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Mission Possible: Russian Diplomacy after Crimea

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The pressure the West is putting on Russia, not wanting to acknowledge the results of the Crimean referendum, continues, but at the same time they are realizing that what has happened is irrevocable. The entire picture of modern international relations is beginning to change. Just the fact that the vote which took place at the meeting of the UN General Assembly on March 27 on resolution No. 262, «Territorial Integrity of Ukraine», divided the international community almost equally says a lot.

100 out of 193 states voted for the resolution declaring the referendum in Crimea invalid. 11 voted against it. 58 countries abstained, while 24 did not participate in the vote at all. Thus, 93 countries did not support the resolution.

The makeup of the countries which abstained from the vote on the anti-Russian resolution also speaks of serious changes in world politics. Israel, for example, abstained. Even such loyal allies of the U.S. as Iraq, Afghanistan and the United Arab Emirates did not vote for resolution No. 262. China, India, Brazil, South Africa and Egypt abstained.

«China,» noted Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov, «states that it categorically rejects any attempts to solve this problem by non-political methods and the use of sanction pressure. Our contacts with Chinese partners show that they not only understand the legal interests of the Russian Federation in its entire history, but that they have a clear understanding of the initial

courses of the current deep crisis in Ukraine».

The international «isolation» of Russia in such conditions is out of the question. Furthermore, the «Crimean Rubicon» has outlined the beginnings of a new configuration in world politics. On the one hand, the «indissoluble» Americanocentric bloc is dissolving. On the other hand, the situation in the former Soviet Union is changing as well. For example, Azerbaijan voted for resolution No. 262, but Armenia voted against it. As Russian analysts have noted, «This will probably mean the end of the Eastern Partnership, as two members of one organization cannot take opposite positions».

In the European Union, political forces which unambiguously support Russia's actions with regard to Crimea are becoming more active. Among them is the Front National (France), headed by Marine Le Pen, who urged Brussels to be consistent: «Either the EU advocates unity and the Constitution of Ukraine, in which case Viktor Yanukovich remains the president and it is necessary to organize new elections; or else there is no more Constitution or Constitutional Court, and the acting government is a revolutionary government, in which case it is difficult to deny Crimea the right to behave the same way as part of Ukraine behaved on the Maidan».

Such large Italian parties as Forza Italia («Forward Italy») and Lega Nord («League of the North») do not share the anti-Russian position either; these parties control a total of around 30% of the seats in Italy's parliament. Representatives of both these parties look part in the Crimean referendum as observers and noted the full conformity of all procedures with the norms of international law. Belgium's Vlaams Belang, Bulgaria's Ataka and Hungary's Jobbik do not conceal their skepticism with regard to the U.S. and EU position on Crimea. German left-wing representatives in the Bundestag have expressed their unambiguous support for the results of the Crimean referendum.

The results of the vote in the UN General Assembly forced the White House to return to the format of bilateral negotiations. On March 30 «very intensive negotiations» took place in Paris between Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S. Lavrov and U.S. Secretary of State J. Kerry. And although Moscow's and Washington's assessments of the reasons for the Ukrainian crisis still do not coincide, the parties «agreed that we need to search for areas of common interest to develop a joint position with regard to the ways for a diplomatic settlement in the interests of the Ukrainian people».

The first step on this path, in Russia's opinion, should be de-escalation of tensions and ensuring the safety of all residents and visitors in Ukraine, which means disarming illegal militarized groups, bringing basic order to the streets, liberating illegally seized buildings, and unblocking streets, squares and all kinds of «Maidans» and «mini-Maidans». De-escalation of tensions also involves abandoning the use of foreign private military companies (PMCs) to put down civil protests. As the Information and Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia notes, «In particular, Greystone Limited, which is currently registered in Barbados and is a part of Academi Corporation, is a candidate for such a gendarme role. It is a similar and probably an affiliated structure of the Blackwater private army, whose staff have been accused of cruel and systematic violations of human rights in different trouble spots many times». The initiative to use the services of foreign PMCs in Ukraine is «evidence of the inability of those who grabbed

power in Kiev to ensure even minimum order in the country and, probably, guarantee their own security».

