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«New Normality» or a New Deal

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In April the cynical political murder in Kiev of the writer Oles Buzina, alongside a strange chain of deaths of former functionaries and members of the Party of Regions throughout Ukraine, increasingly question prospects of the Minsk-2 accord. The fragile foundation of this peacekeeping construction is gradually eroded by Kiev's reluctance to implement its commitments stipulated in the political section of the Agreement signed in Belarus on February 12, by the declaration of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada on "Resistance to Russian Armed Aggression," by Rada's appeal to the National Security and Defence Council (NSDC) to impose sanctions on the Russian leadership, by the recurring violations of the ceasefire agreement in the Ukraine's south-eastern provinces by its "volunteer battalions," by the elaboration of a new anti-Russian Strategy of Ukraine's National Security Council—the brainchild of Oleksandr Turchynov, Secretary of NSDC, by the deployment of hundreds of foreign military experts and instructors in Ukraine's western regions.

The Ukrainian crisis has virtually disappeared from the editorials of international media. It may seem that the civil war in Ukraine has come to an end and the armed conflict has been localised. This, however, is a delusion. A new wave of hostilities is likely; further provocations are lying ahead. A significant segment of the Ukrainian political class belongs to the "War Party." They started that war, many of them were involved in combat operations, and that war provided grounds of their legitimacy. They seek and establish links with their peers in a various Western countries. The presidential election campaign gaining momentum

in the US will be permeated with anti-Russian rhetoric. Speaking at one of the recent debates in Moscow, Herr Helmut Scholz, MEP from German "Die Linke," made a startling observation that some of his colleagues in the European Parliament "were eager to man the trenches in the outskirts of Moscow".

Western discourse on Minsk-2 is often boiled down to an assertion that "the sanctions against Moscow will be lifted as soon as the [Minsk-2] agreement is fully implemented." This claim is absurd for the reason that apart from Russia there are other parties of the Agreement – the members of the Contact Group including the OSCE, Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk (the last three are its principal actors). Thus, Russia is held hostage for any breach the Agreement. Such an approach plays into the hands of hawks in the new Ukrainian establishment effectively absolving them of any responsibility for the disruption of the Minsk-2 accord.

The ongoing public and political discourse is infused with ideas conducive to new stereotypes and concepts that gradually are perceived by most people as natural facts, e.g., "a new cold war" or "a new normality." The latter premise as well as the understanding that there will never be a comeback to the "business as usual" in the relations between Russia and the countries that have subjected it to sanctions presupposes that the present level of confrontation should not be regarded as an aberration but as a new norm. Once it is accepted as a norm, it should be logically taken for granted and remain unchanged for a long period of time. There is also a notion of "a hybrid peace" invented, as a synonym of the Minsk-2 accord—with an apparent intent to alter the meaning of the "hybrid warfare" concept that was, allegedly, invented by Russia as a stratagem to justify its "seizure" of the Crimea and destabilisation of the situation in Ukraine's southeastern provinces. Its semantics, however, is flawed since the notion of peace in this wording is presented as imperfect and undesirable in the long term.

Nevertheless, it seems that European Union is tired of with the Ukrainian crisis and its confrontation with Russia. The EU attitude towards Kiev is becoming more pragmatic and rational. This particularly is noticeable in Germany and France whose leaders have invested huge political capital into peace-making efforts. The visit to Moscow by Italy's Prime Minister Matteo Renzi shows that Italy, too, is willing to mediate in the peacekeeping process. The precept of a "new normality" is not shared either by the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades or by the Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras. Both of them made it clear during their official visits to Russia. In responding to Moscow's concerns, the office of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, has held several rounds of talks with Russian and Ukrainian experts on the issues of adaptation of the economic part of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement, which implementation was postponed until 2016.

The growth of scepticism in the EU countries about the objectivity of the new sanctions' modality in their relations with Russia stems from the EU intrinsic internal and external problems. Most people realise that an attempt by the EU countries to help the 7-million-strong Greece avoid the default through a financial assistance amounting to € 240 bln cannot be repeated for a 45-million-strong Ukraine. There is just no money for that. It is not a coincident that the European Commission has initiated the overview of the "neighbourhood policy", primarily the Eastern Partnership.

