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## Future German OSCE Chairmanship in handling the Russia-Ukraine conflict: small steps are better than no steps

*This article provides an initial overlook on the upcoming German OSCE Chairmanship's priorities in 2016 in terms of handling the Russia-Ukraine conflict in so-called post-Minsk II environment. Berlin firmly believes that the OSCE is an irreplaceable international institution and the only one practically proved its capabilities in solving above conflict. Nevertheless, it remains unclear, whether Berlin has a kind of strategic emergency planning in case of the Minsk II peace accords failure.*

Next year Germany will chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). This is quite a challenging task on the backdrop of current European security crisis exacerbated by the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict being on the top of the OSCE's agenda and ambiguously called by Berlin as the *crisis in Ukraine*.

This Chairmanship is being considered by Berlin as a kind of dangerous journey in a rough security water testing Germany's ability to steer the "OSCE ship" in a safe harbor. Nevertheless, Germany declares its readiness to pass this test, while expressing a bit of caution about successful outcome, and warning all the "passengers" not to rely much on the captain's expertise being prepared for emergency landing.

Generally, there have been declared three main pillars of future activities of the German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016, namely *dialogue, trust and security*. All of these principles to certain extent will be implemented in order to settle the Russia-Ukraine conflict, as we would prefer to call it for consistency reason.

As for *dialogue*, the emphasis will be given to sharing and applying own German experience to establish dialogue between the West and the East finally resulted

in unification of the country. Such experience could be definitely useful in the case of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, especially in terms of overcoming the third party's influence and creating favorable conditions for common values being broadly shared throughout the country. Not mentioning the strategic level of the West-East communication, there have been many unsuccessful attempts to initiate a comprehensive dialogue on national level in the framework of current conflict resolution. Therefore, it is of particular importance for upcoming OSCE Chair to analyze all previous mistakes and having clear perception on root causes of the existing "*Ukrainian*" conflict, not to deceive itself.

Germany also has clearly stated that there is no military decision for solving the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This solution must be political one, according to Berlin. Hence, finding the political will has been defined as a priority task to pave the way for the Russia-Ukraine conflict's resolution. In doing so, the package of measures adopted in Minsk is considered by Germany as a "road map" being the only available option, albeit not ideal one, to move further. And that is the OSCE to play a crucial role in supporting the implementation of this "road map", while the conflicting parties must shoulder its major burden.

What is particularly interesting, a political solution to the current Russia-Ukraine conflict is recognized by Berlin as a main precondition for the very existence of the future European collective security system, which Germans are eager to revive. Completing this task would be impossible without having contentious dialogue on the substance of shared understanding of common future and principles of coexistence.

The main cause for current loss of *trust*, according to Berlin, is Russia's annexation of Crimea, which violated international law and a fundamental principle of the Europe's peace order – the inviolability of borders. Rebuilding trust will be closely related to further maintaining all essential parts of cooperative security, namely strengthening the arms control regimes and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), keeping regular military contacts, organizing exchange among military and political experts, etc.

Having in mind firm Russia's stance on arms control and CSBM issues, all declared essential elements of rebuilding trust will hardly be effectively utilized. In performing this task, some small steps would be made to approach more closely the RF being still under the sanctions and constant pressure of the West resulted, among other things, in halting bilateral political-military cooperation. Therefore, one could predict that Moscow will try doing all its best to use the OSCE fora in order to break through the above Western blockade in the area of political-military cooperation and divert attention of the participating States from its aggressive actions in Ukraine. That is why it would be worthwhile for Berlin to maintain a constant balance between all above essential elements of cooperative security not letting Moscow to play its game.

Developing economic exchange was another promising initiative in rebuilding trust announced by Berlin as well. Having in mind the prevailing economic component in the German foreign policy, this initiative would definitely be extended to the eastern parts of Ukraine in the framework of maintaining sustainable post-conflict environment. And successful implementing of the Minsk II agreement is the only way in pursuing the above task.

Speaking about *security* as the third pillar of its future Chairmanship, Berlin firmly believes that the OSCE is an irreplaceable international institution and the only one practically proved its capabilities to provide assistance in solving European security crisis and soften current confrontation.

The OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) is considered as a key OSCE instrument to be further

engaged in settling the Russia-Ukraine crisis. The main focus here will be concentrated on resolving technical and organizational issues of the SMM's functioning in order to effectively perform future verification tasks. The SMM is also seen by Berlin as a testing ground for examining different technical preconditions for more difficult missions being deployed in the future. Having in mind current developments and a special status of the SMM, the latter could give a signal of possible preparation for deploying in Eastern Ukraine a new type of field mission oriented primarily on peacekeeping and peace building tasks, if the Minsk agreement fails ones and for all.

Additional efforts would be required from the German OSCE Chairmanship in finding a kind of balance between existing/newly created participating States' consortiums (the Normandy Format, Karasin-Nuland Format, etc.) and the OSCE itself as competing international players actively involved in current conflict resolution. There would be some benefits and disadvantage from such interaction. As for possible benefits, one could consider the better coordination among all players involved, as well as increasing the role of the OSCE in general and Germany in particular, as leading party both in the Normandy Format and the OSCE. Among possible disadvantages could be the diminishing influence of the Normandy Format as a main driving force in current conflict resolution amid the existing OSCE weaknesses shadowing its effectiveness.

As far as a relationship with the U.S. is concerned, the upcoming German OSCE Chairmanship has declared its readiness to provide good services for the Washington bridging the U.S. closer to Europe and Central Asia.

The German OSCE Chairmanship in 2016 is supposed to be conducted in so-called post-Minsk II environment, having in mind the timeframe for implementing the package of agreed measures with deadline expiring at the end of this year. Hence, there are two main options that may feature this environment – one promising and another not so optimistic. Promising option is generally based on the perception that the Minsk II agreement will be more or less successfully implemented in due time, and not so optimistic one would be characterized by failure of the conflicting parties to implement timely undertaken obligation with further possible accusations and escalation ...

Having in mind declared priorities, it remains unclear whether Berlin has a kind of emergency planning in case of having deal with not so optimistic scenario, complementary to using the SMM potential and preparing for deployment of more complicated mission, if any.

In general, small steps could help in reaching tactical objectives. Moreover, they should be made in right direction defined within the strategic framework. This framework seems not being finalized yet and will be con-

stantly adapted following situational developments on the ground depending on the effectiveness of implementation of the Minsk II peace accords.

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*East European Security Research Initiative (EESRI) is an informal discussion, analytical and information-sharing international platform aimed at uniting efforts of the experts and researches from various countries to find effective ways for strengthening security in the Eastern Europe as the most vulnerable region of the contemporary Europe.*

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