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MINSK AGREEMENT ON UKRAINE CRISIS. MISSION IMPOSSIBLE?

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Alexander Lukashenko that hosted the summit in Minsk could barely hide his happiness. He did not take a direct part in the 16-hours long negotiations, but got a precious opportunity to transform his status from the one of “the last European Dictator” into the one of the main European peace-maker with the European leaders paying a visit to him. All this would be impossible in other circumstances, but in this occasion a strategically neutral position of Belarus made Minsk the best venue to discuss a peace plan in order to stop the bloodshed in Ukraine.

Before the summit started, many were skeptical about a possibility to reach an agreement, the document under discussion had been kept secret and the results remained unclear until the end of negotiations. Even now, when the peace declaration is signed, the main question remains open: will it really work?

All the parties had to make important concessions in order to come to an agreement. A political will of both Putin and Poroshenko to put an end to the conflict, that lasts more than a year by now, became evident. It was agreed that the

territorial integrity of Ukraine is to be unconditionally respected. Nevertheless, some of the crucial points of the declaration are rather ambiguous and can be interpreted differently (the level of decentralization, for example). Moreover, the concessions made by the sides of the conflict can result rather unpopular and lead to political risks both in Russia and in Ukraine. Thus, one of the main points is the constitutional reform in Ukraine, to be held by the end of 2015, will grant a major autonomy to “some regions” of DNR and LNR, which include self-rule bodies and larger cooperation with Russia’s regions. The level of this autonomy is unclear and it resembles the previous law on special status signed by Poroshenko after the Minsk summit on September, 5th, 2014. This move was and will be highly unpopular with Poroshenko’s political opponents in the Ukrainian parliament, and can be seen as “neglecting national interests” and could threaten the current parliamentary coalitions.

At the same time the point on withdrawing all the foreign troops and fighters along with the armaments from the Ukrainian territory means the indirect admission of their current presence in Ukraine, which Russia has never ad-



mitted before. This, along with the very fact that Russian president practically assumed a role of the separatists' representative during the negotiations, puts the Russian leader in a very delicate situation. From the one hand he cannot leave the self-proclaimed republics to their destiny since the war in the East of Ukraine has been depicted by Russian media almost as a "sacred war" in the heartland of the "Russian World". Russia's disinvolvement can damage Putin's image as "The Father of The Nation" inside of the country. From the other hand, the European leaders made it clear that in case the agreements achieved are not respected, further sanctions might be imposed on Russia. Russian economy is already facing hard times due to the low oil prices and national currency's devaluation and new sanctions could bring the economy to its knees that will most probably lead to public discontent as it happened after the previous economic crisis (2008-2009).

The other important point of the agreement is that Kiev will restore its bank system in the rebel regions. It means a

complete financial dependence on Kiev, in conformation with the Ukrainian law. Europe is expected to provide help and assistance in this process. At the same time it is hard to imagine that the DNR and LNR, in view of the recent military advances would be willing to step behind at least without Russia's pressure on the rebel leaders.

The *Financial Times* argues that Putin proposed Poroshenko a "Chechen scenario" of the conflict settlement which means a larger autonomy on Kiev's expenses. This variant is unacceptable for Ukraine not only for political but also for financial reasons, which cannot allow itself to "buy" loyalty of the rebel regions.

If all the points of the agreement are respected by all the parties, it might become a sort of a "frozen conflict", more similar to the Transnistria one.

The ceasefire starts officially on February 15th and the respect for this first fundamental condition will put on probation the goodwill of the parties.