

Small gloss on Ukraine

The old realm of the Rus, over the centuries evolved into a heterogeneous and fractious country, torn between East and West. From mid-17th to late 18th century river Dniepr (Vorysthenes of the ancients) was the frontier between Russian Tsardom and Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth. The overwhelming majority of Ukrainians are Orthodox, while a compact minority in the West observe the Greek Catholic rite. If the political gravity centre is located in the capital Kiev, linguistic citadel is further south east the area of Poltava, while the political pendulum finds its zero point in the rich town of Dnipro on the banks of the river.

Affiliations and political traditions of Ukraine are much more diverse than the endless plains of the country indicate. Yet, all forces profess more or less allegiance to the constitutional narrative of a centralized, non-federal country. The Minsk Protocol of February 12 2015, an agreement which extricated Kiev from a perilous military situation in Debaltsevo, effectively terminating hostilities, stipulated a decentralized administrative structure for the entire country, reserving special status after elections under international (OSCE) monitoring, to the two insurgent "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Since then, countless times the Trilateral Contact Group chaired by OSCE has gathered in the Belarussian capital, seeking to help materialize the commitments made six years back. Prodding by the Normandy Group (France, Germany, Ukraine, Russia) has not engineered a breakthrough. Yet, the level of tensions, armed clashes, civilian casualties have considerably been decreased; much of it owing to the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), since 2014 deployed along the "contact line". For all practical purposes war in the East of Ukraine is reduced to low intensity warfare, but not yet to a frozen conflict.

In view of the recent flare up STRAVO thinks that there is no alternative to a diplomatic solution of the conflict. Ukraine, before becoming a NATO country, a development at odds with its geography, should first become a functioning European political community. Honouring commitments of February 2015, is a steppingstone for both Kiev and the russophile Eastern insurgents to claim European political standards. After all, in essence situation on the ground was not worse than it has been for the last several months.

In some quarters there is appetite to raise the antes with regard to Ukraine. Prudence is in order. Heightened tensions between Kiev and Moscow might lead to humiliation of the former and to further alignment of Russia with China, with everything that this implies. There is still room for peaceful settlement of this European dispute, a collateral part of which is the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation.

Greece, the only EU country that operates a professional consular representation in the conflict zone, cares a lot, as more than 120000 Ukrainian citizens of Greek descent live in the hinterland of Mariupol, on both sides of the front.

Stravo of Amaseia

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