

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Wall Street Journal. – 19.01.2015

By John Vinocur

## Is There No One Who Will Stand Up for Ukraine?

Seems the West will do anything these days to avoid a confrontation with Vladimir Putin.

*Невже ніхто не вступиться за Україну?*

*Здається, Захід зробить що-небудь в ці дні, щоб уникнути конфронтації з Володимиром Путіним.*

*Олександр Турчинов, секретар Ради національної безпеки та оборони України, зробив сенсаційну заяву у парламенті. Він заявив, що близько 8500 російських регулярних військ зараз розгорнуті у східній Україні, і ще 52000 знаходяться в готовності на східному кордоні України. Цифри є суттєвими, і набагато більше, ніж ті, що були повідомлені місяць тому. Росія продовжує спроби дестабілізувати Україну, в той час як Володимир Путін "відмовляється від наявності своїх військ" і продовжує завзяті безглуздості.*

*Канцлер Германії Ангела Меркель коментуючи зрив зустрічі, запланованої з паном Путіним, заявила, що вона не бачить жодної можливості широкого українського перемир'я через триваючі порушення режиму припинення вогню з боку Росії та проросійських сепаратистів. Незважаючи на це, головний зовнішньополітичний керівник ЄС, Федеріка Могеріні, запропонувала Брюсселю розглянути "більш активний підхід" до можливих компромісів, щоб викликати зміни в політиці, незалежно від "подальшого тиску з боку Росії, залякування та маніпуляцій."*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/john-vinocur-is-there-no-one-who-will-stand-up-for-ukraine-1421702240>



*Vladimir Putin and Federica Mogherini in 2014. REUTERS*

Oleksander Turchynov, the secretary of Ukraine’s national defense council, told the country’s parliament something startling last week. He said that there were 8,500 Russian regular troops now deployed in eastern Ukraine and that another 52,000 were poised just on the other side of its eastern border.

The figures are dramatic—and so much larger than what has been reported during the months of Russian attempts to destabilize Ukraine, while Vladimir Putin’s denials of his troops’ presence continue with stubborn ridiculousness. I asked a Western security expert if the numbers sounded plausible.

He responded: “It would be difficult to believe that the Ukrainians could have such hard numbers on Russian troop presence without that also being visible to Western intelligence.” A day later, Alexander Vershbow, NATO’s deputy secretary-general, described the situation in Ukraine as deteriorating.

This once again posed the question about what NATO, through military steadfastness, and the European Union, by sanctions and politics, could, might or would do (long live the conditional tense) to convince the Russians their patience, somewhere, has limits.

The EU, it turned out, was talking at first about giving in. The talk of retreat came in disregard of Chancellor Angela Merkel’s rejection of a meeting scheduled for last Friday with Mr. Putin. She saw no possibility of a broad Ukrainian truce because of continuing cease-fire violations by Russia and pro-Russian separatists.

No matter, the EU’s foreign-policy chief, Federica Mogherini, proposed that Brussels consider “a more pro-active approach” of possible trade-offs to induce policy change, regardless of “further Russian pressure, intimidation, and manipulation.”

Look at the maneuver like this: Ms. Mogherini, a geopolitical social worker-type, was acting as if the EU wanted to signal its readiness to set up a parole-board hearing for a still-at-large major criminal—notwithstanding the objections expressed on Monday by foreign ministers on Europe’s Putin-endangered eastern periphery.

For her, it seemed like the evidence on aggressive Russian behavior toward the West over the past two months just didn't exist, although Moscow's military showed off its potentially nuclear-armed Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, the westernmost Russian territory bordering Poland and Lithuania, and then announced it would station combat-ready troops in Kaliningrad and Crimea in 2015. Meanwhile, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, the U.S. Army commander in Europe, pointed to the risk of a major new offensive by pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine this spring.

Mr. Vershbow's reaction to the EU's musings was tactful. The general view of the Allies, he told Reuters, was to stand by its suspension of all practical cooperation with Russia following its invasion of Crimea. "Right now," he recommended, "it's probably not the right time to even speculate about" so-called "forward steps."

After the Mogherini paper was first disclosed by The Wall Street Journal, I talked with a senior NATO official about the overall Ukraine-Russia situation.

The official described the Alliance as being in touch with reality and regarding Russia as acting "duplicitously." Ms. Merkel feels she had been personally deceived, backs continuing sanctions against Russia, and hangs tough.

A point has been reached, the official said, where NATO "is getting ready for neo-containment. The Germans are getting adjusted to it. Although not all of them."

Yet considering Mr. Putin's newest success in widening critical differences between and within the Alliance and EU, there is obviously no single strong notion about what to do.

On one side, NATO will be getting about 150 U.S. tanks and armored vehicles, sufficient to equip a heavy armored brigade, for prepositioning in Eastern Europe. But eventual supply by Washington of lethal defensive arms to Ukraine remains chimeric.

What the Obama administration doesn't seem to take on—or doesn't want to take on—is the great willingness of some of its European allies to ease up on a Russia that the White House was reported early last year as seeking to ignore into pariah-state status.

Sigmar Gabriel, the Social Democratic vice chancellor in Ms. Merkel's coalition, tells his countrymen that many Americans want the old superpower rivalry "back on the ground" and ominously urges Germans to "take note that Russia is an atomic power." French President François Hollande, seemingly setting himself up as a go-between, says, like Mr. Gabriel, he wants done with the Russia sanctions, although a resolved truce is a prerequisite.

"I prefer," Mr. Hollande adds, "to position myself in a perspective of emerging from the crisis."

Mr. Hollande might have read a response from Alexei Navalny, Russia's leading opposition activist, now under house arrest. "Without the sanctions, the Russian Army would be in Odessa," he told Le Monde. So where does President Barack Obama, the West's nominal leader, stand? He laid out his line last month: "The idea that ramping up sanctions further and further and further and somehow Putin will change his mind is a miscalculation. . . . Sometimes it's tempting to say we can go even further, but that won't do us any good if suddenly the Europeans peel off."

And then what? Kurt Volker, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO under Presidents Bush and Obama, says the truth is gruesome and must be opposed: "Everybody thinks it is more important not to be confronting Russia than saving Ukraine. If that means giving up on Ukraine, that's what can happen."

*Mr. Vinocur is former executive editor of the International Herald Tribune.*

*Г-н Винокур колишній виконавчий редактор International Herald Tribune.*