

**EPISTEMOLOGICAL STUDIES IN PHILOSOPHY,  
SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES**

ISSN 2618-1274 (Print), ISSN [2618-1282](#) (Online)

Journal home page: <https://visnukpfs.dp.ua/index.php/PFS/index>

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УДК 17.026.4

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**THE DONBAS CONFLICT AND PEACE PROCESS**

*Received 05 September 2019; revised 15 October 2019; accepted 25 November 2019*

*DOI: 10.15421/341931*

**Abstract**

*The Donbas Conflict is one of the main obstacles for Ukraine which threatens the territorial integrity of the country and thereby its sovereignty. Therefore, finding a peaceful solution to the conflict is the main priority of Kyiv. However, reaching peace in Donbas does not depend solely on the will of Ukrainian officials. Although ceasefire has been reached and peaceful solution to the conflict has been projected in the frame of Minsk agreements, the parties have difficulties in implementing the articles of the agreements. This article, first, investigates pros and cons of the Minsk agreements for Ukraine and Russia, respectively. Subsequently, it concentrates on the idea of the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas as an alternative solution to the Donbas Conflict. The work concludes that contradictions which do not allow for implementation of the Minsk agreements reflect in this alternative idea too. In connection with the conclusion, this study argues that achievement of peace in Donbas depends on the concessions which the sides will make.*

**Keywords:** *Donbas Conflict, Peace Process, Concessions, Ukraine, Russia.*

**Конфлікт на Донбасі та мирний процес**

**Анотація**

*Конфлікт на Донбасі - одна з головних перешкод для України, яка загрожує територіальній цілісності країни і тим самим її суверенітету. Тому пошук мирного вирішення конфлікту є головним пріоритетом Києва. Однак досягнення миру на Донбасі залежить не лише від волі українських чиновників. Хоча і було досягнуто припинення вогню, а мирне вирішення конфлікту було заплановано в рамках Мінських угод, у сторін виникли труднощі в імплементації статей цих угод. Спершу у статті досліджуються плюси та мінуси Мінських угод для України та Росії відповідно. Наступна частина роботи концентрується на ідеї миротворчої місії ООН на Донбасі як альтернативного рішення конфлікту. Наприкінці робиться висновок про те, що суперечності, які не дозволяють реалізувати Мінські угоди, відображаються і у цій альтернативній ідеї також. У зв'язку з цим, це дослідження стверджує, що досягнення миру на Донбасі залежить від поступок, які зроблять сторони.*

**Ключові слова:** *конфлікт на Донбасі, мирний процес, поступки, Україна, Росія.*

**Конфликт на Донбассе и мирный процесс**

**Аннотация**

*Донбассский конфликт является одним из главных препятствий для Украины, которое угрожает территориальной целостности страны и тем самым ее суверенитету. Поэтому поиск мирного решения конфликта является главным приоритетом Киева. Однако достижение мира на Донбассе зависит не только от воли украинских чиновников. Хотя прекращение огня и было достигнуто, а мирное урегулирование конфликта было запланировано в рамках Минских соглашений, стороны сталкиваются с трудностями при имплементации статей соглашений. В первую очередь в статье исследуются плюсы и минусы Минских соглашений для Украины и России соответственно.*

*Впоследствии работа концентрируется на идее миротворческой миссии ООН на Донбассе в качестве альтернативного решения конфликта. В статье делается вывод о том, что противоречия, которые не позволяют реализовать Минские соглашения, отражаются и в этой альтернативной идее тоже. В связи с этим, данное исследование утверждает, что достижение мира на Донбассе зависит от уступок, на которые пойдут стороны.*

**Ключевые слова:** конфликт на Донбассе, мирный процесс, уступки, Украина, Россия.

## **Introduction**

When the battles in Donbas began, newly formed government in Kyiv did not anticipate a long-lasting war in the territory. However, developments towards Summer 2014 made it clear for everyone that the war is not going to end soon despite the promises of newly elected president, Petro Poroshenko. August 2014 was a nightmare for Armed Forces of Ukraine when they faced with Russian regular troops in Donbas. Since then, intensifying the war in Donbas works against the Ukraine's interest. Therefore, finding a peaceful solution for Donbas Conflict is one of the main priorities of Kyiv.

