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Munich: Imposing Their Own Will on Eastern Europe

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The Munich security conference is a unique podium to address the problems of world politics. Once a year politicians, heads of international organizations, diplomats and security experts get together. No binding decisions are taken, the Munich conference of our days is very much different from what it was as far back in history as 1938, when the West gave Hitler a carte blanche to annex Czechoslovakia.

The Western media does its best to get around analogies and comparisons. The address is also different now – the hotel the Hotel Bayerischer Hof (Bavarian courtyard) in Munich. Sometimes it pops up that Führerbau, the Hitler's residence built by fascists, is located on Königsplatz (King's Square), less than a kilometer away. That's where the leaders of Great Britain, France, Germany and Italy signed a treaty called the Munich pact or Munich Agreement. It is called the Munich collusion in Russia and the Munich Dictate in Czechoslovakia. The ceremony took place in what today is Hochschule für Musik und Theater, München (the University of Music and Performing Arts, Munich). The difference is symbolic; but what about the gap dividing the historic event and our days, is it really that wide?

This time it was an anniversary: the 50th conference took place on January 31 - February 2. Initially the annual forum was quite different from what it is today starting as a closed meeting to discuss military issues getting together Western politicians and industrialists - a narrow circle of participants. In the 1990s it started to gradually convert into a podium for open discussions.

After 1999 the hosts started to invite guests from Central and Eastern Europe, India and China. Hordes of journalists come to Munich for the occasion.

There is an important traditional feature of the Munich conference – the issues that fill the agenda are always hot ones. The program had been outlined in general terms a month before, but the issue which finally dominated the agenda was missing - **Global strength and Regional Stability: Focus on Central and Eastern Europe**. The events in Ukraine grabbed attention. It met the US interests because the issue of NSA surveillance over Europeans was moved away from public limelight. Let's give the devil his due: the hosts did not take away the issue from the list. It was impossible anyway in view of vigorous public outcry in Germany sparked by Edward Snowden's revelations. After all the influential German Spiegel was among the media outlets which brought the disclosures to light.

The first day was devoted to the restoration of confidence, freedom and cyberspace security, as well as huge data stockpiles and the future of intelligence. Those who were naïve enough to expect US State Secretary John Kerry espouse plans for a new No-Spy agreement or present apologies for what the US did were frustrated. Americans let know in no uncertain terms that nothing like that was going to take place. New NSA chief Vice-Admiral Michael Rogers said in his speech upon confirmation that the heads of states and governments will not be subject to surveillance until there are compelling reasons to do so related to national security.¹ To put it in simpler terms **spying on Europeans will continue as before**. Addressing a press-conference together with German Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, John Kerry said Berlin and Washington will have to join together to tackle the problem. ² A classic case of blame shifting. So what? German foreign chief said the debates on spying should not undermine the transatlantic friendship. Chancellor Angela Merkel does not even consider anything like making a pause in the bilateral relations; she has received the Obama's invitation to visit Washington soon. Nothing like a serious discussion of the delicate issue, something promised by Wolfgang Friedrich Ischinger, the chairman and organizer of the 50th Munich security conference, took place. Did Ischinger believe what he said? He is an experience diplomat. He was Germany's ambassador to the United Kingdom from 2006 to May, 2008, before that - from 2001 to 2006 - he was the German ambassador to the United States. No doubt he knows all the ins and outs of bilateral relationship. Kerry glided over some recent hitches in the US-German ties but never even mentioned the NSA. Then the situation in Ukraine went to the fore.

The event organizers invited Ukrainian Foreign Minister Leonid Kozhara and maidan leaders Vitaly Klitschko and Arseniy Yatsenyuk, as well as oligarch Petro Poroshenko, who seems to be one of Washington's favorites. Their meeting with Kerry had been announced in advance. Nationalist Oleh Tyahnybok was not invited, otherwise he would like to walk the streets of Munich and visit Führerbau and the well-known Hofbräuhaus public brewery as well as other places of sightseeing in the city known to be the fascism cradle. Don't think he is kept out of Germany, he knows his way around there, Tyahnybok has been invited by the cells of German right wing radicals and ruling conservatives associated with the Konrad Adenauer foundation. Germans know how to work with foreign right wing nationalists. They do it for bright future, of course. For instance, in the seventies the BND (the Bundesnachrichtendienst – German overseas intelligence service) effectively cooperated with the Croatian National Committee – the organization proud to take its root in the Ustasa movement. Americans are not very choosy too.

John Kerry unambiguously called on Ukrainian opposition leaders to join together in their fight against the government. In Munich many switched to the view that the “chocolate boy” Petro Poroshenko has been selected by the United States to lead Ukraine in future. The cooperation with Ukrainian opposition, started by John Kerry, will be continued by his experienced deputy Victoria Nuland. She is dry behind the ears in the matters related to the post-Soviet space. Nuland is to come to Kiev on February 6 after visiting Greece, Cyprus and the Czech Republic. This time the Deputy Secretary is not expected to give cookies away on maidan, she is in for tackling burning issues. Perhaps Tyahnybok will not refuse to meet her, even though the guest is not Aryan.

Once more an attempt to take control of Eastern Europe is undertaken in Munich. It does not look like Europeans are interested in another Drang nach Osten as much as their American partners are. Not all are happy about the fact that everything in the Western world, unlike in the pre-war Munich, is decided by one center of power instead of finding an agreement between different groups of interests. It's well known what the 1938 Munich adventure resulted in, but history cannot be repeated, that's what the Munich event confirmed. Some politicians start to routinely talk about interference into other states affairs, including the use of force, and it makes one wonder. This kind of attitude is becoming unacceptable...

Endnotes:

1 US-Außenminister weicht Frage nach No-Spy-Abkommen aus/ Reuters, 31. Januar 2014.