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## THE MINSK AGREEMENTS OF 2015: A FORCED STEP OR A SMALL ACHIEVEMENT OF THE UKRAINIAN SIDE WITHIN THE DIPLOMATIC CONFRONTATION AROUND THE WAR IN THE DONBAS

### ABSTRACT

The article describes the formats in which the “Ukrainian question” has been discussed in various forums in the last year and defines various reasons why meetings within the format of the “Normandy Quartet” was the most effective. The Ukrainian national interest considered, it analyzes the preferences and shortcomings of the *Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* and the *Declaration by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* adopted on February 12, 2015.

### Key words

“Package of Measures”, “Ukrainian question”, Normandy format, Donbas

At the end of December, 2014, well-known Ukrainian political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko, describing the Minsk Protocol and the Minsk Memorandum, signed on September 2014, noted:

My heart is refusing to accept the Minsk agreements, but rational mind takes over. I realize full well the need of it (Zik, 2014).

It is hard to disagree with this statement which is also absolutely true for evaluating the results of the negotiations in the Belarusian capital in 2015.

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An official meeting of the leaders of the “Normandy Quartet” (Russia, France, Germany and Ukraine) was held in Minsk on February 11–12. As a result, two final documents were aligned: the *Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* (hereinafter referred to as *The Package of Measures*) and the *Declaration by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* adopted on February 12, 2015 in Minsk (hereinafter referred to as *the Declaration*). The Minsk negotiations aroused great interest among political scientists, experts, politicians as well as ordinary citizens of the European countries. It is only natural, considering the problems discussed in the Belarusian capital and radically opposing tasks set by the negotiators, that outcomes of the final documents are quite different from each other. Nevertheless, the negotiations have played a prominent role in the attempt of resolving the conflict in the Donbas. Obviously, it is these documents that the conflicting parties involved in Eastern Ukraine and other interested parties will appeal to.

In the last year, the negotiations on the Ukrainian issue have been discussed in various formats. Primarily, the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the USA, the Russian Federation and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy was held on April 17 in Geneva. That was the only time when the “Ukrainian question” was discussed among the participants of such format.

The so-called “Normandy format” with the participation of the leaders or foreign ministers of Ukraine, Germany, Russia and France has been more effective. It originates from the Commemoration Ceremonies in honor of Allied landing in Normandy in the castle of Benuvil (France) on June 6, 2014 (Шрайбман, 2015).

The Minsk negotiation format was launched at a meeting in the Belarusian state residence “Zaslavl” near Minsk on July 31, 2014 (Belapan, 2014). The Minsk format is the Tripartite Contact Group represented by negotiators from Ukraine, Russia and the OSCE and was joined by the leaders of the so-called “DNR” and “LNR” in the course of the meetings. The Minsk agreements’ failure is an acknowledged fact (Шрайбман, 2015). Moreover, some of the scheduled meetings never took place. However, due to various factors, decisions taken at the meetings in the Normandy format have had an influence on the situation in the Donbas for a long time.

The above-mentioned formats are just few in the long list of negotiation formats with the goal of resolving the conflict in the Donbas. It is also worth mentioning that it was Petro Poroshenko who initiated the Minsk meeting which

took place on August 26, 2014 to ensure the peace process. The negotiation was conducted by the leaders of Ukraine, the “Eurasian Three” (Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia) and the European Union (Korrespondent, 2014). However, the only result of this meeting was the fact that it actually served as a red herring distracting the world community from the real threat of a regular large-scale invasion of Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine (Гавриш, 2014).

The documents, signed in the Belarusian capital on February 12, 2015, were based on numerous meetings within the framework of the Minsk format. However, the vital negotiation was the format of the leaders of the Normandy Four with Petro Poroshenko, Angela Merkel, Francois Hollande and Vladimir Putin which had been dragging on for over 16 hours. It should be noted that not a single document was signed by the above-mentioned leaders at the meeting of February 11–12. In fact, whereas there was no signature under the Declaration, The Package of Measures was signed by the representatives of the tripartite contact group: the second President of Ukraine Leonid Kravchuk, the OSCE Representative Heidi Tagliavini, Ambassador of Russia to Ukraine Mikhail Zurabov and leaders of the so-called DNR (or DPR) and LNR (or LPR) Igor Plotnytsky and Alexander Zakharchenko (Илларионов, 2015; UA.112, 2015; OSCE, 2015).