This article details the peace process of the Donbas Conflict by presenting the views of the sides, in order to find out which factors have influence on the peace process of the conflict. In this context, first, the conditions which motivated Ukraine to reach ceasefire agreements are studied. In this part, pros and cons of the Minsk agreements for Ukraine are assessed. Subsequently, the research evaluated peace process in Donbas from Moscow's point of view by underlining the position of Russian Federation and its main goal in Donbas Conflict. The third part of the paper examined the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas as an alternative approach to find a solution for the conflict in Donbas. However, the work showed that contradictions which blocks implementation of Minsk agreements reflects in the idea of UN peacekeeping mission too. Therefore, this article concludes that the sequence of the fulfillment of Minsk agreements are the main stalemate for achieving peace in Donbas. In connection with this conclusion, the study argues that peace in Donbas depends on the concessions of the parties, especially Ukraine.

## **Minsk Agreements and Ukraine**

Apparently, the Minsk agreements did not provide any benefit to the national interest of Ukraine rather they threatened the unitarity for-

mation of Ukraine by demanding special status for Donbas. After all, the reasons why the Ukrainian government went to negotiations and agreed to the proposed conditions of peace is understandable. The military defeat and the threat of the continuation of hostilities with the direct or indirect involvement of Russia, could lead to further territorial losses and internal destabilization up to total loss of sovereignty.

As mentioned before, Ukrainian army was very close to victory over the separatist forces by first half of August 2014. However, Russia's direct intervention in Donbas war at the end of August 2014, strengthen the position of militants. Hence, Ukrainian troops suffered a devastated defeat in Ilovaisk at the end of the month. A significant territory loss in the short period forced Ukrainian officials to agree the Minsk Protocol on September 5, 2014. Similarly, collapse of Minsk-I ceasefire in January-February 2015 left no chance but to agree Minsk-II for Kyiv authorities. The clashes in Donetsk International Airport and the heavy fighting in Debaltseve forced Ukrainian officials to negotiate the peace process in second time. Therefore, from Kyiv's point of view, Ukraine had to sign Minsk agreements in order to avoid more territorial and military loose.

In fact, according to Minsk-I and also Minsk-II agreements, Debaltseve and its vicinity were supposed to remain under Ukraine's control. However, by launching new offensive in January-February 2015, the separatist forces aimed to capture these territories and while the negotiations were continuing in Minsk, the separatists were already repelling Ukrainian troops from the transit hub in Debaltseve and this was the main reason why the ceasefire was not becoming effective right after the Minsk-II accord. In fact, the conflict in Debaltseve continued even more three days after February 15 (Luhn, 2015). Therefore, although it seemed that the Minsk-II declaration promised a wider security zone in compar-

ison with the Minsk-I in reality it was pushing Ukrainian forces beyond the Debaltseve region. Besides, the agreement was unrealistic because it redrew the contact line according to the Minsk-I. It was clear that the separatists would not retreat to the first contact line because they were about to seize Debaltseve. Nevertheless, Minsk-II achieved to decrease the conflict tension in Donbas and the ceasefire disburdened Ukraine though it lost more territory in February 2015 [“Kuchma Says” 2015].

Implementation of the Minsk agreements promises Ukraine to regain full control on Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. Ukraine initiated several attempts to fulfill the agreements. On September 16, 2014, the Ukrainian parliament passed a law on introducing a special procedure for self-government in certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts for a term of three years. It was shortly called the ‘Law on Special Status’ [“Law on Donbas” 2014]. The parliament also adopted a law that releases certain categories of people who committed criminal offenses from February 22, 2014 until the date of entry into force of this law in the territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions where the Anti-Terrorist Operation [ATO] was conducted. However, the Cabinet of Ministers stated that the law on the ‘special status’ of the Donbas (certain districts of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts) would be fulfilled only under certain conditions [“Турчинов Підписав Закон” 2014]. These conditions include actions such as: local elections in certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk are carried out according to Ukrainian law and international standards; All kind of weapons and foreign military formations to be withdrew from the territory of Ukraine [Peters & Shapkina 2019].

Additionally, draft law on amendments to the constitution of Ukraine regarding decentralization of power which Kyiv was supposed to enact according to the Minsk agreements by the end of 2015 were approved in the first reading by Ukrainian Parliament on August 31, 2015 [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine 2015]. However, the draft law on decentralization of power in Ukraine caused dissatisfaction among people particularly nationalist groups. On the same day when the

parliament voted for amendments to the Constitution, an assault was carried out against the building of the Verkhovna Rada. During the attack One of the participants of the action threw a military grenade in front of the law enforcement officers who were guarding the building. As a result of the clashes, four fighters of the National Guard died, 141 people (including 131 policemen and a fighter of the National Guard) were injured [“Під Радю Пом’янули” 2016]. Following this event, Ukrainian parliament halted to pass the amendments to constitution on decentralization of power. Some of Ukrainian experts urge that the constitutional amendments on the decentralization of power are necessary in order implement the reforms [“Експерти Розповіли” 2019].

