

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Wall Street Journal. – 01.03.2016

By John Vinocur

Putin's New Normal Begins to Take Hold

The West is making its peace with Moscow's incursions into Ukraine and Georgia.

*Путінський новий порядок починає закріплюватися
Захід примиряється з вторгненнями Москви в Україну та Грузію
Гірко думати про це, але зневажливе ставлення до України з боку Нідерландів може
здобути широку народну підтримку в Німеччині, де російська анексія Криму поряд з
крадіжкою Москвою двох регіонів Грузії в 2008 році, зайняла місце в списку свідомо
забутих кремлівських завоювань, - пише автор статті. Зараз в Європі немає послідовних,
шанованих голосів, які б активно відстоювали необхідність продовжити накладені ЄС на
Росію санкції, а така необхідність цього літа, ймовірно, виникне, з жалем відзначає
автор. Все це, на його думку, свідчить про те, що "Україна залишається для Європи
неприємною моральною проблемою".*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/putins-new-normal-begins-to-take-hold-1456775469>



Atlantic Council Senior Fellow Adrian Karatnycky on Russia's efforts to destabilize Ukraine and use Syria as leverage against Europe. Photo credit: Getty Images.

The traditionally tolerant Atlanticist Dutch—tough enough to be flying F-16 raids against Islamic State in Syria—will stage a national “advisory” referendum next month on whether the European Union should grant associate status to Ukraine. This looks like a noble gesture, a signal of backing for a want-to-be-in-the-West former Soviet satellite now facing massed Russian tanks and renewed gunfire.

Except that consistent polling says the Dutch will tell the Ukrainians to buzz off when the Netherlands votes on April 6.

For symbolism, this would be a “no” result weighing about a ton. It expresses multiple currents of contempt for the European Union. Even more, it argues that as a result of Russia’s unchecked military successes and effective hybrid-warfare techniques—in the Dutch case, involving little orange disinformation-men?—here’s a core European country that would look like it sees an advantage in placating Vladimir Putin.

It’s as if the Dutch were telling themselves: “Don’t annoy him. He can flood the migrant supply line to Europe with a single afternoon of new bombing in Syria.” Stating that Russia “stood to benefit most” from a no vote, the president of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, has warned the Dutch that rejecting the Ukrainian association agreement “could open doors to a continental crisis.”

Maybe not, but it would surely serve to illustrate the breakdown in political instinct and the self-obsession that grip EU members. The Dutch signaled a Europe that was sick in 2005 when, via a referendum, they rejected a proposed EU constitution. Now the linkage between contempt for Brussels and intimidation by Russia, involving its leverage on the flood of migrants to Europe, is noxious on a wider plane.

It’s a miserable thought, but the Netherlands cold-shouldering Ukraine could mutate into a groundswell in Germany, where Russia’s annexation of Crimea has found a place alongside Moscow’s 2008 theft of two Georgian provinces on the list of willfully forgotten Kremlin conquests.

These days, there are no consistent, respected European voices actively defending the probable necessity this summer of continuing the sanctions the EU has imposed on Russia. While both German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President François Hollande appear battered, the recent fawning visits to Moscow of leaders from the parties of Germany’s grand coalition encourage more Russian provocation.

The circumstances reflect a continent without a real locus of authority. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung has asserted that Germany’s moment of European hegemony ended following Mrs. Merkel’s substantial loss of allegiance on the migrant issue.

And the Obama administration? Its self-imposed absence from influence on Europe intensified nearly two years ago when the White House saddled up a German horse to handle Ukraine diplomacy but disregarded its riders’ Russia-related limitations.

In all of this, Ukraine remains Europe’s unwelcome case of conscience. “It’s an enormous irritant,” a Brussels official told me. “There are countries that think, ‘couldn’t Ukraine be bargained off in some way?’ ”

There are signs pointing in that direction.

German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, and his new French counterpart, Jean-Marc Ayrault, were in Kiev last week. According to a German news report, Mr. Steinmeier told the Ukrainians that there could be “no more excuses” from them about the security situation blocking work on the subordinate details of the so-called Minsk plan for resolving the conflict.

Which really signifies the unacceptable insistence that Kiev make concessions to Moscow without first gaining control of its side of its border with Russia and being rid of heavy Russian armament from the area. For atmospherics, note an article by the two ministers last week in

which an unnamed “neighboring state” of Ukraine was said not to respect its sovereignty. But which one? Moldova?

It’s in this tiptoeing context that NATO’s supreme commander, U.S. Gen Philip Breedlove, has warned the international community against accepting “the situation in Ukraine as the ‘new normal.’ ”

In a statement, he spoke last week of Europe’s “somber reality,” its “growing instability fueled by a revanchist Russia” and of a continent that largely remains financially and economically “stagnated” while coercible through its dependence on Russian energy.

But he’s just a military guy whose boss, U.S. Chief of Staff Joseph Dunford, has argued, without effect, that it would be “reasonable” for America to furnish Ukraine with defensive weapons.

It’s a reasonable conclusion. With borders on four NATO members, Ukraine ought to receive the American antitank weapons necessary to make a Russian onslaught against it a matter of unacceptable casualties for Moscow.

The Dutch, at least, can save their honor through a vote that suggests they understand how abandoned Ukraine has become. But with the diplomacy he delegated to Germany nearing a dead-end on Ukraine, President Obama continues refusing to supply this inadequately protected friend with a minimal means of dissuasion. It’s a stance that emphasizes his administration’s major part in the accelerated geopolitical implosion of the West.