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Two years of Euromaidan and Strategic Perspective of the Ukrainian Crisis?

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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TWO YEARS OF EUROMAIDAN AND STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE OF THE UKRAINIAN CRISIS

Summary:

Question of the future of Ukraine is globally important and requires answer before it is closed in order to be ready for final result. Ukrainian crisis has an internal and external dimension. First part of the article analyzes the consequences of Euromaidan. Two years is a period of time, which makes possible some preliminary conclusions about the development of Ukraine. It can be said that political and economic system of the country is deteriorating. At the same time disappointment of the people about the course of the state is growing. Therefore theory of expectations and reality discrepancy can be applied to predict the future of the today's political regime in Kiev. The conclusion is that next social explosion (revolution) in Ukraine is highly possible in a short term, because unacceptable gap between expectations of Ukrainians and reality they live in has almost reached critical margin. Still situation in the country is strongly dependent on the position of two big external actors – the West (the United States and the European Union) and Russia. On the one hand, they stabilize the conflict – the West helps the government of Petro Poroshenko to survive politically and economically and manages social protest potential in the state; Russia supports separatists of Donbass, but holds them from further military aggression, accentuating implementation of Minsk deal. On the other hand, Ukraine definitely is a hostage of “great geopolitical game“ between Washington, Brussels and Moscow and is not a subject, but object in it. Strategic perspective of the Ukrainian crisis will depend on Russia's ability to survive economically and make the West believe it is better to retreat in Ukraine, on the American so called “hawks“ perception of this ability and on the damage they and the EU are ready to suffer from the Russian side. Supposed additional value of the article is that it tries to conceptualize (also theoretically) the current national and foreign situation of Ukraine and propose prognostic framework (the main variables) to predict its future.

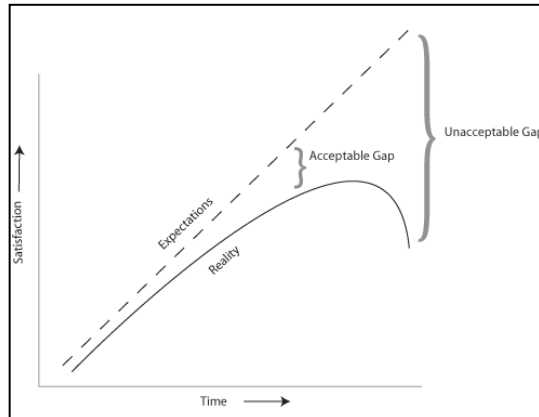
Key words:

Ukraine; Euromaidan; Donbass separatists; Russia; the United States; “hawks“; “ruled chaos theory“; Europe; Minsk deal.

Introduction

Recently Euromaidan celebrated its second anniversary. In this context Ukrainian experts like to repeat alleged phrase of Deng Xiaoping, who, asked about the impact of the French Revolution, answered it is too early to say. But in reality many of them just do not want to recognize a rather clear fact that the consequences of Euromaidan and the so called “revolution of dignity“ for Ukraine are miserably terrible both internally and externally.

Inside the country new wave of social unrest is coming, because very high expectations of the Ukrainians after removal of the former corrupt president of the state Viktor Ianukovich crashed both in political and economic sphere, not to speak about unsuccessful war in Donbass. In other words the gap between exaggerated hopes of the Ukrainian society and cruel reality it faces is reaching unacceptable margin, and this, according to J-Curve theory (see the picture below) of James C. Davies¹, can result in revolution.



At the same time externally Ukraine actually lost its sovereignty, being totally dependent on the financial support and accordingly on the political will of the West, while Russia controls big part of its territory in Donbass, not to speak about Crimea annexation (or reunification – as you like).

In such situation the country in fact feels double pressure – bottom-up (degradation of the political and economic system) and top-down (destiny of the state is decided by global geopolitical players), what makes its future unpredictable (up to the scenario of disintegration).