However, opinion polls show that there is no consensus among Ukrainians in terms of the constitutional amendments. In the regional context, granting the ‘special status’ to the occupied territories with its consolidation in the Constitution seems to be the most unacceptable for the residents of the Center (59%) and the West (55%). In Donbas, the gap between those who would agree to such compromise and those for whom it is unacceptable, is minimal: 39% and 41%, respectively. Besides, for the residents of the East this proposal is quite acceptable (44% - for, 32% against), and in particular, the prospect of ‘special status’ of certain territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the South (47% - for, 29% - against) is supported [“Мир На Донбасі” 2018].

The law on ‘special status’ which was adopted by the Ukrainian parliament for 3 three years in 2014 was extended in January 2018 after radical reformulation of the content. The reformulated law titled as “draft law No. 7163 on special aspects of state policy to ensure Ukraine’s state sovereignty in temporarily occupied areas in Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts” [Shandra 2019].

The new law did not mention the Minsk agreements. Instead, it directly referred to Article 51 of the United Nations Charter on right of individual and collective self-defense. Bypassing the separatist rulers in Donbas, the new law positioned Russian Federation directly as an aggressor state against Ukraine. The law neither men-

tioned 'war' nor 'Anti-Terrorist Operation' but it described the situation as "measures to ensure national security and defense, deterrence and repression of Russian armed aggression" [Shandra 2019]. Ukrainian MP Oleksandr Bryhynets remarked that the 'Anti-Terrorist Operation' does not define the war in Donbas. For him, Ukraine is at war with another state, "which is connected to another type of war – a hybrid war" [Shandra 2019]. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, criticizing the law, announced that the so-called Donbas Reintegration law is a scandalous and violation of Minsk agreements ["Comment by the Information 2018].

Along with the abovementioned initiatives of Ukraine in order to the fulfillment of the Minsk agreements, there are several concerns of Kyiv officials which hinder the implementation of the agreements. In this process, the main concern of Ukraine appears in security issue. In fact, there is a contradiction in terms of agreeing the sequence of military and political measures. In fact, Ukraine may achieve full control in Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts within the frame of Minsk agreements, but this achievement in return can undermine the sovereignty of Ukraine. Ensuring security in Donbas particularly at the border with Russian Federation is a vital issue for Kyiv in order to cease further Russian influence in Ukraine. For Ukraine, withdrawal of all military formations from Donbas is the prerequisite for implementation of political measures. In other word, guarantying security in Donbas is particularly important for accomplishing the Minsk agreements. For instance, the local elections specified in the agreement are impossible to be held unless the public order is restored in separatists-controlled areas for Kyiv [Калиновський 2019].

Besides, to assure the participation of Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the local election, first, it is necessary to secure the public order for their return to Donbas. In addition, for holding the local elections, access of the Ukrainian parties, the media, the Central Election Commission and other officials, including the police and the judiciary to the region are essential. In this case, analysts such as Vasyl Filipchuk et al, state: "the elections in non-controlled territories are impos-

sible without the settlement of security issues, as well as the issue of legal regime in this territory, restoring a minimum level of subordination and setting up infrastructure of interconnections between Kyiv and currently non-controlled territories" [Filipchuk, Ohtysiuk, & Yaroshenko 2017]. Sabine Fischer, another scholar, also emphasizes that Ukraine prioritizes ensuring security in Donbas. For Fischer, Ukraine's argument is that it is not possible to "fulfil the political conditions until the ceasefire was permanent" [Fischer 2019].

In fact, reinstating its full control in Donbas before implementing political obligations of Minsk agreements contains certain risks from Ukraine's perspective. First, amnesty for separatists in Donbas means legalization of their rule in the territory. In such case, all military formations in Donbas can be easily converted to local police. Besides, legalizing the separatists' power in Donbas will halt Ukraine's pro-Western foreign policy because integrating the pro-Russian separatists into Ukraine with legal power will provide Russia an excellent tool to sabotage Ukraine's foreign policy direction. Second, decentralization of power by giving a special status to certain districts of Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts will create injustice in terms of true equal rights for all regions and it will harm the concept of the national unity and social cohesion. Discrimination among regions, most probable, will provoke other regions to demand the identical rights. In other word, decentralization of power as Jonathan Brunson emphasizes, is an 'olive branch' to rest of the regions in eastern Ukraine such as Odessa or Kharkov which contains pro-Russian groups [Brunson 2019].

