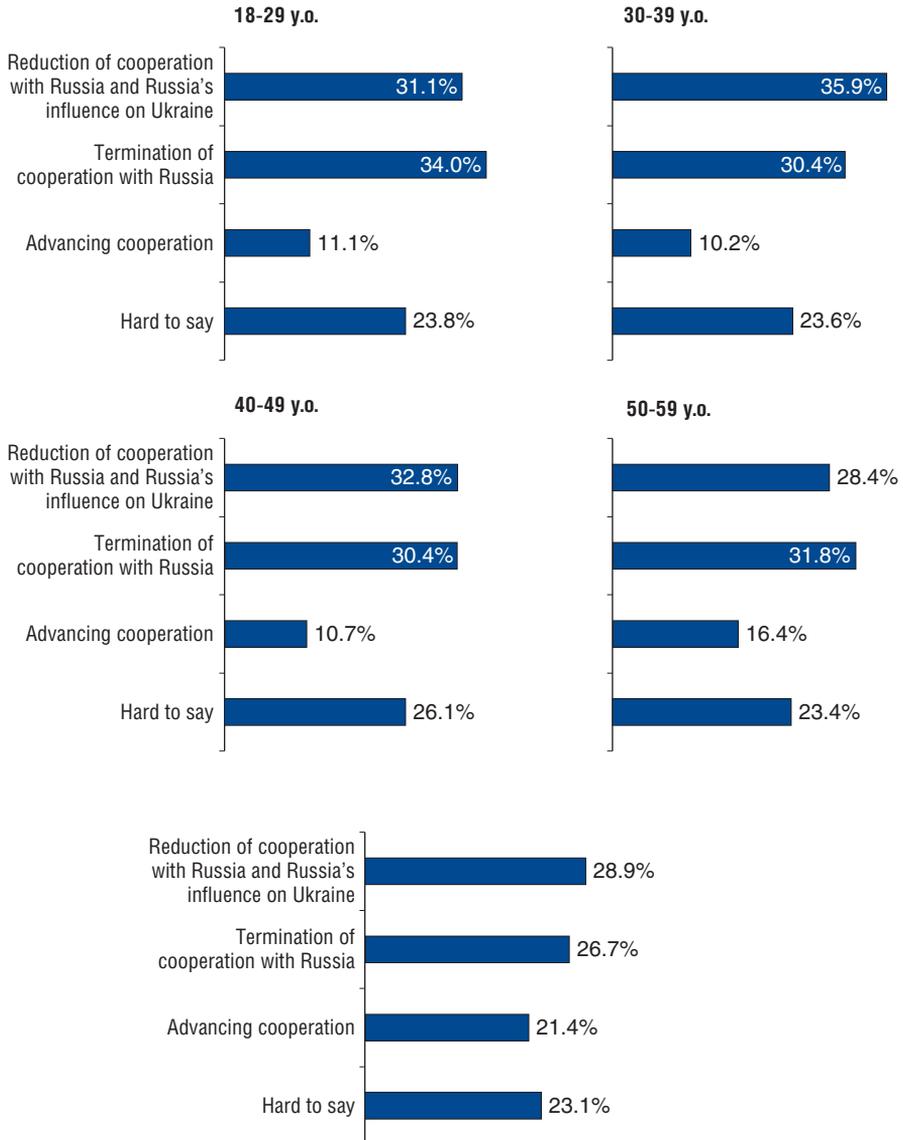
June 2017

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

