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Strengthening the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine: a way to peacekeeping?

Given the current developments, a general tendency could be revealed for more active use of the potential of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine for maintaining peace and security in Eastern Ukraine with gradual transformation into a kind of peacekeeping mission, albeit not formally recognized one.

There has been active formal support from Moscow to strengthen the potential of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM). A purpose of such support could be to prepare the basis for extensive use of SMM potential as an alternative to possible deployment of the UN or EU led international peacekeeping missions in Eastern Ukraine, which is currently being negotiated by Kyiv.

So, the absolute encouragement by Moscow of the extension of the SMM mandate until 31 March 2016 based on the joint German-Russian initiative on expanding the SMM strength up to a total of 1000 civilian monitors, according to situation on the ground, should be regarded as the first step in that direction. At the same time, the RF in its interpretive statement to the above-mentioned OSCE Permanent Council decision №1162 once again stressed the need for enhancing the SMM with all the necessary technical resources, including satellite images, drones, radar equipment, etc., as it was envisaged in the approved Package of Measures in the framework of the Minsk II Agreements.

A special interest here has been provoked by Russia insisting references to the United Nations Security Council resolution 2202 (2015) of 17 February, namely to the need for creating a security zone in South-Eastern Ukraine after the withdrawal of heavy weapons, all foreign armed formations, military equipment and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine under the OSCE monitoring, including disarmament of all illegal groups.

All these references seem to be intended to emphasize once again that it is only the OSCE being formally recognized by the UN Security Council as a main international player to be involved in handling the crisis in Ukraine. This factor would formally affect the process of taking appropriate decision by the UN Security Council on Ukraine's request for the deployment of peacekeeping operation.

Hence, according to Russia, predominant attention of the SMM should be concentrated exclusively on a special security zone and high priority areas identified at the request of Ukrainian authorities. Therefore, there is no question about monitoring and verifying of all Ukrainian territories temporarily occupied by Russia-backed separatists in eastern part of the country. Instead, the emphasis is given to tracking developments throughout the all government-controlled areas. Special attention is paid to the establishment of interaction between the SMM and purely military component – the Joint Centre for Control and Co-ordination, as possible military staff core for the deployment of future peacekeeping operation, whatever it might be.

In general, there is quite clear logic of Moscow's actions by any means to involve the OSCE in peacekeeping, which have pretty tough old roots. The peak of Russia previous diplomatic activity in this field came in mid-2002, when appropriate suggestions on elaborating guidelines for the OSCE peacekeeping operations were prepared and submitted for considering to the OSCE

participating States in the framework of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation. At that time such proposals appeared to be premature for consensual approval. After more than a decade, current developments gave a good reason to believe that Russia did not give up this idea, but to change the strategy of its implementation utilizing successfully tested hybrid diplomacy approach. Such approach is based on promoting own ideas contrary to existing arrangements, as well as using trade-offs, and gaining more political leverage through blocking of certain OSCE decisions, including on the SMM issues as well.

Thus, Moscow without excessive publicity actually has managed to realize in practice the basic provisions of its own strategy on the OSCE involvement in peacekeeping. Most of the ideas proposed by Russia have been already included or would be included in the SMM mandate so that to convert it gradually into a prototype of the OSCE peacekeeping mission on a Russian mode, first of all as far as pre-deployment conditions, task and composition of peacekeeping missions are concerned.

Given the content of recent official statements delivered by representatives of Russian high-level military and political establishment in the OSCE fora, it is possible to reveal Moscow additional attempts to restore working contacts with NATO under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council, including on peacekeeping issues as well.

Important is also the fact that Russia quite skeptically reacted to Ukraine's appeal on possible deployment of international peacekeeping mission under the auspices of the UN or EU in eastern regions of Ukraine.

On the backdrop of current OSCE involvement in Ukraine, some noteworthy steps made by the OSCE Secretary General could be mentioned, who is active in maintaining closer cooperation with high-level UN officials (the Under Secretary-General for Peace Keeping Operations, the Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs, DPA's Director of the Europe Division, etc.). In addition, the UN High-Level Independent Panel on UN Peace Operations is also going to submit to the UN Secretary-General its report based on results of the visit to the OSCE at the end of February this year. The UN General Assembly at its 2015 General Debate will also consider the recommendations of this Panel to be the starting point for formal discussion on future OSCE role in peacekeeping.