¹ J.C. Davies, *The J-Curve of Rising and Declining Satisfaction as a Cause of Some Great Revolutions and a Contained Rebellion* [in:] *Violence in America: The History of Violence in America: Historical and Comparative Perspectives*, ed. H.D. Graham, T.R. Gurr, New York 1969, pp. 690-730.

Therefore this article is not going to propose concrete end of the story, only to generalize the political and economic consequences of Euromaidan and provide prognostic framework (the main variables) to predict strategic perspective of the Ukrainian crisis.

Degradation of the political system of Ukraine

Two main expectations of the Ukrainian people on Maidan square could be described as truly democratic government with domination of rule of law – not unrestricted corruption, and economic progress, also in relation to the Association Agreement (free trade zone) with European Union.

The political problems started at once. Several points can be made in this context. First, there is no new elite in today's Ukrainian government, and this is general problem of the revolutions in the post-soviet area (for example, in Kyrgyzstan after two revolutions there are still old generation politics in power).

If you look at the main political leaders of Ukraine, you can easily notice that their unattractive past dominates over their same present. For instance, President Petro Poroshenko is an oligarch, who had close relations with “Party of Regions“ and personally with Viktor Ianukovich. Other fact – RFE/RL revealed that over the course of seven years, Petro Poroshenko quietly appropriated a plot of protected land in Kyiv's elite Pechera district and recently quashed an inquiry into the damage of an 18th-century structure caused by construction work on his plot². He also made a lot of electoral promises and continues to make them, but without implementation (in the Internet you can even find a long list of the things he promised to do, but did not). Finally, he hardly controls situation in the country. Many of these problematic aspects became very clear in the interview of Petro Poroshenko to Deutsche Welle Conflict Zone journalist Tim Sebastian³.

Prime Minister of Ukraine Arsenii Iatseniuk is also representative of the political past of Ukraine, once being brother in arms of Iuliia Timoshenko, who had been in prison for non transparent gas deal with Russia, but now is again an active political actor. Perhaps the best story, which characterizes leader of the Ukrainian Government, was told by the former head of the State Financial Inspection Nikolai Gordienko, who said: “Corruption schemes in Ukraine are headed by the government of Yatsenyuk“⁴.

² *Questions Raised Over Poroshenko's Role In Valuable Kyiv Land Deal*, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 13.05.2015, <<http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-poroshenko-land-deal-questions-tsars-village/27013945.html>> (12.12.2015).

³ *Deutsche Welle „Conflict Zone“ interview with President of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko made by Tim Sebastian*, YouTube.com, 16.11.2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBLt-B0ya8w>> (12.12.2015).

⁴ *Ukraine's Chief Anti-Corruption Official Fired after Uncovering Millions Stolen*, Russia-Insider.com, 26.03.2015, <<http://russia-insider.com/en/2015/03/26/5028>> (26.03.2015).

Finally, the Vice President of the United States Joe Biden, speaking in the Ukrainian parliament said: “I never tell people from other countries what they should do, but you can’t find a single democracy in the world where the cancer of corruption is so thriving. You cannot find any such a country”⁵.

Other feature of the qualitative democracy is well functioning mechanism of elections. First post-Maidan presidential and parliamentary elections took place in specific conditions and can be excused for some shortcomings. But local ones – two years after Maidan – had to prove that new system of governance in Ukraine had become transparent and fair.

ESCO surprisingly declared that they were democratic. At the same time many experts noticed that the amount of violations was extremely high. Only one example – MP of Mazury board (Poland) Janusz Niedźwiecki, commenting local elections in Dnipropetrovsk, informed: “Generally, the election process was spoiled very much and nowadays it is not be trustworthy. We are going to address in European Parliament with plea to consider elections in Dnipropetrovsk invalid and to organize it again”⁶. And such a type of evidence seems to be rather a rule than an exception.

It means that Euromaidan actually destroyed respect to constitutional order in Ukraine. Now instead of rule of law we witness there rule of uncontrolled violence disparaging to democratic procedures.