Moreover, going further, some scholars argue that the Ukraine's effort in reintegrating Donbas is not worthy. Alexander J. Motyl, a prominent Ukrainian expert, states:

Ukrainians must let go of the Donbas enclave and concentrate on the priority that lies plainly ahead-its survival as a democratic and prosperous Western nation. Let the Donbas work itself out at another time-when Ukraine is strong, Putin Russia is weak, and the Donbas population realizes the dreadful mistake it made in siding with the Kremlin's dictator [Motyl 2016].

For Motyl, the war in Donbas will not come to an end even if Ukraine fulfil the Minsk obligations or other capitulations. The expert argues that the Ukrainians will continue to die as long as Vladimir Putin wants them to die and the war will not end unless he wants to finish. Motyl concludes that “disengaging from the occupied Donbas psychologically, ideologically, and politically is imperative” [Motyl 2016]. In this case, Jonathan Brunson claims that neither pro-Russian separatists want to reunify with Ukraine nor Ukraine is reluctant to reintegrate pro-Russian residents of Crimea and Donbas. Additionally, he stresses that Ukraine does not want to win Donbas war because of its reconstruction cost. According to Brunson, ‘loser gets Donbas’ is a common joke regarding the crisis [Brunson 2019].

Despite abovementioned radical views on Donbas Conflict, it should be noted neither the full implementation of political obligations of Minsk agreements nor disengaging Donbas can guarantee ending the war in Ukraine. As noted, in former case Ukraine legalizes the separatist rulers in Donbas and integrating those leaders into Ukraine’s politic means halting the pro-Western foreign policy. In the later scenario, separatists penetrations towards Ukraine’s territories will continue. Simply, first, the separatist leaders will demand the rest of the territories of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts or even further destabilization of other regions can be anticipated. Under such stalemate, removal of all military formations from Donbas and controlling the border with Russian Federation is particularly vital for Ukraine. Only after securing its borders and re-establishing public order in Donbas can Ukraine allow elections in Donbas which is mentioned in Minsk agreements. Otherwise, implementing the agreements mean legitimizing the governance of Donbas by the separatists.

### **Minsk Agreements and Russian Federation**

Ukraine from the beginning of the crisis aimed to design Russia as a part of the conflict in Donbas. However, Russia, denying its presence in Donbas define the war in Donbas as a ‘civil war’ or internal issue of Ukraine. Indeed, although Russia is one of the representatives in the

Trilateral Contact Group, Minsk agreements do not mention Russia and do not assume any responsibility directly for Russia. Even, Point 10 of the Minsk Protocol only indirectly refers to Russia’s obligations. It states “to withdrawal of all illegal armed groups and military equipment as well as fighters and mercenaries from the territory of Ukraine” which does not directly points Russian forces [“Package of Measures” 2015].

In general, there are three levels of Donbas Conflict: ‘Russia versus the West World’ [geopolitical conflict]; Russia versus Ukraine (bilateral conflict) and Kyiv versus self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics (internal conflict) [Hedenskog 2018]. As it is known, for Russia, the Orange Revolution and Euromaidan events were sponsored by the West. From the Kremlin’s point of view those developments were the part of NATO’s enlargement project towards Russia which is unacceptable. Therefore, Kremlin officials do not refuse meeting with the US authorities to negotiate the conflict in Donbas. In this level, American-Russian meetings took place in Volker-Surkov format, headed by Russian President Vladimir Putin’s aide Vladislav Surkov and US Special Representative for Ukraine Negotiations Kurt Volker [“Russia’s FM Lavrov” 2018].