The risks endangering regional and global stability and security are also increasing in other areas. There is growing anxiety about the European periphery. The situation in Libya is chaotic. Violent removal of the Libyan government brought about the crisis, which Moammar Khadafy warned about: relatively effective barrier on the way of illegal l immigrants to the EU countries is no longer there. The Mediterranean migrant death toll is appalling. In April alone, a boat packed with hundreds of migrants capsized off the Libyan coast taking the lives of 800 people. If the rate of casualties remains the same, the overall death toll may amount to 30 ths people by the end of this year. Still a great number of illegal migrants still succeed in their desperate attempt to reach the EU countries. In 2014, the number of immigrants who made it into the EU across the Mediterranean amounted to nearly 200 ths people.

"The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant" (ISIL) is effectively keeping the bulk of the earlier seized territories in spite of the global coalition set up by the US (bypassing the UN) which has been trying for months to degrade and defeat ISIL. A free-for-all warfare is further exacerbated by the Islamic extremists' feuds. In such conditions, recently Moscow hosted the second round of talks between the Damask government and representatives of some of the opposition forces.

A new civil war with the external participation erupted in Yemen—in the Arabian Peninsula. Ten Sunni-led Arab states—this time led by Saudi Arabia—have joined in a new coalition (again bypassing the UN) to combat Shia Houthis militia. It is easy to predict the "success" of these efforts. All such developments have a major impact on the Europeans—not only due to an increasing influx of refugees. Thousands of European passport holder extremists take part in those armed conflicts and then come back home. The only positive development in the region is a fragile success of negotiations in Lausanne between the foreign ministers of P5+1, the European Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran. It is a vivid example of how Russia could not be ignored, as much as it could not be ignored in reaching a settlement in Syria, Iraq, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Against the backdrop of "great destabilisation," i.e. the increasing role of systemic risks both in Europe and in its neighbourhood, the issue of the European security acquires new significance. 2015 offers opportunity for revisiting this issue in view of the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. How could our countries in the cold war climate manage to attain a

détente, and why that project succeeded? Certain resemblance between 1975 and 2015 is apparent.

In the early 1970's, the very context of international relations pushed for a New Deal. By the way, that strategic idea of Soviet diplomacy dated back to the 1950's, while its actual implementation was heavily influenced by contemporary developments, namely, the similar "great destabilisation" including the war in Vietnam, which was eroding social stability in Europe, a new armed conflict between Israel and the Arab countries (the Yom Kippur War), the world's first energy crisis, widespread aggravation of the internal European socio-economic problems influencing political configurations of national politics. One can easily draw many parallels with our present-day world.

At that point in time, the success of the Helsinki accord depended on finding a solution to the German question. The Moscow agreement of 1970 paved the way for Germany ultimately to assume a significant role both in overcoming stagnation impeding the EU development and in establishing a more viable system of the all-European security. At that time West-European countries sought to provide favourable external conditions for their internal modernisation. Today the rise of external risks, too, inhibits the EU acute requirement to focus on its internal reforms. In Helsinki, all the leading European countries came to realise the importance of common principles underpinning their relations, which brought about a new Pan-European negotiations venue – CSCE. Today various attempts are undertaken to revitalise the formats designed to coordinate the positions of major states on vital issues, such as the German-French-Russian "big three" summits in 2003-2004, or the most recent Normandy summits.

Deliberations about the importance of coordination mechanisms of major countries in the 21st century brings back not only the recollections of the events of 1975, but also of the earlier periods preceding them. In many aspects, the Helsinki accord came as successor to the principles enshrined in the documents adopted at the conferences in Yalta and Potsdam in 1945.

What lessons can we learn from those epochal summits?