Economic crisis and crash of the European economic dream

With such a political system there is no surprise that economy of Ukraine is also in a terrible if not catastrophic condition. If we look at Ukrainian 2010-2014 economic outlook, we can easily conclude that every indicator is down, and some of them dramatically⁷.

Table 1. Ukraine Economy Data

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Population (million)	45.6	45.5	45.4	42.9	42.8
GDP per capita (USD)	2,983	3,586	3,813	4,195	3,016
GDP (USD bn)	136	163	173	180	129

⁵ *No country in the world so rife with corruption in Ukraine, says Biden*, Reporter-ua.ru 08.12.2015, <<http://en.reporter-ua.ru/no-country-in-the-world-so-rife-with-corruption-in-ukraine-says-biden.html>> (08.12.2015).

⁶ International observers will appeal to European Parliament with request to declare elections in Dnipropetrovsk invalid, Most-Dnepr.info, 16.11.2015, <http://most-dnepr.info/news/economics_eng/128339.htm> (16.11.2015).

⁷ *Ukraine Economic Outlook*, Focus-Economics.com, 01.12.2015, <<http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/ukraine>> (01.12.2015).

Economic Growth (GDP, annual variation in %)	4.1	5.5	0.2	0.0	-6.8
Consumption (annual variation in %)	7.1	15.7	8.4	6.9	-9.6
Investment (annual variation in %)	3.9	8.5	5.0	-8.4	-23.0
Industrial Production (annual variation in %)	11.2	8.0	-0.5	-4.3	-10.1
Retail Sales (annual variation in %)	10.1	13.7	13.7	5.6	-9.6
Unemployment Rate	8.1	7.9	7.8	7.4	9.3
Fiscal Balance (% of GDP)	-6.0	-1.8	-3.6	-4.3	-4.6
Public Debt (% of GDP)	40.1	36.4	36.7	39.9	70.3
Stock Market (annual variation in %)	23.1	14.2	13.1	17.5	5.4
Inflation Rate (CPI, annual variation in %, eop)	9.1	4.6	-0.2	0.5	24.9
Inflation Rate (CPI, annual variation in %)	9.4	8.0	0.6	-0.3	12.1
Inflation (PPI, annual variation in %)	20.9	19.0	3.7	-0.1	17.1
Policy Interest Rate (%)	7.75	7.75	7.50	6.50	14.00
Stock Market (annual variation in %)	70.2	-45.2	-38.5	-8.6	28.8
Exchange Rate (vs USD)	7.97	8.01	8.05	8.24	15.82
Exchange Rate (vs USD, aop)	7.97	7.99	8.08	8.15	12.02
Current Account (% of GDP)	-2.2	-6.3	-8.2	-9.2	-4.1
Current Account Balance (USD bn)	-3.0	-10.2	-14.3	-16.5	-5.3
Trade Balance (USD billion)	-9.6	-18.0	-21.9	-22.1	-7.7
Exports (USD billion)	47.3	62.4	64.4	59.1	50.6
Imports (USD billion)	56.9	80.4	86.3	81.2	58.2
Exports (annual variation in %)	27.4	31.9	3.3	-8.3	-14.5
Imports (annual variation in %)	33.9	41.3	7.3	-5.8	-28.4
International Reserves (USD)	34.6	31.8	24.6	20.4	7.5
External Debt (% of GDP)	86.0	77.3	78.0	78.9	97.7

Source: *Ukraine Economic Outlook*, Focus-Economics.com, 01.12.2015, <<http://www.focus-economics.com/countries/ukraine>> (01.12.2015).

In other words, GDP is falling (also because of decrease of industrial production, and it is terrible that such industrial giants as “Iuzhmash“ and “Motor Sich“ actually stopped), national currency devaluating and inflation growing, country’s gross public debt is near 100% of GDP. Year 2015 only worsened the situation. Therefore international rating agencies give very low ratings to Ukraine, which today could not survive without external economic help.