It is worth mentioning that effectiveness of the meetings beginning from the period of autumn 2014 till after the format in the capital city of Belarus was repeatedly questioned (BBC, 2014; Решмедилова, 2015). Top Ukrainian politicians and political experts have systematically emphasized that these formats have exhausted themselves and it is time for the US to be engaged in the negotiations to revive the Geneva format. For example, on November 5, the President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko had a telephone conversation with the US Secretary of State John Kerry and emphasized on the rebooting the dialogue with the USA participation (Nbnews, 2014). The Prime Minister of Ukraine Arseniy Yatseniuk has repeatedly mentioned the same. In particular, on November 18, 2014 during the joint press-conference with the Prime Minister of Norway Erna Solberg he stated:

We call on Russia to begin real talks. We believe that a Geneva format is the best one for such negotiations, with the participation of the US, the EU, Ukraine and Russia (Pravda, 2014a).

The ex-head of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) and the Ministry of Defence Yevhen Marchuk is of the same opinion. On March 20, in his interview for the Internet publication “GORDON” he announced:

Now it is clear that the European Quartet proves ineffective. We need a Geneva format with the participation of the United States. But the moment is wasted.

We were bound to insist on changing the format before meeting in Minsk, when Putin was under unprecedented pressure (Посканная, 2015).

Undoubtedly, the official participation of Washington in the negotiations would definitely strengthen the negotiating position of the Ukrainian side. Traditionally, the Russian leadership puts the blame on the USA for most of the problems it encounters (Censor, 2014; Ng, 2014). Yet, according to basic documents on foreign policy, Germany and France are recognized as main partners among member states of the European Union (Mid, 2013). On the other hand, the foreign economic relations policy appears to be a vital factor affecting the foreign policy of any country. From this perspective, the official participation of Washington will be favourable for Ukraine. The fact that the trade flow between the US and Russia appears to be considerably lower than the commodity circulation between the EU and Russia may support the above given statement (Яременко, Белокопос, Олег & Хара, 2015). The outcome of the imposed sanctions has been a significant decrease of the trade flow between Russia and Germany, on the one hand, and Russia and France, on the other (Caspianenergy, 2015; Rueconomics, 2014). The losses French businesses suffer due to sanctions are tremendous. The situation is the same with German companies. Consequently, the German chancellor and the French president are under considerable pressure from big business (Ednist, 2015; Tyzhden, 2015). In view of temporary character of sanctions and Russia's huge resource potential, such situation forces the leaders of Germany and France to weigh every single word during the talks with Vladimir Putin (Interfax, 2014). Accordingly, under condition of a US representative's participation in the talks, the Russian side would feel less comfortable.

Therefore, the question arises: why the key meetings on the "Ukrainian question" took place without the participation of America? In our opinion, there is a number of factors that facilitated bigger effectiveness of talks in the Minsk and Normandy format. The chronological order regarded, the first reason, though not the principal one, might be inadequate reaction of the participants to events in Ukraine during a sole meeting in the Geneva format. To be more precise, the final Declaration of the meeting in Geneva on April 17, 2014 totally ignored the facts of occupation and annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. Moreover, the document failed to raise the issue on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine in the face of the deteriorating situation in the Donbas. Finally, the document states that the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission is to be engaged for implementing de-escalation measures in Ukraine. It is interesting to note that, along with the USA and the EU, Russia, having taken over a part of

the Ukrainian territory only a few weeks ago, granted observes to support the Monitoring Mission (Dt, 2014).

Another reason was the fact that the representatives of the so-called “DNR” and “LNR” expressed negative attitude towards the Geneva format in which they were not engaged. Of course, their attitude was not decisive, but the active support by the Kremlin significantly influenced the situation. In particular, making a speech in the State Duma on November 2014, Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Lavrov pointed out that the Geneva format was useful “only when there was no direct dialogue between Kyiv and Southern and Eastern Ukraine”; “The dialogue has already been established. It will be a crime to destroy it”, – he stressed (Pravda, 2014b).

In this manner, Kyiv, which had a strategic advantage over the separatists during July–August (Машовець, 2014; Zavtra, 2014), underestimated the danger and consented to their participation in the meetings in the Minsk format. After the large-scale invasion of the regular Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine in the second half of August 2014 and the tragic events in Ilovaik, Ukrainian diplomats did not have enough tools, including international support, to improve the situation to their advantage.

