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## Capacities and limitations of the Normandy format

*Every new meeting of the Normandy four causes debates on the efficiency and impartiality of this format, given that previously Germany and France were considered to be the most loyal towards Russia among the EU and NATO member states. To satisfy Moscow, in 2008 Berlin and Paris blocked the granting of NATO Membership Action Plan to Ukraine and Georgia. Now Germany and France are the key mediators in Russia-Ukraine conflict.*

The latest Berlin Foreign Ministers Meeting of 13 April 2015 became another cause to question the capability of the Normandy format to protect the peace and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The text of the Agreed Statement of the Chair as well as comments of the participants to the Berlin meeting make it clear that the negotiations corresponded much more with the Moscow's vision than with the Kyiv's one.

A few days before the Berlin meeting Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko said that the issue of international peacekeepers for Donbas would be the main topic, while the Russian side insisted on the "political process" and "restoration of socio-economic ties" between Kyiv and Donbas. It should be understood, that speaking about the "political process" Russia means the decentralization of Ukraine through the Constitutional reform and the legalization of the separatist self-proclaimed "republics". Under the "restoration of socio-economic ties" Moscow implies the renewal of Kyiv's budgeting for the separatist-controlled areas of Donbas, including pensions and other social payments. Actually, it is about forcing Kyiv to finance the separatist territories with maintenance of de-facto Moscow's control over them.

The abovementioned Russia's requirements were reflected in the Berlin Agreed Statement of the Chair, which called on to "launch as soon as possible" the four working groups on security; political process; humanitarian issues; and economic affairs and rehabilitation. At the same time, Kyiv's proposal on peacekeepers was not even mentioned in the text of the statement. No wonder that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov

was pleased with the results of the meeting and called it "useful", while his Ukrainian counterpart Pavlo Klimkin described the Berlin talks as "difficult" ones.

The Agreed Statement also called on "all sides" to fully implement the ceasefire and to conclude the withdrawal of heavy weapons in full cooperation on the verification process with the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM). The words "all sides" could mislead the world public, causing the illusion of equal responsibility of the separatists and Ukrainian forces for the ceasefire violations and unwillingness to fully cooperate with the OSCE mission. While in fact, it is clear from the OSCE SMM reports that the majority of the violations were made by pro-Russian separatists, who even opened fire towards the SMM patrol on the outskirts of Shyrokyne, near Mariupol, on 7 April 2015.

Due to unwillingness of the separatists to fully cooperate, the OSCE mission is unable to properly inspect the withdrawal of heavy weapons. Under such conditions the provision of the Berlin statement, which calls for the withdrawal of mortars and heavy weapons below 100mm and all types of tanks, is obviously impracticable. Moreover, it might be used to impose the additional de-facto unilateral obligations on Ukrainian side, given the absence of conditions for proper verifications of their implementation in the areas controlled by the Russia-backed separatists.

So, Kyiv has enough reasons to be disappointed with the latest Normandy Foreign Ministers Meeting. At the same time, such outcome was quite predictable not

least because of the insufficiently rational policy of the Ukrainian side, which expended too many efforts on little promising initiatives and underestimated the importance of formalities for Berlin and Paris, thus giving Moscow the chance to accuse Kyiv in improper performance of its obligations.

In particular, it is hardly worth concentrating efforts on promoting the idea of international peacekeeping mission for Donbas, given the Western partners' lack of political will to send the EU mission without a UN mandate; and it is hopeless to count on positive decision of the UN Security Council due to the Russia's position. Under such circumstances, it makes more sense to consider focusing on the improvement of the OSCE mission, including the extending of its mandate, increasing technical capacities as well as number and qualification of the personnel. Despite all the shortcomings, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission is currently the only possible option, and its potential capacity is far from being employed to the utmost.

It should be also kept in mind that Berlin and Paris have neither opportunity nor intention to study all the details of conflict development, but being the political guarantors of the Minsk agreement, they do care for the formalities of its implementation. It may be self-evident for Kyiv that the fulfillment of the political and economic provisions of the Minsk agreement should be preceded by the complete ceasefire. At the same time, such understanding it is not necessarily a matter of course for Berlin and Paris, especially when Moscow exerts all efforts to convince the European partners as if Kyiv sabotaged its Minsk commitments. And judging by the text of the latest Normandy Quartet meeting statement, Moscow has quite a success in imposing its vision.

The primary objective of Berlin and Paris is to avoid a major war with Russia, not to restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine. Therefore, the most that Normandy format can currently propose to Kyiv is the freezing of the conflict with an open option for its settlement in the future. Nevertheless, it does not mean at all that Nor-

mandy format is futile. At a critical juncture in February 2015, it was the only possible tool to stop the massive hostilities. And so far it is the only possible way to continue the dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow under the Western intermediary, since Russia declines the option for the U.S. involving.

Withal, the possible advantages of the return to the Geneva format are greatly exaggerated or even delusive. The participation of the U.S. Secretary of State and of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in Geneva meeting of 17 April 2014 did not prevent the total failure of the implementation of Joint Geneva Statement.

It should be also taken into account that despite the U.S. involvement, the level of the participants under the Geneva format would be actually less convincing for the Kremlin than those of the Normandy format. Judging by the Barak Obama's position on Russia-Ukraine crisis, there is no reason to expect that he would intend to personally participate in the negotiations. Therefore, the Geneva format would most likely be held at the level of Foreign Ministers only, while the Normandy format functions at both Presidential and Ministerial levels. And there is no reason to believe that the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and the EU High Representative Federica Mogherini would be more convincing than German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande.

Let us also remember that a key to the tougher economic sanctions against Russia is in Merkel's hand, not in Obama's. Given the unwillingness of the West to provide Ukraine with military assistance, sanctions are the most powerful instrument the West is ready to use.

So, despite all the shortcomings of the Normandy format, for the time being it is the most high-potential negotiation tool for Kyiv at the international level. To make the most use of it, Ukraine should properly consider its capacities and limitations as well as the primary objectives of the participants.

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