Of course it can be said that Ukraine is a war state. But the problem is that the government of the country only makes the problems bigger. For example, cut of industrial ties with Russia (and even cancellation of air flights to it) is populistically understandable, but economically highly irresponsible – many

people in this case lose their income, what inevitably augments social tension. To say more, total Ukraine's dependence on credits from IMF leads to its required "liberal shock therapy" (radical liberalization of economic system), which only deepens the problem of social impoverishment, because inefficient Soviet-Type Ukrainian economy is not ready for drastic changes.

Particular attention should be given to the question of the Ukraine-EU Association Agreement (already not to speak about visa-free regime for Ukrainians going to Europe, which was promised for Euromaidan and still is not in place). Refusal of Viktor Ianukovich to sign it triggered Euromaidan. Advocates of Agreement were explaining that it will open a window of new possibilities for the Ukrainian economy. But already then it was clear that it is much more useful to the EU than to Ukraine, because Europe gets unrestricted access to the Ukrainian market, and big part of the Ukrainian goods do not match European standards and are uncompetitive in the European market.

Report of the Institute for Economic Research and Policy Consulting (Ukraine) named "Autonomous trade preferences of the EU: Implications for Ukrainian export" confirmed that trade preferences granted by the EU to Ukraine in the end of April 2014 had not brought the expected effect on the export of Ukrainian goods to Europe⁸. In 2014 it grew by only 1,5% and in the first half of 2015 it fell by 35,5%. Exports into the EU peaked in may 2014, when the growth was 36,1%, and trend was positive until the end of August 2014. Since then its dynamics is continuously deteriorating – the further, the faster. And, as report shows, this is not just because of the challenges of the Ukrainian companies from antiterrorist operation zone.

Finally, Russia's message to Kiev was clear from the beginning – in case of implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between Ukraine and the EU it will respond by trade restrictions. Government of Arsenii Iatseniuk estimated potential losses of Russia's food embargo at 600 million dollars in 2016⁹. Thus it would be logical for Ukrainian side to look for some compromise with Moscow. But Petro Poroshenko said in Vilnius: "Neither Ukraine nor the EU will respond to any blackmail, we are resolute in our desire to put into force the agreement on the deep and comprehensive free trade area with the EU on January 1, 2016"¹⁰.

To sum up, two years after Euromaidan victory Ukrainian economy found itself in deep crisis which is caused not so much by war in Donbass, as by populist, irresponsive, ineffective and likely corruptive policy of the state's gov-

⁸ *Ukrainian exports to the EU fell by 35%*, 30.07.2015

<http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=10b_1438291887#GpHz9hCUjPjEeUUb.99> (30.07.2015).

⁹ *Ukraine estimates potential losses of Russia's food embargo at \$600 mln in 2016*, TASS.ru, 18.11.2015, <<http://tass.ru/en/economy/837543>> (18.11.2015).