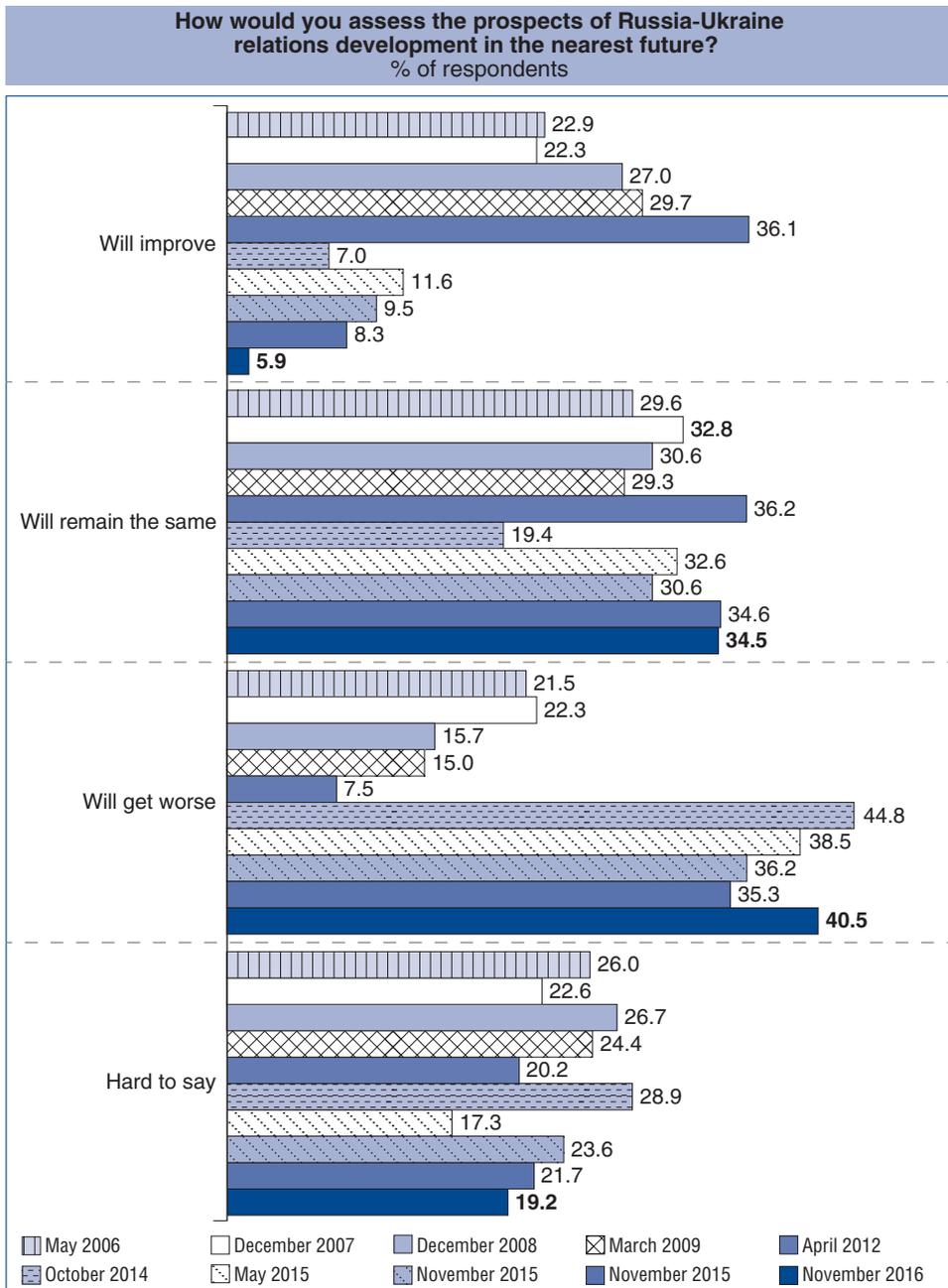
% of respondents

(Continued)

