

Ukraine-Russia Summit: What will Poroshenko Hear from Putin in Minsk?

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Vladimir Putin and Petro Poroshenko's upcoming summit in Minsk will be the first in-depth meeting between the leaders of Russia and Ukraine in six months. During that period Ukraine has become embroiled in a civil war and teeters on the verge of an economic meltdown – but officials in Kiev continue to blame everything on Russia. Is there any point in holding a meeting with a hostile Poroshenko?

On August 26 Minsk will host a summit between the leaders of the Customs Union (soon to be known as the Eurasian Economic Union) and the president of Ukraine. Putin, Lukashenko, and Nazarbayev will meet with Petro Poroshenko, who will not arrive on his own, but will be accompanied by representatives of the European Union.

Instead of European Commission President Barroso, those representatives will consist of three European Commissioners, led by Baroness Ashton, the European diplomatic leader. The agenda has yet to be announced – but during a time of war (a hot one in Ukraine and a cold one between Russia and the West), it would obviously be ridiculous to limit the discussions to the purely economic issues stemming from the new association between Ukraine and the EU. Especially since this will literally be the first opportunity for Poroshenko and Putin to meet – that 15-minute quadrilateral meeting with Merkel and Hollande in Normandy can hardly be considered an in-depth encounter. Even if no separate bilateral meeting is held in Minsk, negotiations between the Eurasian troika and Poroshenko will make it possible for everyone to look one another right in the eye and state exactly what it is they really want. What will the presidents of Russia and Ukraine talk about? Will they be able to reach any kind of agreement? And if not – what is the point of such a meeting?

Ukraine considers itself to be in a state of war against Russia – if not legally, then in fact. “We are defending ourselves against Russian aggression” is the position of the Ukrainian government and a sentiment shared by a majority of the Ukrainian population. And Kiev is [requesting help](#) – financial, military, and also political – from the West, claiming that the aggression from Moscow was provoked by the European leanings of the Ukrainian people.

Poroshenko is [threatening](#) Russia with sanctions from Ukraine and demanding that Western sanctions against Russia be beefed up in order to force Moscow to withhold support from the insurgents in eastern Ukraine.

Kiev cannot eradicate the rebels on its own – after flexing its military muscle for over three months, the only result is that the civil war in Ukraine can now unequivocally and conclusively be labeled a protracted and bloody affair. But Kiev cannot abandon its military operation because the personal interests of the ruling elite, as well as the position of the

United States, encourage attempts to resolve the issue by force. Poroshenko does not run the country single-handedly – but in some manner he seems to personify the entire nation.

It's no use talking about Ukraine with the one entity – Washington – upon which the government in Kiev is truly dependent. The US will not acknowledge its own momentous influence on Poroshenko, and it is easy to see that America will not only make no move to dampen Kiev's bellicose fervor, but, on the contrary, is diligently fanning it. Given this environment, Russia can only speak with two of Washington's vassals – the EU and Kiev. But it would be wrong to refuse to engage in a conversation even of this nature. War is war and talks are talks. Besides, it's worth it, if only to remind Kiev once again what awaits them in the near future.

✖ What will Poroshenko hear from Putin in Minsk? That the Ukrainian state stands poised between life and death. By spurning peace talks with Novorossiia, Kiev is digging its own grave. By committing herself to an armed response, Ukraine will not only be unable to preserve the unity of the country, she is destroying the last chances for her nation to be resurrected in any guise.

Continuing down her path toward integration with Europe, which the Ukrainian parliament should conclusively ratify in September, will deal a mortal blow to the Ukrainian economy that is collapsing as a result of the war and the decline in trade with Russia.

Even before the war began, we warned you that if you signed this agreement we would defend our markets. Ukraine is threatening us with sanctions? Are you trying to put the kiss of death on your export trade to Russia? And where are you going to sell your products? You think help will come from overseas? No, they don't have that kind of money (so claim the European Commissioners with utter dejection). You're threatening to block the passage of our gas into Europe, while at the same time preparing to have it shipped to you via Slovakia? How will you feed your people this fall, President Poroshenko?

And this is just a small sample of what Putin might say to Poroshenko – and what if he brings up the thousands of dead residents of Donetsk and Luhansk? After all, there must ultimately be some reckoning for all those Ukrainian citizens who have died and for the civil war.

Obviously Putin will be treated to a response citing Crimea and a demand for the return of the former border, or else ... However, Poroshenko will be perfectly well aware that his proclamations are absolutely meaningless even as he speaks them – he can only recite his lines perfunctorily, for in fact he has no answers to Putin's questions. No money, no country, and no exit strategy from this crisis that has already turned into such a calamity. He has nothing – except the hope of victory in his "anti-terrorist operation." But if that does not materialize – and if Poroshenko finally figures that out from the look on Putin's face – what can he do? There is no backup plan to rescue the country. Unless one counts the hope that the US and EU will help Kiev out by coming up with one – after all, we (pro-European Ukrainians) go joining them, or to be more precise, they come and fetch us.

And what could the US do? Contacts with Russia have for all practical purposes been severed, new sanctions won't help, and the attempt to isolate Russia has come to naught. Europe wants only one thing – to wrap up this Ukrainian misadventure as quickly as possible and arrange a ceasefire with the Russians. Poroshenko's belligerence will soon become an irritant for Europe – and even though she will remain submissive to the United States, EU

leaders in many countries will find it increasingly difficult to curb the discontent of their national elites and the general public. In addition, at some point even Berlin will realize that the situation at the front in Novorossia could rapidly change in an extremely dangerous way for Kiev. And Poroshenko has poorly timed the new elections – at that point no one will have any idea who is in charge in Kiev. Putin will just wait for Ukraine to disintegrate and then move in and snatch up everything – that's the fear in Europe. And they're right – and that means that they themselves will push Kiev into talks to reach an agreement on a ceasefire at least, if nothing else.

The main question is whether Kiev has already perceived the full extent of the threat or whether they will continue to place their hopes in the West. If Poroshenko has already grasped the whole picture and will not wait for a disaster on the eastern front in order to recognize the necessity of negotiating – that means Putin's reminders could serve as the final straw that brings Kiev back to reality. If not – that means we should soon expect to see serious losses at the front, the further decline of the hryvna (Ukrainian currency), the meltdown of the economy, and coercion from Berlin. And there's no chance that Moscow will just sit idly by and wait.

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