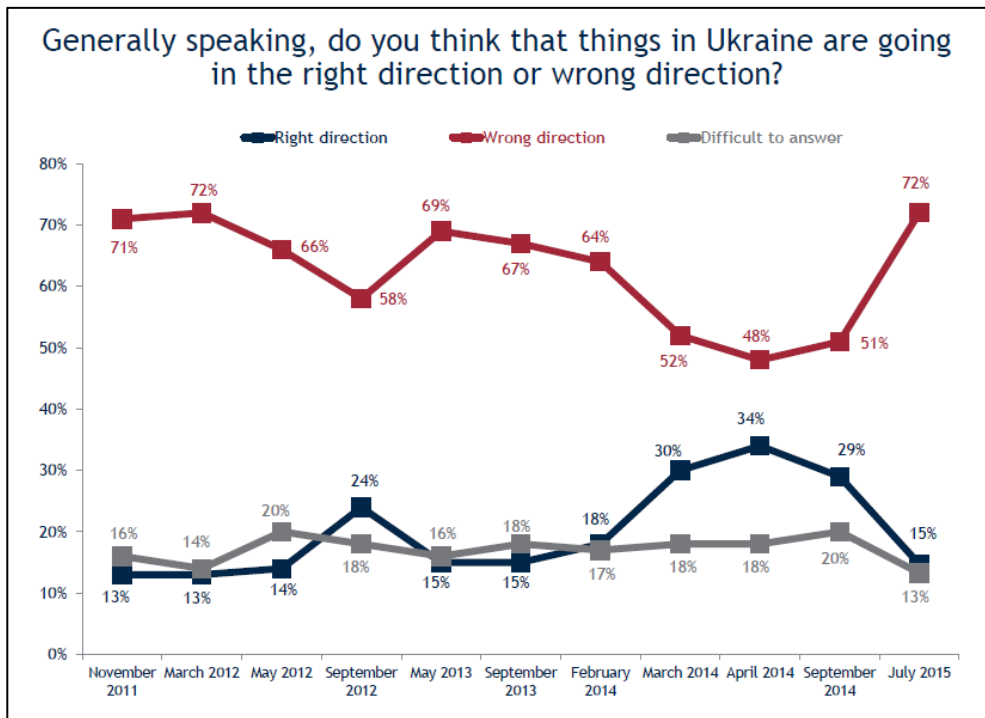
¹⁰ *Poroshenko: Ukraine not to yield to Russia's blackmail concerning entry into force of FTA with EU*. Interfax.com.ua, 02.12.2015.

<<http://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/308371.html>> (02.12.2015).

ernment. At the same time, European trade preferences did not open for the Ukrainian business expected export window, and implementation of the free trade zone between Ukraine and the EU will bring the former even more costs because of trade restrictions from the Russian side.

All this definitely strengthens dissatisfaction of the Ukrainians with their today's government, which is evident in different public opinion polls. For example, The International Republican Institute in the United States has published the results of polling, which was conducted in the latter two weeks of July 2015 and which shows that majority of people in Ukraine (even without Donbass representatives, who were not included in the poll) thinks that the country is going in the wrong direction¹¹.

Chart 1. Poll results showing Ukrainians deeply dissatisfied with government, economy and war



Source: <https://newcoldwar.org/15039-2/> (26.08.2015).

¹¹ *Poll results showing Ukrainians deeply dissatisfied with government, economy and war*, NewColdWar.org, 26.08.2015, <<http://newcoldwar.org/15039-2/>> (26.08.2015).

In this way we get formula of new revolution in Ukraine finished: political system degradation complemented by very hard economic situation, what people of that country see as wrong course of its development. In other words, expectations-reality gap is evident, but for the moment practice contradicts theory. Possible explanation, why new revolt still did not happen in Ukraine, is that Ukrainians are tired of instability or their patience has not finished yet. But true answer can be related to the decisive role of external factor in this crisis.

Main players and their interests

Ukrainian conflict is very complicated. It has many participants with different interests and hardly predictable trajectory of development. Still some preliminary conclusions can be proposed and some prognosis made.

First of all, it is necessary to determine who is who in the Ukrainian puzzle. In other words it must be clear which actor(s) is decisive and which one is dependent in his decisions. In this context it is evident enough that Donbass separatists are totally dependent on the Russian financial and military help (so called “Voentorg“ or “North Wind“), and on its political will. At the same time Ukrainian regime decisively depends on the West plans, and it should be noted that inside the western camp position of Europe is influenced a lot by the United States.

In other words direct participants of the conflict in Ukraine – Kiev and Donbass – are not its main actors: “Love is all around“ – America, Russia and in some way Europe. The following step is to understand their interests in the Ukrainian crisis. To start from Russia we can determine at least three fractions in Kremlin with their own position on Ukraine and call them “liberals“, “peacefully imperialists“ and “militarists“.