The official position of Washington was another significant reason why the US representatives did not participate in the negotiations on the “Ukrainian question”. As stated above, at the beginning of November 2014 the President of Ukraine in a telephone conversation with the US Secretary of State John Kerry called for resuming negotiations in the Geneva format. However, after the meeting held on November 21, 2014 with the US Vice President Joe Biden in Kiev, Petro Poroshenko noted: “We have already come to a complete agreement that the most appropriate basic format for the peace process is the format of the Minsk talks – Tripartite Contact Group” (Newsru, 2014). Thus, the absence of the US representatives at the Minsk meeting was the conscious position of the American side. Once again the Ukrainian president raised the issue of the necessity of negotiations in the Geneva format after the Mariupol tragedy on January 24, 2015, when 30 people were killed and more than 100 people were injured as a direct result of terrorist attacks (Mediarnbo, 2015). However, this initiative was not fruitful. Soon after, the world media attention shifted toward a new initiative by the Western countries concerning the settlement of the Ukrainian crisis.

The escalation of the conflict in the eastern Ukraine in the second half of January 2015 prompted the Western countries to find the new ways out of the situation in the Donbas. In this case, there are a number of vivid peculiarities as far as the preparatory stage for the meeting on February 11–12 is concerned.



Primarily, the credit should be given to the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany Angela Merkel for taking the most active role in every attempt to settle the conflict. During two weeks ahead of the Minsk discussions, she had repeatedly spoken on the phone with the leaders of all the involved sides and even succeeded in meeting with the presidents of Ukraine, Russia, the US and the Prime Minister of Canada within the short period of February 5–9 (BBC, 2015; Ipress, 2015a).

It is obvious to the eye and mind that along with the systematic contacts between the German Chancellor and the President of the United States, they give a different emphasis to resolving of the Ukrainian crisis. In particular, Angela Merkel has repeatedly emphasized the unacceptability of settling the conflict in the Donbas by military means. Thus, the German leaders rejected the idea of providing Ukraine with weapons. It was not the case with the USA. In early February 2015, the American president stated that the decision regarding supplying the lethal weapons to Ukraine had not been taken yet. Meanwhile, the White House underwent a noticeable pressure from representatives of the Republican Party, analysts and journalists aimed at forcing Barack Obama to strengthen military assistance to Ukraine (Ipress, 2014; 5.UA, 2015). Such situation laid the groundwork for the crucial decision to be taken at the proper time about supplying necessary weapons to Ukraine.

Another feature of the preparatory phase of the talks was the growing diplomatic pressure on the Kremlin from the West. On the eve of their meeting in Minsk, the leaders emphasized that if the situation did not improve in the Donbas, Russia will have to encounter new hardships. So, after the meeting with the German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Barack Obama stated:

Russia violated all the obligations under the Minsk agreements... Russia did not withdraw its troops from the east of Ukraine, they continue to operate there, Russia helps separatists to coordinate their attacks... If Russia continues its course, its isolation will be only getting worse (Ipress, 2015b; Korrespondent, 2015).

The above mentioned facts indicate an attempt to coordinate the actions taken by of the European Union (Pravda, 2015) and the United States in the “Ukrainian question”. On the other hand, the allocated roles of Germany and America are apparent in terms of using a “good cop, bad cop” technique while negotiating with Russia.

Currently, this tactic seems quite reasonable. Western countries have used most of their tools to influence the Kremlin’s position. However, despite the significant deterioration of the Russian economy, the Russian leaders have made

neither concessions nor serious steps towards de-escalation of the conflict in the Donbas. In the middle of March 2015, the former Minister of Internal Security and the Foreign Minister of Israel Shlomo Ben-Ami spoke quite aptly on this subject. In particular, he said:

Probably, Europe underestimated the determination of Russia to maintain its key interests in Ukraine. The struggle for influence in Ukraine is a game that Putin cannot afford to lose. For the West, the principle of preventing the power redrawing of the borders is vital from a political point of view. In fact, it is the cornerstone of a civilized world order. But both the US and Europe have made it clear that they were not going to lie the bones for the sovereignty of Ukraine... And the sanctions, despite the damage it have done to the economy of Russia, were not enough to break the will of Putin (Бен-Ами, 2015).