So far, Kurt Volker and Vladislav Surkov held four meetings. The first talk between two officials took place in August 2017 in Minsk. The Minsk talk was followed by two meetings in October and November 2017 in Belgrade. The last meeting held in January 2018 in Dubai [“Permanent Representative of Ukraine 2018]. The next meeting was scheduled in following months of 2018 but the Russian side refused to meet. The representatives negotiate mainly the ways to implement Minsk agreements and the deployment of UN Peacekeeping mission in Donbas. Regarding the meetings Vladimir Yelchenko, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the US stated that “there is no unity or progress there. Progress depends on the Surkov-Volker track that seems to be ‘on the verge of death’. They have not met since January. They haven’t made any decisions” [“Permanent Representative of Ukraine 2018]. According to Kurt Volker, Ukraine must fulfill

the obligations of the Minsk agreements but it is not easy due to Russia's attitude. In this case, Volker state:

The Ukrainian side will have to fulfill its part of the Minsk agreements. Ukrainians must fulfill their part, which implies respecting the ceasefire, although now it is difficult for them to implement it, because Russia is fighting on the other side of the front line [“Volker: Implementation of Minsk 2019].

In contrast, from Kremlin's point of view, the West's delivery of weapons, including lethal arms, to Ukraine makes the situation worse in Donbas. According to Alexei Chesnakov, head of the Russian Center for Current Politics, the consequences of the West military aid is a half-baked step. For Chesnakov, the Ukrainian authorities can think about changing status quo in Donbas relying on the West aid which can cause another tragedy in Donbas [“Three Years of Minsk Agreements 2018]. On one hand, Chesnakov blames the West on escalating the Donbas crisis. On the other hand he emphasizes that the West's assistant to Kyiv will not change the balance of Power in Donbas. Moreover, Russia sees the Donbas war as a consequences of United States's war against Russian Federation. Thereby, from Kremlin's perspective, Ukraine is not an independent state but an actor controlled by Washington. Therefore, it can be concluded that so far, the meetings in geopolitical level between Russia and the United States have not produced any result to resolve the conflict in Donbas [Fischer 2019].

Correspondingly, due to its denial being a part of Donbas war, Moscow refuses bilateral level of the Donbas war. In other word, Moscow, different from Kyiv denies the argument of Donbas war as a war between Ukraine and Russia. Instead, Russia prefers to approach the crisis as an internal conflict of Ukraine. Therefore, according to Kremlin, the causes of the war in Donbas lies at heart of internal political and social structure of Ukraine. In this context, Russia pressurizes Kyiv to recognize the so-called leaders of the self-proclaimed the DPR and the LPR as official negotiators in order to resolve the conflict. To response the proofs which shows Russia's military presence in Donbas, Moscow argue that the active

Russian soldiers in Donbas are the volunteers not official soldiers [“Kremlin Says” 2019].

During the first meeting in Minsk, despite Ukraine's objection, Russia managed to include the heads of the self-proclaimed DPR and LPR, Alexander Zakharchenko and Igor Plotnitsky respectively, in the negotiation. Therefore, along with the representative of the OSCE, Ukraine and Russia the leaders of the separatists signed the Minsk Protocol on September 5, 2014. In fact, at the end of Minsk agreements, Russia was the only winner. Implementation of the Minsk agreements will serve on the interest of Moscow. It should be noted that, from the beginning of the conflict, Russia showed no intention to absorb Donbas as a it did in Crimea [Gregory 2015].

As known, right after the so-called referendum in May 2014, separatist leaders showed their desire to be part of Russian Federation and they even asked Russia to annex Donbas. However, Russia did not repeat Crimean scenario in Donbas. In fact, the annexation of Donbas was in contradiction to the national interest of Russia. In the case of annexing Donbas Moscow could lose its leverage on Ukraine and could not be able to maintain its influence in Ukrainian political landscape. In such scenario, most probable Ukraine had to stop fighting in Donbas as it did in Crimea. Therefore, Russia's ultimate goal in Donbas was not a direct occupation but transfer the region back to Ukraine but under certain conditions. Those Moscow's preferred conditions are mainly listed in the Minsk agreements. First, Russia aims to federalize Ukraine in order to be able to Ukraine's pro-Western orientations particularly its possible NATO membership.

Moscow can achieve its aim in Donbas in case of fulfillment of the Minsk agreements because the accords include decentralization of power in Ukraine through the constitutional amendments. Hence, implementing the Minsk agreements mean to secure autonomy for Donbas while ensuring amnesty for all separatists who participated in Donbas war. By reintegrating Donbas into Ukraine in the frame of Minsk agreements Russia well achieves its ultimate goal in Ukraine. In fact, Russia insists on the implementation of the Minsk agreements and it is reluctant to accept any alter-

native to agreements. In this context, Boris Gryzlov, Moscow's chief representative in the Minsk Contact Group, stated that "Russia's position has been consistent, we believe that the path to peace in Donbas is through faithfully implementing the Minsk agreements" ["Russian Envoy" 2019]. He also implied that Russia is not an actor in Donbas conflict but a mediator helping to resolve the conflict. Hence, Gryzlov noted: "the conflict that the Contact Group is designed to resolve is an internal conflict in Ukraine. The Minsk Package of Measures clearly says that there are two parties to the conflict: Ukraine's central government and certain areas of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions" ["Russian Envoy" 2019].