First camp was initially disappointed by the decision on Crimea, which resulted in fierce confrontation – also economic – with the West. As close to ruling regime political expert Viacheslav Nikonov said, some liberals accuse militarists of creating problems, which they – not army – have to solve now¹². But this line is not dominant. Further we can speak about peaceful and aggressive Russian imperialists. Former seek to concur and control Ukraine through political game or – to put it simply – through full-fledged implementation of Minsk deal. It is said that leader of this camp is Vladislav Surkov, being adviser of Vladimir Putin. Finally, there are “militarists“ (representatives of army and special services, like GRU), who allegedly would prefer to solve all problems in Ukraine by changing Kiev regime with the help of the Russian military.

Vladimir Putin is supposed to have two scenarios on his table: Minsk deal and military option. And he is completely ready for both of them.

¹² *Voskresnyi vecher s Vladimirom Solov'evym [Sunday evening with Vladimir Solovyov]*, YouTube.com, 21.06.2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FSw6SSYvxIM&feature=youtu.be>> (21.06.2015).

For the moment implementation of Minsk requirements seems to be priority for Kremlin, because it has at least two big advantages. First and the most important – real fulfilment of the deal (as a result of Kiev compromise with Donbass) means that Russia will get its agent inside Ukraine, which will be blocking all western initiatives of Kiev. Second, Minsk process helps Moscow to bring back friendship of Berlin and Paris and expect the end of the European sanctions. At the same time, if Ukraine decides to restart military action against Donbass (so called “Croatian scenario“), “North Wind“ will blow again, and as a result it may lose more territories (if not Kiev). And this time Europe may not support Petro Poroshenko.

Now about the interests of the western side. Today already many experts say that America lost its strategic orientation. To be more precise, it looks like there is no consensus in American elite on grand strategy and main adversary. For example, well-known and well-informed Russian expert Sergei Karaganov said: “It is necessary to understand that our partners failed and went too far afield. Especially partners in America. They lost strategic guidelines, lost everything, they are in a fluster and they do not know what to do. This is absolutely evident. There is open quarrel between different elite groups“¹³. Therefore simplistically it is possible to speak about two American camps – supporters of the so called “ruled chaos theory“, which they apply both in the “Big Middle East“ and in Ukraine, and traditionalists, thinking in the categories of spheres of influence in relations with Russia, China or Iran.

To make it more or less clear in faces, Barack Obama and John Kerry prefer not to create unpredictable situations, and Pentagon is more destructively aggressive. Actually, today’s president of the United States is the biggest ally of Russia. For example, he supported Putin’s idea on the Sirian chemical weapon when American attack seemed almost inevitable, he reached the deal with Iran and he blocks official military help to Ukraine under huge pressure of his opponents. Real traditionalist in terms of geopolitical philosophy, if listen to his speeches, is Henry Kissinger, whom Vladimir Putin likes to meet with so much. Europe is divided in its preferences on Ukrainian crisis in the same way – partly supports American “hawks“ (mainly, so called “younger Europeans“ – Baltic states, Poland etc.), partly is tired of anti-Russian policy and wants to restore previous level of relations (primarily, “Old Europe“, but not Angela Merkel as a chancellor of Germany). The former, for instance, vote for sanctions against Russia, the latter agree to build “Nord Stream 2“.

So, for now we have two big geopolitical teams, which determine the destiny of Ukraine. First consists of Russia, American traditionalists, who are ready to recognize the whole post-soviet area as a Russian sphere of influence, and their supporters in Europe. The second is represented by American “hawks“ and “Young Europe“. In this way the future of the Ukrainian conflict

¹³ *Pravo znat' [Right to know]*, YouTube.com, 03.10.2015, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=45puyE7x2AY>> (03.10.2015).

depends on the relations between these two camps, to be more concrete – on the change of their positions.

When perception matters

The position of Russia is not going to change – either Ukraine accepts Minsk rules how Kremlin sees them or, if Kiev restarts military action, “Voentorg“ will be open again. Europe because of economic costs is looking for opportunity to reconcile with Russia. But still it is strongly influenced by the American point of view. So, actually the main variable is the position of the United States, and it is hardly predictable.

