

# OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICAL EVENTS OF 2014–2015 IN UKRAINE

*Holger Mölder*



The current chapter gives a short overview of political events that played major role in Russia's information war against Ukraine during the ongoing conflict.

## Political Events of 2013-2014

The political developments in Ukraine in late 2013 and in 2014 after the Vilnius Summit (28–29 November 2013) can be summarized as follows:

### **21 November 2013–21 February 2014. EuroMaidan in Kyiv<sup>1</sup>**

On 21 November 2013 the Ukrainian government suspended preparations for signing the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement.<sup>2</sup> This decision resulted riots, civil unrest and demonstrations in Kyiv. At the same day the Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti) in Kyiv was occupied by anti-government protesters.<sup>3</sup> On 27–28 November 2013 the third Eastern Partnership Summit took place in Vilnius.<sup>4</sup> During the EuroMaidan protests from November 2013 to February 2014 hundreds of protesters were killed. On 21 February 2014 President Yanukovich signed the “Agreement on the

---

<sup>1</sup> See more about Euromaidan – **Мухарський, А.** 2015. Майдан. Еволюція духу. Київ: Наш формат; **Кошкина, С.** 2015. Майдан. Нерасказанная история. Киев: Брайт Стар Паблішинг. [Кошкина 2015]

<sup>2</sup> **Кошкина** 2015, pp. 22–23.

<sup>3</sup> **Kiev protesters gather, EU dangles aid promise.** – Reuters, 12.12.2013. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/12/us-ukraine-idUSBRE9BA04420131212>> (last accessed 24.08.2016).

<sup>4</sup> **The Third Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius** 2013. Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union 2013, 2.12.2013. <<http://www.eu2013.lt/en/vilnius-summit>> (last accessed on 24 August 2016).

settlement of the political crisis”.<sup>5</sup> After that Viktor Yanukovich left Kyiv and moved to Kharkiv. A few days later he appeared already in Moscow.

### **22 February 2014–1 April 2014. Annexation of Crimea<sup>6</sup>**

On February 21st, 2014 President Viktor Yanukovich departed the country. The Ukrainian Parliament took over the power in the country and removed Yanukovich from office on 22 February 2014. On 23 February, the Crimean crisis erupted with demonstrations staged against the new Ukrainian government. Russian support to separatist policies materialized in March of 2014 with the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation. On 21 March 2014 Vladimir Putin ratified the inclusion of two new areas into the Russian Federation: the Republic of Crimea and the City of Federal Importance of Sevastopol.

### **1 April 2014–30 June 2014. The Pro-Russian offensive**

This phase saw the transition into an armed conflict. On 7 April 2014 the so-called People’s Republic of Donetsk was declared. The militants took control of the SBU offices in Donetsk and Luhansk. On 27 April People’s Republic of Luhansk was declared. Armed conflict between the Ukrainian armed forces and pro-Russian militants of so-called People’s Republics of Donetsk and Luhansk, who were supported by Russian volunteers, was launched. On 27 May 2014, Petro Poroshenko was elected the President of Ukraine.

### **1 July 2014–1 September 2014. Ukraine’s offensive**

During the offensive, Ukrainian forces were militarily successful and retook significant parts of territory controlled by separatists. On 5 July, Slavyansk was retaken by Ukrainian forces. In July 2014, the Malaysian civil airliner was shot down most probably by separatist forces or Russian volunteers who fought on behalf of them. At the end of summer 2014 pro-Russian separatists initiated counteroffensive. The battle of Ilovaysk (10.08–02.09.2014), became a turning point of the war in Donbas, and ended on 2 September as the Ukrainian forces withdrew from the area.

---

<sup>5</sup> Signed by Yanukovich and the leaders of the Ukrainian parliamentary opposition.

<sup>6</sup> See more **Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2014, pp. 2148–2161; **Mölder, Sazonov, Värk** 2015, pp. 1–28.