In the Western countries, unlike Russia, there are no real mechanisms to influence the situation in the east of Ukraine, and they were more focused on stabilizing the situation, even at the cost of some loss, primarily from the Ukrainian side. In such circumstances, the Western countries have decided not to provoke Vladimir Putin, going to make some concessions in the issue of the format of the meeting, to achieve at least some progress in the case of stabilization in the Donbas.

In general, analyzing the events associated with the meeting in the Belarussian capital, I would like to draw attention to some interesting moments. Firstly, events in the Donbas have caused the situation in which Ukraine, contrary to the principle of state sovereignty, has to involve other states into the solving its domestic problems. The tragedy of the situation is that Russia, which previously annexed the part of Ukrainian territory and is trying hard to destabilize the situation in Ukraine, is also involved in this process.

Secondly, the negotiations of February 11–12 appeared to be the forced step for the most of the involved sides. It is believed that negotiations a priori imply concessions from each party. However, when the parties agree to make some concessions, they usually expect to gain more advantage than they could grasp by using non-diplomatic methods. For the Western countries, having failed to influence Russia with sanctions, the Minsk negotiations were an attempt to find new levers of influence on the events. On the other hand, the Western leaders have faced the pressure from businesses bearing severe losses from the sanctions imposed against Russia. In such situation, the freezing of the conflict in the eastern Ukraine in the short term is the best-case scenario for the Western countries. This scenario can be primarily implemented through negotiations. It is Ukraine,

more than any other party, that is interested in the resolving the conflict in the Donbas. In my opinion, Ukrainian troops have no chance of winning if there is no complete control over the Ukrainian-Russian border. The events of July–September 2014 proved that the activation of the Ukrainian armed forces cause a similar reaction from the Russian side. The deployment of regular Russian troops on the territory of Ukraine with the Western countries failing to respond to such doings have shown that in the near future the Ukrainian people have to rely only on themselves. Taking into consideration the incomparable military and economic potential of Russia, as opposed to those of Ukraine, and regarding the position of the Western countries (Facebook, 2014), Kyiv realizes full well that, in the course of events, diplomatic tools are more acceptable. The economic, financial and social situation in the country is an important incentive for taking steps aimed at de-escalation (КАШИН, 2014). Economic reforms, overcoming inflation, encouraging the foreign investment, raising social standards are actually unrealistic during the war.

There are various reasons for forcing the Russian president to participate in the negotiations in the capital city of Belarus. Firstly, it was necessary to document the tactical military successes of Russian and separatist military formations over the past few months. To my mind, prevention of the aggravating isolation of Russia and imposing new sanctions were equally important reasons (Korrespondent, 2015; Nr 2, 2015; Rosbalt, 2015).

Thirdly, Russia holds a dominant position in discussion of the “Ukrainian question” (Ярощук, 2015; Polradio, 2015). The above-mentioned Shlomo Ben-Ami said:

From the very beginning Putin has taken an upper hand in the crisis with the annexation of the Crimea. Now, in the eastern Donbas, he skillfully urges split and non-riskful West to choose between war and adaptation (БЕН-АМИ, 2015).

Vladimir Putin, more than anyone else, has an influence on the situation. Under such circumstances, Kremlin, by aggravating escalation of the conflict in the Donbas at the end of January 2015 (ЖАРТОВСЬКА & КОВАЛЕНКО, 2015; КАШИН, 2014), compelled Western countries to negotiate. Moreover, Moscow sent threatening signals that Vladimir Putin would take part in the negotiations only under certain terms (TSN, 2015a).

Fourthly, the negotiations became a sort of symbiosis of the Norman and Minsk formats. As already noted, while the key decisions were taken by the leaders of the “Normandy Quartet”, one of the final documents was signed by the Trilateral Contact Group and the leaders of the so-called “DNR” and “LNR”



(Илларионов, 2015). Some analysts emphasize that Vladimir Putin did not sign any document after the negotiations (UA.112, 2015). We believe that such approach is too formalized. If in the future the Kremlin appears to be in the situation to reckon with the Minsk agreements, such a situation might be completely ignored. On the other hand, the signing of *The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances* (1994) and the *Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation* (1997) by Russian President Boris Yeltsin, by which Russia recognized the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine (Zakon1, 1994; Zakon1, 1997), did not prevent Putin from taking over the Crimea in March 2014.