AGE



June 2017



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

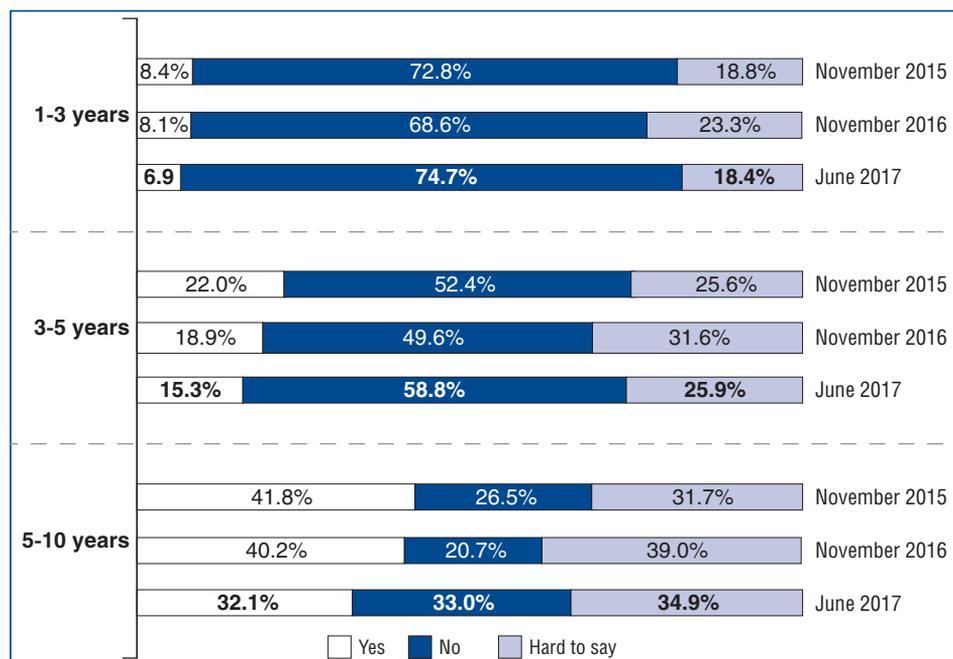
% of respondents

(Continued)

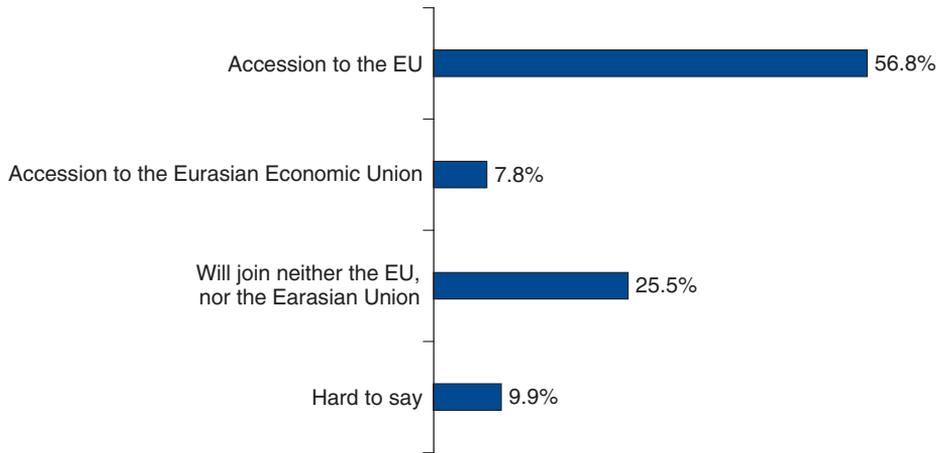
	REGIONS (June 2017)				
	WEST	CENTRE	SOUTH	EAST	
Will improve	4.9	5.3	11.2	5.3	
Will remain the same	31.5	35.0	26.6	40.0	
Will get worse	44.2	45.0	31.5	34.6	
Hard to say	19.5	14.7	30.7	20.1	
	AGE (June 2017)				
	18-29 y.o.	30-39 y.o.	40-49 y.o.	50-59 y.o.	60 y.o. and older
Will improve	5.7	5.5	5.8	4.7	7.2
Will remain the same	36.6	35.4	28.5	32.4	37.2
Will get worse	38.9	41.2	46.6	41.6	36.5
Hard to say	18.9	17.8	19.0	21.2	19.1