Nevertheless, last year attempts, in particular made by German experts, to highlight this issue in the format of the OSCE Informal Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions while preparing its draft report on

future perspective of the OSCE field operations met considerable resistance at the level of the OSCE Secretariat.

Additionally, the OSCE Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, with active participation and involvement of Russian experts, is also going to prepare a set of relevant recommendations and lessons learned on using the OSCE experience in settling the crisis in Ukraine, including at national levels. The last meeting of the Panel was held in Vienna on 26-27 March 2015. Based on the results of this meeting, as well as a series of personal meetings of Panel's members with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Secretary General and Heads of the OSCE Institutions, the first interim report on the lessons learned for the OSCE on its engagement in Ukraine will be prepared.

The latest developments taking place in the SMM, including organizational improvements, changing of personnel recruitment policy and strengthening technical capability, could serve as a kind of confirmation of the above facts. One of the major tasks currently being carried out by the SMM is the monitoring of heavy weapons withdrawal from the contact line. At the same time, the SMM leaders note the impossibility of performing a full-scale verification measures on progress undertaken by the parties because of restricted access for observers. Such restrictions mainly apply to the territories controlled by Russia-backed separatists. The Chief Monitor declared the plans to establish acceptable to all parties the verification mode based on existing international experience. The verification process could be independent from the levels of parties' involvement and sporadically selective one. Along with monitoring and verification activities, the SMM begins to be actively involved in initiating of an interim truce in certain territories in order to deliver humanitarian aid.

Ukraine has demonstrated a significant level of its openness not to block the inclusion of Russian monitors to the SMM. The Russian side, in its turn, has launched a broad information campaign aimed at supporting Russian efforts to strengthening technical capacity of the SMM. Moscow is going to engage actively in supply of armored vehicles and unarmed/unmanned aerial vehicles for SMM's needs, the first unsuccessful attempt of which took place last year. Other OSCE participating States, such as Germany, France, Great Britain, are also among active players ready for submitting their bids.

Given the formal statements and practical steps undertaken by Moscow, positions of other leading OSCE participating States, including the U.S. and Germany, as well as current activities of the OSCE Secretariat and updated

tasks of the SMM, a general tendency could be revealed for more active use of its potential preferably oriented at maintaining peace and security in Eastern Ukraine while gradually transforming into a kind of peacekeeping mission, albeit not formally recognized one.

The main efforts of the Russian Federation in this area seem to be widely supported by Germany, which also holds some hope for peacekeeping capacity development of the SMM particularly and the OSCE in general, especially during its OSCE Chairmanship in 2016.

Ongoing trends on reducing UN attention to European region begin to change in some way, but we could hardly expect the deployment of a large UN field presence in Europe soon, which is currently limited only to Cyprus and Kosovo. The silence on this matter kept by all major players indicates on low probability for adopting appropriate decision by the UN Security Council in its present composition. As possible alternative, only additional measures from the UN and the EU could be expected that will be aimed at fostering cooperation with the SMM

based on already undertaken steps to be formally broadened and endorsed. The main area for applying the SMM potential, including in its reinforced status, is most likely to be a so-called security zone and high priority areas identified at the request of Ukrainian authorities.

Finally, it is possible to draw an interim conclusion that any other type of formally recognized international peacekeeping intervention in Ukraine, at least until the end of the current SMM's mandate (end-March 2016), should hardly be expected. Possible refusal from further extension of the SMM mandate, in case of its inefficiency in meeting current Kyiv requirements, which could contradict to appropriate UN Security Council resolution, is unlikely as well as adoption of any other UN Security Council resolution because of Russia veto. Hence, there is an obvious need to break this vicious circle and to find another way of using increased SMM's potential for maintaining peace and security in Eastern Ukraine according to current situation on the ground and Ukraine's national interests.

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