**24 August 2014–31 December 2014. The Pro-Russian counteroffensive**

At the end of August (24.08.2014) the separatists initiated a major offensive against Mariupol. A ceasefire was established with the first Minsk Protocol and was signed by parties of the conflict under the auspices of the OSCE on 5 September 2014 in Minsk, but it ultimately failed.

**Political Events in 2015**

The key term to describe the developments of the Ukrainian crisis in 2015 would be ceasefire. The parties agreed to end active fighting on February 10<sup>th</sup> 2015, and for the rest of the year this was more or less adhered to, although frequent clashes between the parties nevertheless continued.

The Ukrainian crisis was discussed in multiple international forums throughout the year (2015), including several permanent forums such as the Contact Group (the OSCE, Ukraine, Russia, and the rebels, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, the DPR and the LPR) and the Normandy format (Germany, France, Ukraine, Russia). Active bilateral negotiations between the leaders of the United States, Germany, France with Russia and Ukraine also continued throughout the year, but without any significant breakthrough towards peace. Political contacts between the leaders of Ukraine and Russia deteriorated. The proxy armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Donbas region was followed by an active information and economic war that was actively advanced by Russia against Ukraine. Russia was especially uncompromising in regards to Ukraine's debts and gas supplies, and moreover displayed great reluctance to reach any agreements on these issues. The western countries continued their sanctions against Russia due to its involvement in the Ukrainian crisis.

**The first phase from January to March 2015**

In January 2015 the rebels achieved their long-term military task and captured the Donetsk International Airport. The Minsk II Agreement, which arose via the initiative of the German and French leaders Angela Merkel and François Hollande, was signed on February 12<sup>th</sup> by representatives of the OSCE (Heidi Tagliavini), Ukraine (Leonid Kuchma), Russia (Mikhail Zurabov), the DPR (Alexandre Zakharcenko) and the LPR (Igor Plotnitsky). The ceasefire began on February 15<sup>th</sup> (2015), with the exception of the areas of Debaltseve and Mariupol, where fighting continued. Ukraine withdrew its forces from the Debaltseve area on February 18<sup>th</sup>. From 24<sup>th</sup> to 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015 both parties began to withdraw their artillery from the front lines. The

parliament of Ukraine approved a law that conferred “special status” on the Donbas region on 17 March 2015, as specified by the Minsk II agreement. The OSCE Monitoring Mission continued to observe the situation in the crisis area, but their involvement was often prevented by rebels.

#### **The second phase from April to June 2015**

The fragile ceasefire in the crisis area was followed by frequent armed clashes between the opposing parties. Tensions between Russia and Ukraine increased slightly, but during this period there were no significant changes in the positions of parties in the crisis area. Because of continuing tensions in Ukraine, the United States proposed the deployment of US forces to Eastern Europe.

#### **The third phase from July to September 2015**

The low intensity conflict continued until mid-August, when shelling recommenced and could be identified, especially near Mariupol and Horlivka. At the end of August a new ceasefire agreement was achieved. It has been in effect since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015 and has proved to be quite effective as there have been extended periods when no casualties were reported. . At the end of September 2015, an agreement on withdrawal of small weapons from contact line was reached. From mid-July, clashes between the Right Sector and the Ukrainian Government occurred in Mukachevo.

#### **The fourth phase from October to December 2015**

After a relatively peaceful period and several agreements on the withdrawal of weaponry, fighting resumed at the end of October. The Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU was ratified by EU member states on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2015. Russia continued its economic war against Ukraine into 2016 as it suspended the free trade zone and showed great reluctance to finding solutions to Ukraine’s debt agreements. Local elections were held in Ukraine, where the pro-Government parties were successful in Western and Northern Ukraine. The opposition, on the other hand, found broad support in Southern and Eastern Ukraine. The separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk postponed their elections until 2016.

For more detailed timeline late 2013-2015, see **Appendix 1**.