Even though Russia insists on the implementation of the Minsk agreement, in fact every situation seems reasonable for Kremlin. Jonathan Brunson, an expert on asymmetric warfare, notes that "Putin's Russia wins all variants: status quo, de-escalation, and escalation (in Donbas Conflict)" [Brunson 2019]. To investigate Brunson's argument, it can be said that status quo in Donbas ensures Moscow's influence in Ukraine and weakens Ukraine's pro-Western integration process while de-escalation of the conflict through Minsk agreements provides Kremlin an opportunity to deploy its tools in Ukraine permanently. An autonomous Donbas in Ukraine can easily work for Moscow's purpose. Besides, escalation of the conflict also would serve very well for Kremlin's aim. Escalation of conflict in Donbas can be compared with the war in South Ossetia in 2008. As known, Russia had directly declared war against Georgia in summer 2008. At that time, Russia had attacked Georgia by using the Tbilisi's offensive in the South Ossetia as an excuse. Alike offensive is probable in the case of escalation in Donbas case [Valasek 2008].

However, Moscow does not prefer neither status quo nor escalation but fulfillment of the Minsk agreements in Donbas Conflict for mainly two reasons: Resolving the conflict through Minsk negotiations Russia will be able to present itself as a mediator in Ukraine's crisis and thereby as a peace-loving actor in international arena; resolution of Donbas conflict can help Russia to get rid of the sanctions of which the West is im-

posing since 2014. In this case, the latter reason is more important than the former one.

As known, in March and July as well as August and September 2014, the EU countries along with the USA, Canada, Japan and Australia were adopted numerous restrictive measures against Russian Federation. These sanctions include areas such as defense cooperation, sensitive technology, export of dual-use products and restrictions on access to capital markets. In addition, visa bans have been imposed on Russian politicians, businessmen, and the 'leaders' of occupied Crimea and Donbas [Bentzen & Anosovs 2015]. Although these sanctions are insufficient to change Russia's policy in Donbas the consequences of them along with the low oil prices have a substantial negative impact on Russia's economy. Therefore, Russian authorities aim to lift the sanctions as a result of the resolution of Donbas Conflict through the implementation of the Minsk agreements.

#### **The UN Peacekeeping Mission in Donbas**

Since the conflict erupted in Donbas September 2014 and February 2015 Minsk agreements are the only two and identical agreements in resolving the conflict. As detailed in previous parts, these agreements were not signed by the head of the conflict parties. This was understandable from Moscow's point of view because Russian officials did not see their country as an actor in the Donbas Conflict but a mediator to help in finding a resolution to Ukraine's 'internal conflict'. Hence, Moscow appointed Mikhail Zurabov, Russian Ambassador to Ukraine (2009-2016) to represent Russia in Minsk and sign the agreements on behalf of Russian Federation. In fact, the ambassador's signature did not bind Russian Federation legally. According to the Russian legislation, only the President of Russia has right to sign a treaty on behalf of Russian Federation. Thus, the documents which Zurabov signed in Minsk can be seen just a political commitment of Kremlin ["Federal Law" 1995].

At the same time, Kyiv's perspective was exactly opposite to Moscow's view. First of all, Ukraine gave consent to Minsk negotiations due to dramatic defeats first in Ilovaisk and then in Debaltseve. Therefore, for Kyiv authorities Minsk

talks were an obligatory process to stop the war and thereby to prevent further territorial loss. The content of the Minsk agreements was not welcomed by neither Kyiv officials nor Ukrainian society except decreasing the tension of the war in Donbas. Likewise, Zurabov, Leonid Kuchma's signature also did not legally bind Ukraine because despite the fact that President Poroshenko authorized Kuchma to represent Ukraine in Trilateral Contact Group, signing international treaties on behalf of Ukraine demands Ukrainian legislation ["Analysis of Set of Measures" 2015]. In brief, the Minsk agreements were necessary for Ukraine in order to cease the conflict, but the accords were not seen by the Ukrainian officials as a process which could genuinely be a solution to the war in Donbas.