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

% of respondents

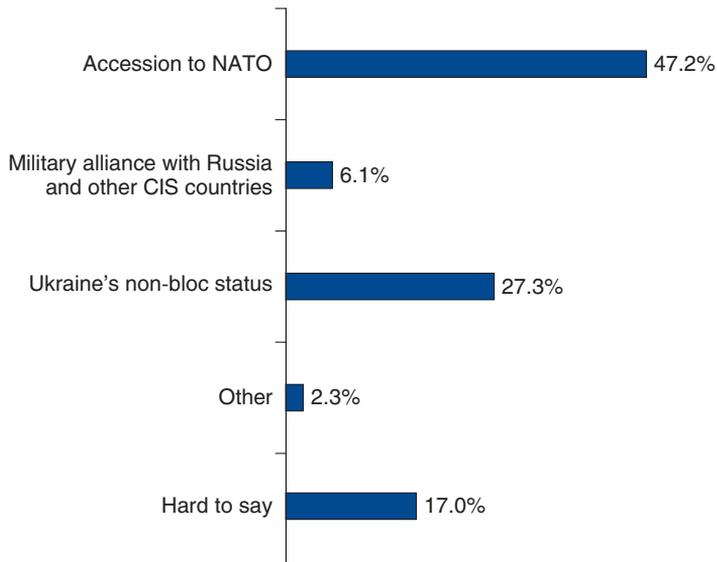


Which integration path should Ukraine follow?
% of respondents



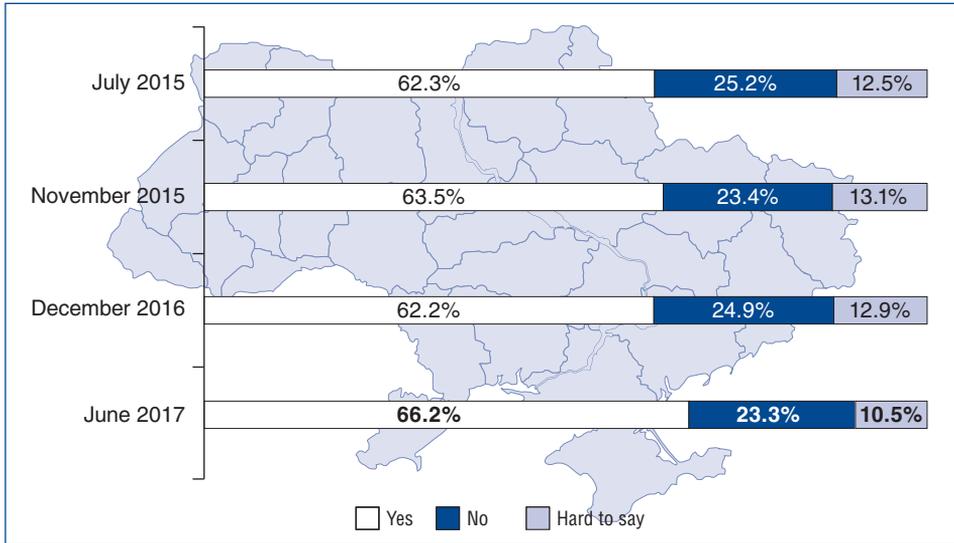
June 2017

What is the best way to ensure the national security of Ukraine?
% of respondents

