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Battle for Ukraine Fought in Normandy

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Formally the June 5-6 event was devoted to commemorations marking the 70th anniversary of the D-day landings. But in practice the issue of Ukraine defined the agenda. France did its best as a host nation. The organization of the ceremony was beyond praise to be accompanied by diplomatic adroitness. The ballet dancers re-enacted the slow advance of US troops across the map of Europe on a stage at Sword Beach, one of the landing points near Ouistreham, a small port where British troops landed and fought their way to Pegasus Bridge, a key route. Ouistreham was the site of the main international ceremony. The GIs moved across France, through Germany, Ukraine, Belorussia and the Baltic States to stop somewhere in the vicinity of

Russia's border. An unusually intriguing interpretation of the historical events!

Barack Obama, the chief guest, evidently liked the show but there was not much else to be happy about. The US media wrote that he had an aggrieved air, probably because his plans to internationally isolate President Putin failed... Obama realized that Russia has a historic relationship with Ukraine. According to him, «Russia has a legitimate interest in what happens in Ukraine, given that it's on its border and given its historical ties» and also noted that «Russian armed forces annexing pieces of a neighbor is illegal and violates international law», he continued, «and the kinds of destabilizing activities that we now see funded and encouraged by Russia are illegal and are not constructive». President Barack Obama and British Prime Minister David Cameron laid down a new deadline for Russia on June 5, giving Moscow a month to meet their conditions in Ukraine or face further sanctions. According to the Globe and Mail, Stephen Harper and Barack Obama voiced objections behind closed doors during a Group of Seven summit to meetings that three European leaders have arranged with Vladimir Putin, private tête-à-têtes that they feel undermine efforts to isolate the Russian President. A source with knowledge of the matter described the gulf that exists between the North American leaders and several European counterparts over whether to shun or engage President Putin over Crimea and the situation in Ukraine. Mr. Harper and Mr. Obama asked what kind of message these meetings would send at a time when the West is trying to isolate Mr. Putin, the source said. The request from Mr. Harper and Mr. Obama for these Group of Seven colleagues was that «if you want to meet with him, this is the message you must drive and you must drive it consistently... here are the expectations and here are the consequences», the source said. They wanted the Russian President to be chastised publicly.

Instead the US President and his Canadian counterpart happened to be kind of isolated themselves, nobody paid special attention to them. The Russian President captured public attention. The idea to isolate Russia that President Obama put forward in his West Point speech some time ago faded like smoke from fireworks launched by saluting guns on Normandy beaches. The majority of world leaders realize the Ukrainian crisis cannot be successfully tackled without Moscow.

Besides, the disagreement of the sanctions issue is becoming more tangible. Chancellor Angela Merkel, President Francois Hollande and Prime Minister of Great Britain David Cameron expressed hope there will be no need to introduce the third package of sanctions. They realize the United States actually does not need Russian energy unlike Europe which to large extent depends on Russian oil and gas supplies. For instance, President Hollande flatly refused to block the Mistral deal. France refuses to link the amphibious assault ships contract to the US/EU debate over tougher sanctions against Russia. The first of the two ships, the Vladivostok, is due to be delivered by November this year and the second, called Sevastopol, will arrive in St Petersburg for further fitting out with Russian weapons systems in November 2015. The French President refused to bow to the partners pressure and that is the feather in his hat against the background of otherwise undistinguished record as the head of state. Could Paris exploit this success in future? It remains to be seen.

Grudgingly the US President finally had to communicate with President Putin. The Russian President also met Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko. The issue of putting an end to

bloodshed in eastern Ukraine swept agenda. Kiev needs to start a dialogue with the restive South-East. That's what everybody agreed about. *The Wall Street Journal* published an article. Its caption read Putin Retakes Normandy adding *So much for the Russian's isolation after conquering Crimea*. Deutsche Welle said, «Obama also realizes Putin will not return Crimea. The sanctions make no difference – no turning back is possible».

There are different interpretations of what was agreed in Normandy. President Putin said Poroshenko has a unique chance to start a dialogue with the south-east. Before the meeting he said, «I think that Mr. Poroshenko, who has no blood on his hands so far, has a unique chance to halt this punitive operation and start a direct dialogue with his citizens in the south and east of his country». According to him, «Russia respects choice of Ukrainian people and will cooperate with the Ukrainian authorities», Vladimir Putin said of Poroshenko's election as President. He has stressed that Russia cannot be a party to the talks as it is not involved in the conflict. Kiev has to talk directly with those who support the idea of federalization in the country's east.

In France Poroshenko said one thing while saying something different to Ukrainian media. Talking to Ukrainian journalists, he never mentioned his commitments stressing only the demands the Ukrainian President allegedly put forward while communicating with the Russian President. He said the talks were difficult including the issue of Crimea. According to him, the presidents came to accord on three points. First, a Russian representative will come to launch the process of peaceful settlement. Second, Ukraine expects the permission by the Russian Federation Council to use force on the territory of Ukraine to be revoked. Third, joint actions are planned to close the border in the areas of combat actions to prevent subversive elements crossing to the other state's territory. A rather arbitrary interpretation evidently not confirmed by Russian President's statements. The Ukrainian President's inauguration speech showed he has no definite plan on handling the crisis.

Besides, the Ukrainian constitution in force does not grant him broad powers. His authority is rather limited. It would not be wise to view Yulia Tymoshenko as a loser leaving politics. She heads the Batkivshchyna Party. The position allows her to hold the reins of power in the country. She controls the parliament and the government. A revengeful person, she would hardly try to make the life of the new President easier. Any step on the way to settle the crisis peacefully would serve for her as a pretext for accusing him of high treason. The conflict in the south-east is added by a new stand-off between the executive and legislative branches of power.

There is a long and bumpy road on the way of finding a settlement to the crisis that followed the coup. The new rulers have failed to launch a dialogue with the people; the country is losing its sovereignty getting to larger extent subject to outside influence. It's enough to have a look at the composition of large US team present at the ceremony of inauguration headed by Vice President Joe Biden. It included many familiar faces among those who have immediate relation to the relations with Ukraine: Victoria Jane Nuland, the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the United States Department of State, US Ambassador to Ukraine Geoffrey Pyatt, Senators John McCain, Ron Johnson, and Chris Murphy. No doubt the bloodshed will continue after their visit to Kiev and we'll know for sure who is behind it.