The fact is that Russia must be in a hurry until Barack Obama is in Washington, but it has little chance to finish Ukrainian story as it wants before new person comes to White House. Then there is a question, who will be this person? Hillary Clinton is a strong candidate, but extraordinary Donald Trump can make a surprise. Anyway, strategic indetermination of America does not seem to finish after presidential elections, whoever becomes the next leader of the USA.

At the same time Russia apparently finds itself in a win-win situation. It will definitely win from full scale implementation of the Minsk deal, and it will win military campaign, if Kiev restarts war, feeling the support of American “hawks“.

In this context “ruled chaos approach“ followers in the USA have several options. First, understanding that in the long run there is no chance to win against Moscow in its “close abroad“, retreat with maximal gain (initiate final Ukrainian military attack in Donbass to make as much problems for Russia as possible or get something from Kremlin for leaving Ukraine in the Russian sphere of interest, what traditionalists are already ready for). Second, protract the crisis as long as possible with all its aspects, such as European sanctions against Russia, expecting that Vladimir Putin will pull back.

Post-positivist theories of international relations accentuate understanding how non-material structures condition actors’ actions. In other words, their perception of reality sometimes is more important than reality itself. So the choice of American “hawks“ in case of Ukraine is supposed to depend on three things: real Russia’s ability to survive economically, its real ability to create for America (and broader for the West) unacceptable political, economic or even (indirectly) military damage, and on the western perception of Russia’s abilities.

Is Russia strong enough to win a long term game? It seems that Vladimir Putin believes that it can, because majority of Russian people supports him and is ready to suffer for great victory against the “evil“ West. Besides, the more conflict in Ukraine continues, the more the EU will wish to finish it, accepting Russian conditions, also because in historical civilizational sense Europe ends on the border of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine.

It means that for American “hawks“ it is better to start preparing final deal on Ukraine with Moscow today in order to get at least something tomorrow. But they still seem to believe that protraction of the Ukrainian crisis is in their favour, because the damage Russia creates for the West is not critical for the moment and because Moscow is not ready (mainly in economic sense) for a long fight. And maybe they are right.

To sum up, determinant factor in the Ukrainian crisis is external, not internal, and its strategic perspective depends on Russia’s ability to survive economically and make the West believe it is better to pull back; on the American “hawks“ estimation of this ability and on the damage they and Europe are ready to suffer. In other words, we witness simple “chicken game“, and if nobody turns to the side, believing in his final success, Russia has better chances to win. Mainly, it is because Ukraine is a matter of geopolitical future for it (as it is seen in Kremlin). And Vladimir Putin will do everything to succeed, having the support of Russian people for whom sense of greatness of their state has always been more important than economic prosperity. For America and the EU it is not, and especially patience of Europeans (primarily of “Old Europe“, which determines the policy of the EU) is almost over. Of course there is a possibility that Russian economy will collapse, not being able to feed its imperialistic beast, but it seems unlikely. Therefore, perhaps there is no question, whether Russia wins in Ukraine, but only when it does.

Conclusion

American writer, historian and philosopher William James Durant once said: “A great civilization is not conquered from without until it has destroyed itself from within“. For more than twenty years after getting independence Ukraine had been destroying itself from within like Russia had in the “wild 90s“ (licence of oligarchs, deep economic crisis and finally – civil war). Euro-maidan became the epic final of this process and let external forces (Russia and the West) to “conquer“ the country, to make it the hostage of their geopolitical ambitions.

In other words, Ukraine is under the huge pressure – both bottom-up and top-down, and actually for now cannot decide anything about its future. At the same time, perhaps, there is no question, whether Kremlin wins in Ukraine, but only when it does, because it is a matter of geopolitical future for Russia. It means that for American “hawks“ it is better to start preparing final deal on Ukraine with Moscow today in order to get at least something tomorrow. But they still seem to believe that protraction of the Ukrainian crisis is in their favour, because the damage Russia creates for the West is not critical for the moment and because Moscow is not ready (mainly in economic sense) for a long fight. And maybe they are right.

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