Under these circumstances, Ukraine was looking for an alternative to Minsk agreements. In this context, following month of the Minsk-II agreement, Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko proposed another option in order to implement Minsk agreements. The president proposed to launch a UN peacekeeping mission in the East of Ukraine in March 2015. The proposal aimed to broaden the political solution for Donbas Conflict by supporting the Minsk agreements. Poroshenko's proposal included following obligations:

A) Overseeing pull-out of all heavy weapons in the Donbas; b) Supporting withdrawal of all foreign armed formations and military equipment, as well as mercenaries, from certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions; c) Disarming all illegal groups; d) Helping Ukraine reinstate full control of its border; e) Ensuring the release and exchange of all hostages and unlawfully detained per-

sons; f) Supporting the OSCE's SMM; and g) Overseeing free and fair elections in the Donbas ["Potential UN Mission," 2019].

By this proposal, Ukrainian president showed once again that ensuring security in Donbas, particularly on the border with Russian Federation is a high priority for Ukraine and political promises of Minsk accords such as conducting election can be fulfilled only after re-establishing public order in the region. However, Poroshenko's initiative was halted by Russia's opposition in the United Nations Security Council. In contrast, Russia offered his own version of UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas [Honcharov 2017].

On September 5, 2017, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed a UN mission to Donbas only along the line of contact between Ukrainian troops and separatist forces in order to protect the OSCE SMM and civilians [Feichtinger & Grininger 2018]. Putin's proposal was not detailed and included a narrow mandate only for six months. Ukrainian officials and their Western supporters were skeptical about Kremlin's proposal because for them, the small number of UN forces in Donbas along the contact line envisaged in Putin's proposal did not aimed to end the conflict but freeze the conditions as it was. Moreover, Kyiv claimed that a limited UN peacekeeping mission along the contact line would only serve for legitimization of the border between self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics and Ukraine. Walter Feichtinger and Hanna Grininger summarizes the UN peacekeeping mission proposals of Ukraine and Russia as it presented in the table 1.

**Table 1. Russian and Ukrainian Proposals of UN Peacekeeping Mission in Donbas**

UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas	Russia	Ukraine
Mandate	Protect OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Donbas	Establish peace and territorial integrity of Ukraine
Strengths	1,000+	20,000+
Contributors	No NATO countries	Neither Russia nor its allies
Equipment	Lightly armed	Combat-grade
Duration	6 months	Up to 3 years
Area	Restricted to Contact Line	Both sides of contact line and along Ukrainian-Russian border

Source: [Feichtinger & Grininger 2018].

When we look at the proposals of Ukraine and Russian Federation regarding deployment of UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas it can be seen that disagreement of the implementation of the Minsk accords continues by other means. As mentioned above, Ukraine demands withdrawal of all illegal military formations from Donbas and reinstate Ukrainian international border in Donbas. Therefore, only after addressing these security concerns, Kyiv is willing to meet the political obligations of the Minsk accords. In contrast, Russia does not propose UN troops to be deployed at the Russian-Ukrainian border. For Kremlin, the UN peacekeeping mission should be stationed at the contact line and should secure the OSCE mission. These views are also shared by the Ukrainian and Russian experts. A research conducted by Razumkov Centre together with the Konrad Adenauer-Stiftung compares expert opinions from both countries. According to Ukrainian experts, the sequence of implementing the Minsk accords under the control of the UN peacekeeping mission should be:

First, to ensure a stable security regime;  
Second, to establish a legal framework for socio-economic activity in the occupied territories in line with Ukrainian legislation;  
Third, reinstatement of Ukrainian government institutions on the occupied territories, support of justice processes, transitional justice and reconciliation in line with Ukrainian legislation;  
Fourth, to ensure the functioning of media [television, newspapers, radio, Internet media] in line with Ukrainian legislation;  
Finally, organizing legitimate elections to local self-government authorities in the occupied territories in line with Ukrainian legislation [Klymenko & Pashkova 2018].

