

Chapter 26

The ‘Steinmeier Formula’: A Path to Peace?

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ABSTRACT

The conflict in Eastern Ukraine has been ongoing for over five years, despite the best attempts of the international community to help resolve it. Rather than the EU, UN, or NATO, it is in fact the Normandy Format talks or the Normandy contact group, which is composed of Germany, Russia, Ukraine, and France, which has taken the lead. This chapter considers historical evidence and problems before continuing to analyse the aims of the actors in the conflict, the Normandy Format talks, the ‘Steinmeier Formula’, and whether this represents a solution that can satisfy all the actors. The importance of the wider reforms as part of strengthening Ukraine’s ability to fulfil its aims and direct its own policy path is noted as essential, as is uncertainty from all actors over longer term prospects for the fulfilment of their aims once a peace agreement has been enacted.

‘War is merely the continuation of politics by other means.’ — Carl von Clausewitz

‘If #Russia stops fighting, there will be no more war. If #Ukraine stops fighting, there will be no more #Ukraine...’ — Kateryna Kruk et al.

INTRODUCTION

There is a presumption in such arguments that the political aims of Russia is the utter destruction, submission or annexation of Ukraine. However, this should not be taken as a given. Rather, any consideration of the conflict in Ukraine must consider what the main goals of the active parties are. There are three main active parties: the Ukrainian state, the Russian state and the rebels active in certain areas. Debates over

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how much popular support the rebels enjoy and how much the Russian state must subsidise the rebels in terms of manpower and equipment will remain unknowns for some time to come. However, what is known is that there is support — even if the extent is not. Therefore, the question regarding motivation must include Russia’s goals as well the rebels’ and Ukraine’s.

Any peace plan which hopes to conclude the conflict in Ukraine must hope to be able to satisfy as many of the aims of as many of the actors as possible. It must be able to return politics to the realm of politics and ensure that the continuation of politics by other means is either too costly or unprofitable to be returned to. The question is whether or not The ‘Steinmeier Formula’ is a peace plan which may achieve such a difficult goal. In order to answer such a question first the aims of the actors must be established, before explaining the historical background of The ‘Steinmeier Formula’, which can be found in The Normandy Format Talks, then The ‘Steinmeier Formula’ itself is discussed before finally focusing on whether or not this is a solution which may satisfy all.

The Conflict and Aims of the Actors

The exact classification of the conflict in Ukraine remains something of a thorny topic. Ukrainians, understandably, find attempts to classify the conflict as a civil war inaccurate and often offensive. Such a reaction should not come as a shock to those with even a passing knowledge on the topic, but it does leave a problem: what exactly is the conflict in Eastern Ukraine? Writing in *International Law Studies* US Naval War College, Heinsch (2015) concluded that:

‘While greater clarity of information would be desirable, it seems likely that the situation in eastern Ukraine can be qualified as an internationalized non-international armed conflict, i.e., an original non-international armed conflict, which, through the indirect influence of Russia and the support it is providing to, and control it is exercising over, the pro-Russian separatists, has become an international armed conflict.’

The international character of the conflict was also noted by Szpak (2017), who wrote that there is difficulty in that a full range of information is not available and specifically the lack of knowledge of the degree of control which Russia, as a third party, has over the non-State party, the Ukrainian separatists.

‘However, taking into account all the circumstances mentioned, it is clear that the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine has an international character and Russian soldiers called ‘little green men’, separatists and Ukrainian soldiers have the right to combatant status with all the consequences.’ (Szpak, 2017)

Therefore, in accepting these classifications and in approaching the aims of the actors it is important to bear in mind that, as with most situations in the contemporary era, there is an international element to the conflict in Ukraine and there will likely be an international element to the conclusion of said conflict. It is also important to consider what understanding can be provided by historical lessons on the conclusions to such conflicts.

Hironaka (2005) notes that *‘civil wars are often complicated by the intervention of third-party states. Foreign governments that take an interest in civil conflicts may bring their own forces to bear on one side or another, or they may provide various forms of aid that significantly alter the course of a war’*. Another international element, highly relevant for Ukrainian situation, the post-Cold War era tendency

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