Fifthly, among the issues raised in the context of preparations for the meeting in Minsk, the case relating the annexation of the Crimea was completely ignored (BBC, 2015; Ipress, 2015a).

While analyzing the *Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* and the *Declaration by the President of the Russian Federation, the President of Ukraine, the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany in support of the Package of Measures for the Implementation of the Minsk Agreements* adopted on February 12, 2015, I would like to focus on strengths and weaknesses of these documents considering Ukrainian national interest.

Strengths of the documents:

1. Despite certain innovations, the documents signed on February 12, 2015 are not new, they specify, amend and enhance the Minsk agreements of September 2014.
2. The leaders of the Normandy Quartet reaffirmed “a full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine” in the Declaration.
3. Elections on the separatist-controlled territories are to be held according to the Ukrainian legislation and under the supervision of the OSCE.
4. *The Package of Measures* “restores a full control of the Ukrainian state border by the government throughout the conflict zone” (President, 2015; TSN, 2015b). In this sense, we could clearly trace the positive changes compared with the *Protocol based on consultations of the Trilateral Contact Group on joint steps towards implementation of the peace plan of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and initiatives of Russian President Vladimir Putin* (hereinafter referred to as *Protocol*). It should be noted that the document signed in September ensured “permanent monitoring on the Ukrainian-Russian state border and verification by the OSCE in creating a security zone in the border areas of Ukraine and Russia” (OSCE, 2014a).

5. *The Declaration* refers to the creation of the control mechanism based on the Normandy format, meeting on a regular basis and monitoring the implementation of the agreements.
6. Many provisions of the Minsk agreements signed in February, duplicate those provisions of the September document. In particular, *the Package of Measures* referred to the cease-fire, withdrawal of the military weapons by both parties, provision of monitoring and verification of the ceasefire by the OSCE, release of all hostages and other illegally detained persons and so on. I would like to emphasize that the documents, signed in Minsk, did not mention such terms as “*autonomy*”, “*Federation*” or “*federalization*”. Moreover, “DNR” or “LNR” were not mentioned either. Instead of it, the term “*certain areas of Donetsk and Lugansk regions*” was used to define the separatists-controlled areas. In the same way, the position of O. Zaharchenko and I. Plotnytskoho, who signed *the Package of Measures*, was not defined either.

Article 10 of *the Package of Measures* is worth special attention. It foresees a “withdrawal of all foreign armed forces, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine” (President, 2015; TSN, 2015b). In such way, this document like the *Memorandum on the Implementation of Commitments of the Protocol* (hereinafter referred to as *Memorandum*) (OSCE, 2014b) actually recognized the presence of the Russian armed forces on the separatist-controlled territory. There might be mercenaries from any country. However, in the absence of air service between so-called “DNR” or “LNR” and the outside world, armed groups are sure to operate from the country which has a common border with them.

Shortcomings of the documents:

1. In my opinion, the key weakness is the fact that Ukraine was forced to agree to multilateral talks regarding its internal affairs. Accordingly, for the participants of the Normandy format, the Minsk agreement is a means of influence on the situation in Ukraine. In this context, it is not clear how the key provisions of the Declaration, in which the leaders of Germany, France and Russia “confirm a full respect for the sovereignty” of Ukraine, are fulfilled.
2. According to *the Package of Measures*, the constitutional reform must be carried out in Ukraine, with a new constitution entering into force by the end of 2015 providing for decentralization as a key element, as well as adopting permanent legislation on the special status of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. It should be noted, that in the latter statement the emphasis is put on “permanent” referring to the law, not “temporary”, as stated in the Protocol. The corresponding provision might be used to create a kind of “a state within the state” in the east of Ukraine. The worst thing about it is

that the Kremlin will closely monitor the occurring in this region and, in the course of events that contradict the Russia's strategic interests, Russia will have all the grounds to interfere in the internal affairs of Ukraine. Under such circumstances, the signature of the Russian representative is not favourable, because even with the overcoming of separatism in the Donbas, Russia will have a powerful reason for further influence in the region.