The second step in resolving the Ukrainian crisis suggested by Russia in order to ensure the rights of national minorities, including with regard to language, involves contacts with the acting government in Kiev, keeping in mind that at the current stage this government is itself incapable of establishing a mutually respectful nationwide dialog.

The third step involves creating a mechanism for considering the interests of all regions of Ukraine without exception, which apparently is impossible without the federalization of the country. The beginning of the federalization process is possible only under conditions of full transparency and the inclusion of representatives of all social strata from all regions of Ukraine in this process. Kiev and Galicia cannot determine the rules according to which all Ukraine is to live.

Kiev's reaction to Russia's suggestion on federalization and the need to give Russian the status of a second state language was sharply negative, although according to a Gallup poll, 83% of Ukrainian citizens prefer to use Russian for communication, and in the eastern and southern regions of the country Russian is the main language of communication for 92% of citizens. Thus, without ensuring the possibility to freely communicate in Russian, including with the state government, Ukrainian statehood itself is unthinkable. As S. Lavrov has noted, «They cannot do without a plan which allows each region to choose its leadership - the executive and legislative authorities (so that Kiev does not appoint its own people everywhere)».

The fourth step is not to allow the escalation of tensions with regard to neighboring countries and territories. In particular, Russia is troubled by Kiev's actions which violate the rights and freedoms of residents of Transnistria, including with regard to freedom of movement. In the near future this question will be examined in a «5+2» format, where Russia and Ukraine will act as guarantors, the OSCE will play the role of a mediator, Chisinau and Tiraspol will be the parties in the conflict, and the U.S. and the EU will act as observers. Russia has clearly defined the goal of this meeting: to preserve the special status of Transnistria in a united, sovereign and neutral Moldova.

The fifth step is not to allow the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Early 2014 marked the 20th anniversary of the moment Ukraine voluntarily renounced the status of a nuclear state after the collapse of the USSR. With regard to this, Verkhovna Rada member M. Golovko of the Freedom Party has stated that in response to Russia's actions in Crimea, Ukraine should reclaim its nuclear status. A bill has been submitted to the Ukrainian parliament by members from the Batkivshchina and UDAR parties on withdrawing Ukraine from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon immediately reacted to this initiative: «The implications are profound, both for regional security and the integrity of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. This should not serve as an excuse to pursue nuclear weapons, which will only increase insecurity and isolation». However, the issue is not closed.

In fact, the escalation of tensions in and around Ukraine is to a great extent connected with NATO's plans to continue its expansion to the East. The bloc's Secretary General Anders Fogh

Rasmussen spoke of these plans in a March 30 interview with the German publication Welt am Sonntag. The entry of Eastern European countries into the alliance, he said, is «an impressive success story of our time, but our task has not yet been fulfilled»; therefore, «each European state which is capable of observing the main principles of the alliance and is willing to make a contribution to maintaining security in the zone of its influence may apply for membership in NATO». At a meeting of the foreign ministers of the 28 NATO countries on April 1, Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated that the alliance will not only provide Ukraine with «recommendations for protecting its critical infrastructure,» but may also «send mobile groups of instructors to the country» in the future, as well as «give practical assistance in increasing the country's defensive capabilities». Among these «capabilities» he named joint training exercises and more active efforts toward the compatibility of forces between NATO and Ukraine.

However, we will repeat it one more time. The reunification of Crimea and Russia marks a Rubicon from which a change in the entire picture of international relations cannot but begin. Of course, some may threaten Moscow, saying that it «will have to pay for everything», but this does not eliminate the fact that U.S. hegemony is becoming a thing of the past, while Russia is becoming established in the top league of world politics as a state which clearly understands its own strategic interests and is capable of confidently protecting them.