

Ukraine – peace or pause for breath?

The attempt by the US/EU/NATO Euro-Atlantic bloc to pull Ukraine into the western sphere of influence was a regime change too far, argues **Frank Lee**

The recently brokered ceasefire in Eastern Ukraine took place after the Ukrainian President, Poroshenko agreed to Vladimir Putin's initial proposals for a cessation of hostilities. The ceasefire, which came into effect on 5th September was approved by envoys from Ukraine, the separatist leadership, Russia and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) at a meeting in the Belarus capital, Minsk. So far the fragile peace has (at the time of writing) lasted; this notwithstanding the fact that some heavy fighting has been going on around Donetsk airport. But these sporadic outbreaks are to be expected when there are so many irregulars on both sides outside of official control.

All well and good, but the cynic in me suggests that Poroshenko was only brought to the table due to the calamitous military setback in late August early September when the rebel forces launched a counter-offensive. The Ukrainian army and neo-fascist volunteer battalions were put to flight and during the retreat massacred by deadly artillery and rocket fire. Whole units were decimated or captured and armoured columns blown apart (see picture below).

The road to Mariupol

In this situation Poroshenko had to sue for peace negotiations or see his armed forces disintegrate. But is this express desire for a negotiated settlement being made in good faith, or is it merely a pause for Kiev's armed forces to regroup and re-equip and start a new offensive? Only time will tell, but this seems unlikely, in the short run at least. Ukrainian armed forces have taken such a battering that they are not in a position to resume hostilities in the near future. There are also anti-war demonstrations in the west of the country and demands from anxious mothers that their sons ought not to be sent to the killing grounds of the Donbass. Of course this was not reported in the western media – it doesn't coincide with the official western



Oleh Yaroslavovych Tyahnybok is a member of the Verkhovna Rada and the leader of nationalist Svoboda political party. A Hitler salute? No no, he was just waving to somebody in the crowd

narrative.

There are certainly forces in Kiev who want the war to go on. The neo-nazis of Right Sector, the Azov Battalion, Svoboda, all view peace as a capitulation to hated Russia, but Poroshenko must somehow keep these forces in check.

Svoboda

It also depends on the attitude of the Americans who have invested a great deal of political capital and money into their Ukrainian regime change. According to US senior diplomat, Victoria Nuland, \$5 billion is the going rate for a coup in Eastern Europe. CIA chief John Brennan and US Vice-President Joe Biden who were notable visitors to Kiev after the coup did not go to discuss the weather.

Certainly the divide between the Kiev regime and the separatists headed by Alexander Zakharchenko seems unbridgeable. Ukraine says it will not give up the Donbass but is prepared to concede a 'special status' (whatever this means) to the area to last for three years. For their part the Separatists want complete independence from Ukraine, this being understandable given the death and destruction visited on the Donbass region by Kiev's

armed forces and neo-nazi irregulars. What Russia wants is a non-aligned state with an autonomous Donbass under Russian influence, and above all no NATO presence.

Months if not years

Such negotiations could drag on for months if not years. Then of course there is the question of who is going to pay for the reconstruction of the Donbass, Ukraine is broke, the EU is skint, and the US won't even bail out Detroit, let alone Lugansk... Hard times ahead for Ukraine and its people.



A Ukrainian armoured column which was completely destroyed during the retreat in Ukraine