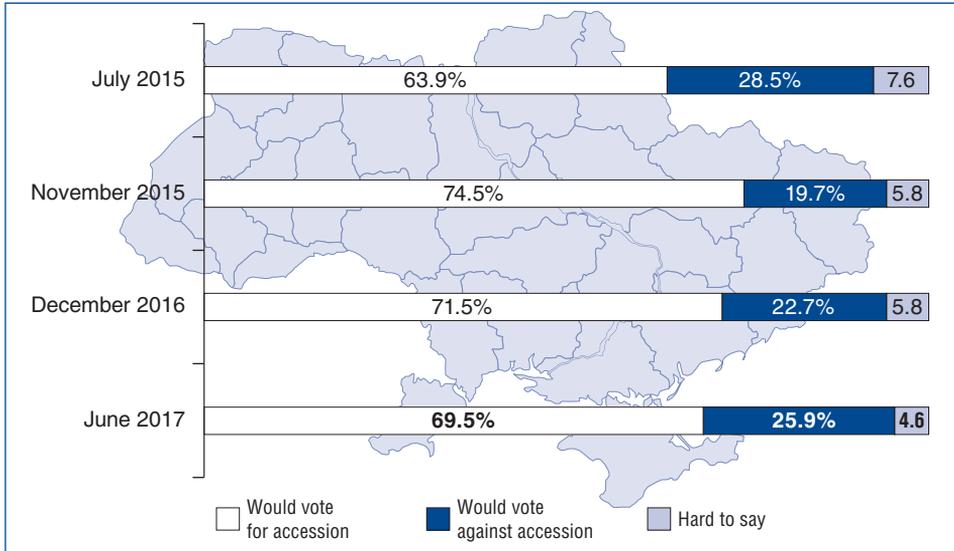


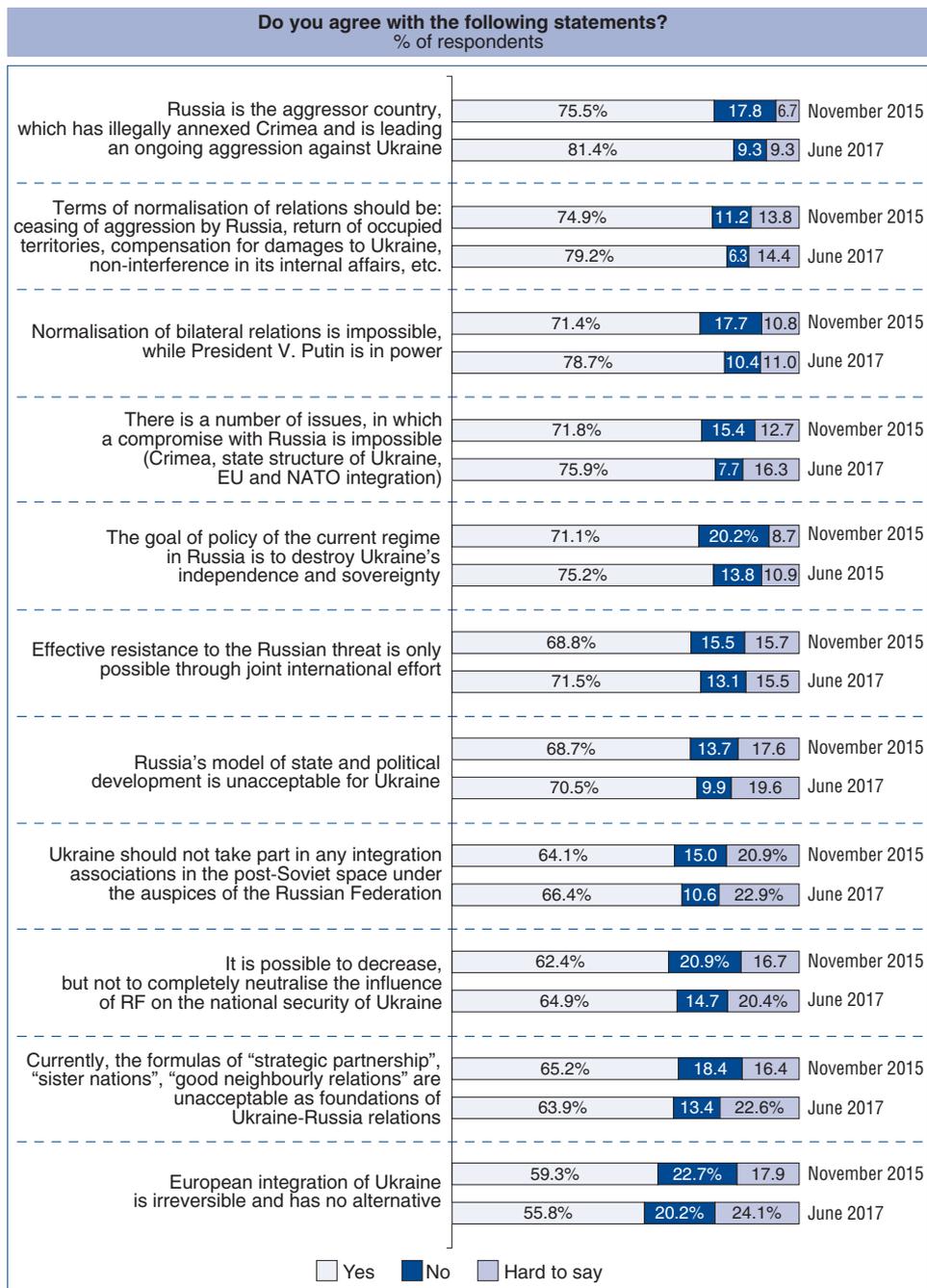
June 2017

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





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

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