As can be seen in the quotation, Ukrainian experts prioritize security issue in order to re-establish peace in Donbas. In contrast, Russian experts think opposite sequence of Ukrainian thinkers to implement Minsk accords and for them, UN peacekeeping troops should support the fulfillment of the Minsk obligations. According to them, to establish peace in Donbas, following steps should be executed: “First, to ensure smooth operation of the OSCE mission; Second, to help ensure safety of civilian population (the police component); Third, after elections are held

and the main provisions of the Minsk agreements are implemented, to assist in mine clearance of the conflict area, withdrawal of heavy weapons, ammunition” [Klymenko & Pashkova 2018]. Different from their Ukrainian counterparts, Russian experts think that withdrawal of military formations from Donbas can be accomplished after elections are held in Donbas. These overlapping ideas reflect in the proposals of the UN Peacekeeping Mission to Donbas and thereby undermine alternative views to find out a resolution for Donbas conflict [Klymenko & Pashkova 2018].

Additionally, international experts are also pessimist about deploying UN peacekeeping mission to Donbas due to Russia’s reluctance of abandoning the Russian-Ukrainian border in occupied Donbas. In this regard, Susan Stewart, a German scholar, states: “it is hardly imaginable that the Russian leadership will develop a willingness to return control over the Russian-Ukrainian border in the occupied areas to Ukraine” [Klymenko & Pashkova 2018]. Richard Gowan, a prominent scholar, also examined whether a UN peacekeeping mission can unite Ukraine or not. For Gowan, the peacekeeping mission can successfully restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine in Donbas only if the mission’s forces are strong enough [around 20,000 troops] and stationed at the Russian border in order to reassure Kyiv against any potential incursions of Russian regular forces [Gowan 2018].

In brief, it can be said that UN Peacekeeping Mission in Donbas is an alternative view to resolve Donbas conflict proposed by Ukrainian officials in March 2015. Although Ukrainian proposal was vetoed in UN Security Council by Russia, in September 2017, Putin offered his own version of UN mission to Donbas. However, the contents of these two proposals coincide with each other. Indeed, the problem of the implementation Minsk accords reflected in the proposal of UN peacekeeping mission too. While Ukrainian side proposed to deploy UN troops at the border between occupied territory of Donbas and Russia, Kremlin aimed to legalize the DPR and LPR borders by deploying UN forces in the contact line. As we noted before, for Ukraine, ensuring security in Donbas is the first condition to re-

solve the conflict while for Russia, illegal armed formations can be withdrawn from Donbas only after decentralization of power in Ukraine and holding elections in the oblasts.

### Conclusion

Finding a solution for the protracted war in Donbas is the major problem for Ukraine since 2014. However, the conditions do not only depend on the will of Ukrainian authorities. In this article, pros and cons of the Minsk agreements are examined for Ukraine and Russia, respectively. In this case, it is argued that despite the fact that both countries are eager to implement the articles of the agreements, they are not agreed on the sequence of the implementation of these articles. It is claimed that the main priority of Kyiv is to ensure security in Donbas and then to work on the political conditions of the Minsk agreements such as constituting a special status for the territory. Kyiv avoids any action which can legalize the governance of separatists in Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

In contrast, Moscow blames Ukrainian officials for not acting in conjunction with the promises of Minsk agreements. For Moscow, first, political promises should be fulfilled, and then foreign military formations can be removed from the Donbas territory. The main aim of Kremlin by proposing the implementation of the Minsk agreements is to achieve the federalization of Ukraine. By achieving its goal, Russia not only can be a dominant actor in Donbas but also it can be stationed at the heart of political system of Ukraine.

In federalized Ukraine, Kremlin can easily block the Western orientations of Kyiv. Therefore, the sequence of the fulfillment of Minsk agreements are the main stalemate for achieving peace in Donbas.

In addition, the chapter also analyzed the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas as an alternative approach to the peace process. In this regard, it is claimed that the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas is welcomed by both countries, particularly by Ukraine. By the UN peacekeeping mission Ukraine aims to secure its borders with Russian Federation and thereby to prevent Russian support to Donbas militants. Therefore, Kyiv supports a strong UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas. In contrast, Russia agrees with the peacekeeping mission only if it can be stationed in the contact line, not at the border with Ukraine. By deploying the UN troops at the contact line, Russia aims to push Ukraine beyond the contact line and thereby, strengthen its presence in Ukraine.

As a result, none of countries come to an agreement about the UN peacekeeping mission to be positioned in Donbas just like the discordance in implementing the Minsk agreements. After questioning the aims of the parties in Donbas Conflict, it seems that neither Minsk agreements nor the UN peacekeeping mission in Donbas are the remedy to reach an agreement for peace unless the sides, particularly Ukraine, make a substantive concession.

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