3. The integral part of *the Package of Measures* are the provisions of the Law of Ukraine *On Special Order of Local Government in Certain Districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Regions*. The provisions of this document guarantee a high degree of autonomy for "*Certain Districts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions*". It means that in some areas the so-called "DNR" and "LNR" actually have more rights than some of the federal parts of Russia. An interesting example of it might be an item on "participation of local authorities in the appointment of heads of prosecutors and courts in some districts of Donetsk and Lugansk regions". On the other hand, an item on "*Development of national police units by local councils*" in practice fully eliminates the provision on the withdrawal of foreign military forces, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine.
4. Establishing the control over the state border by the Ukrainian government depends on the implementation of a number of conditions which must be observed by Kiev, some of which may be affected by the other party. Moreover, establishing such control is postponed in time. I have no doubt that by the end of that period, the Kremlin, actually enjoying a complete control in the so-called "DNR" and "LNR", may change, if it wishes so, the landscape of the territory, not to mention creating the conditions that will prevent the Ukrainian government from entirely taking the territory under its control and fully reintegrating into a single state.
5. The provision on pardon and amnesty does not mention the exclusion for people having committed serious crimes.
6. The extraction of heavy weapons of the armed forces of Ukraine should be completed from the actual conflict line, not the line of demarcation, as stated in the *Memorandum* (article 2) on September 19.
7. Declaration states that the leaders of the "Normandy Quartet" shall support the tripartite talks between the EU, Ukraine and Russia on negotiating issues that generates concern for Russia in terms of implementing the Agreement on deep and comprehensive free trade zone between Ukraine and the EU. That is, in this case we are dealing with an unprecedented situation when Germany and France, on behalf of Brussels, agreed to participate in the discussion

of the third-party agreement between the EU and the countries applying for associative membership. On the other hand, it is strange that this provision was included into this document. If such approaches are applied, why not consider the issues concerning Crimea, which also could have been discussed at the meeting of the “Normandy Quartet”?

8. The documents have completely ignored the so-called “humanitarian convoys” which are directly related to the separatist-controlled territories. The documents neither refers to the termination of such flagrant violations of international law, nor even mentions the possibility of monitoring passing the state borders by Russian humanitarian convoys.
9. The documents do not specify terms of withdrawal of foreign military forces, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine.
10. The documents do not specify the mechanisms of influence on the parties in case of non-completion of the undertaken obligations (President, 2015; TSN, 2015b).

The Minsk agreements, signed on February, created a better legal basis for the de-escalation of the conflict. Once again the parties managed to agree on a ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons, exchange of war prisoners and illegally detained hostages, establishing control over the state border by the Ukrainian government and other important issues. It gives hope for tension to be reduced in the Donbas. Yet, it should be emphasized that the significant number of problematic issues remained unresolved or were postponed. Moreover, the Minsk documents have incorporated provisions which can be interpreted of each side’s favor. Similarly, certain articles of the documents actually give the third parties extensive opportunities to influence the political situation in Ukraine.

While evaluating the negotiations in Minsk, we can speak about certain tactical achievements though they are temporary. Signing the Minsk agreements is not a solution, it is a way to reduce the escalation. However, from a strategic point of view, Ukraine has not achieved much success. And now it is almost impossible to predict the ramification of the situation, as it is difficult to understand which factors will be decisive in decision-making of each of the interested parties. Without a doubt, decisive decisions will be the ones taken in the Kremlin. Provisions of the documents, signed on February 12, leave a lot of field for maneuver and radically opposite interpretations.

The second important issue is the fulfilling of all the undertaken obligations by all the parties. The period after the negotiations in Minsk clearly demonstrates that the Kremlin and the separatists, while urging Ukraine to follow the Minsk

agreements, continue to ignore them themselves. By the end of April, separatists had never completed the agreements of *Package of Measures* (Ukrainian, 2015).

The Kremlin has the real leverage to influence the situation in Donbas, which allows it to act from the position of strength in the negotiations on the “Ukrainian question”. The sanctions imposed on Russia proved insufficient to force Putin to turn to de-escalation policy in the resolving of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. In such circumstances, in the Minsk negotiations, Ukraine, Germany and France were obliged to make significant concessions, including the matters of state sovereignty. The documents, approved and signed in February 2015, provide Ukraine some tactical benefits. At the same time, they contain provisions, which in the case of implying certain “creativity”, have the necessary potential to deprive the Ukrainians of chances to restore the state’s territorial integrity and carry out independent foreign policy.

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