Firstly, the importance of taking advantage of historical moment for resolving a major problem. Had the Yalta Conference been held somewhat earlier or somewhat later, its effect, for many reasons, could have been different and less significant. The success of that conference was to a significant extent predetermined by the situation at the frontlines that had taken shape by February 1945, as well as the three leaders' shared desire to come to Yalta and spend a week there with one another. President Roosevelt's health was getting worse, and several weeks later, he would not have been able to travel. On 12 April, he pass away.

In 2014-2015, the crisis in Ukraine vividly revealed that settlement of the Pan-European security problem could not be shelved any longer.

Secondly, the significance of Yalta and Potsdam underpins the fact that a long-term resolution of complex international problems requires fundamental institutions, mechanisms and structures developed and adopted by the principal actors, which take into account as much as possible interests of smaller actors. It is impossible to imagine the inception of such a universal and versatile entity as the United Nations Organisation in the circumstances other than those of the unique period of 1944-1945. It was on the base of the UN that contemporary international law could be formulated to serve as the solid foundation for relations among the countries in the second half of the 20th and in the 21st century.

We ought to remember this in 2015 better than ever, and put an end to all sanctions imposed in violations of the UN Charter and prohibit the creation of military coalitions bypassing the SC UNO. The ongoing crisis in Ukraine has amply demonstrated the value of the OSCE, which is an organisation that Europe inherited from the 20th century. Today it is acquiring a new importance.

Thirdly, Yalta stands tall as an unparalleled example of the decisions made to not only solve immediate problems but for further decades. In fact, it can be asserted that the concept of a polycentric world was conceived in the Livadia Palace, although for a long time it was in the shadow of a contest between two superpowers. The activities of the UN Security Council, including the power of veto, and its architecture were shaped so adeptly that the United Nations Organisation was much more successful than its predecessor—the League of Nations. Not only has it survived the era of bipolarity, but its structures provided favourable conditions for the next step – the ascendency of polycentricism. The template of the latter was imbedded in the composition of the UN Security Council by including not only European countries but also the leading states from other parts of the globe – the USA and China. In spite of the fact that the Celestial Kingdom at that time was a faint resemblance of today's China, the "big three" were wise enough to accept Beijing as a member of the Club (as well as Paris).

In 2015, this experience is extremely valuable. There is the obvious need to further develop the principles of polycentrism in international relations according to the letter and the spirit of the UN Charter. History teaches us that polycentrism may be depicted as not linear process with zigzags and backsliding. Still the overall vector of those pulsations is directed upwards and history will eventually determine its optimal format. Evgeny Primakov in his new book "Russia. Hopes and Concerns" (Tsentrpolygraph-2015) refers to the current polycentric phase as a "hierarchical multipolarity."

Fourthly, the main lesson learned from Yalta and Potsdam may lie in necessity to take into consideration security interests of the parties'. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the Western countries slipped into revanchism and reneged on their promises to guarantee security of Russia's western borders. The "belt of good neighbourhood" eroded with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. NATO then expanded eastwards approaching Russia's borders. The last "red line" designating Russia's western security sphere runs through Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova, and Transcaucasia. In 2008, Georgia, tacitly supported by the US, decided to cross it. The outcome is well known. Today, Ukraine has become an arena of geopolitical confrontation. Crossing the red line in Ukraine will be tantamount to dismantling the last buffer separating Russia and the NATO alliance where Russia does not belong and which it has no intention to join.

Which main principles could the New Deal rely upon (a sort of Yalta-3 after Yalta/Potsdam and Helsinki)? Also, let's not forget the legacy of Peace of Westphalia of 1648 and the Vienna Congress of 1814-15. The principle of state sovereignty, equality and non-interference in internal affairs. The principle of coordination of interests of major powers. The principle of comprehensive approach to international relations in the sphere of international security. The principle of indivisibility of security. The principle of polycentricism in international relations, which prevents global and even regional domination by one state or a group of states.

The reason for bringing these ideas forward was eloquently articulated by the late academician Nikolai Shmelev: "Evil has always been inherent in this world, and evil will always remain in this world, with its ratio remaining more or less the same irrespective of the historical period. People have always lived with evil, and they will have to keep living with it. The big question is whether society will continue to keep evil more or less under control."

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