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## Ukraine and the US: the Devious Plans of Two P's

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Ukraine is currently in limbo: it has lost the guidance of its American mentors (due to Hillary Clinton's failure in the US presidential elections), Europe is busy with its own problems, and the past year has not brought Kiev any closer to its dream of a visa-free regime. The EU Association Agreement, for which the uprising in Ukraine began, has, firstly, not yielded the desired dividends and, secondly, because of the referendum in the Netherlands, has become cluttered

with conditions that have made the European perspective on Ukraine illusory. A military conflict in Donbass has not been given the go-ahead. At the same time, the Kiev government is under time pressures: it has been three years since the uprising, but the political clans that came to power have nothing to offer to society, to its European partners or to America except a continuation of its 'war with Russia'. While this war may have been highly desirable should Clinton have become president, things might be different with Trump.

Hence the devious plans of the two P's.

### **P – Poroshenko**

It recently became known that the administration of the Ukrainian president is paying the BGR-Group \$50,000 a month to «strengthen US-Ukraine relations and to encourage American entrepreneurs to invest in Ukraine». Lobbyists at the BGR-Group will be working for Kiev to «design and implement a comprehensive government affairs and business development strategy», which will also focus on organising meetings with US officials. The Ukrainian government is hoping to increase US support and get US investors to invest in the Ukrainian economy.

The sum of \$50,000 is a monthly payment that does not include the cost of specific activities, for which the BGR-Group charges a lot of money.

Local media immediately concluded that Poroshenko needs the lobbyists in order to beat a path to the new US president, Donald Trump. It's not quite so black and white, however. One of the founders of the BGR-Group, Ed Rogers, who used to work in the administration of George Bush Senior, was part of the scandalous Never Trump campaign, which aimed to prevent Donald Trump getting into power. And in the run up to the US elections, Rogers, like many Ukrainian politicians, made a number of derogatory remarks about the then presidential candidate Donald Trump. Here, Rogers and representatives of the Ukrainian authorities may sing in harmony, but it remains an open question whether this singing will advance the interests of the Ukrainian elite, who placed their bet on the Democrats headed by Hillary Clinton.

Chances are that Poroshenko's devious plan is a balancing act between strengthening ties with Trump's opponents in the US with the help of lobbyists at the BGR-Group and formally trying to get the new president to look favourably on Ukraine, while actually sticking closely to those who are going to be 'friends against' Trump. It then becomes clear why, on New Year's Eve, Poroshenko dragged American 'Santa Clauses' to Donbass with a sack of 'hammers' and assault rifles – US Senators John McCain, Lindsey Graham and Amy Klobuchar. From Donbass, they all signalled to Trump that the war in Ukraine will continue, no matter what the new US president may think on the matter.

And this is where the BGR-Group is the perfect choice. Using Ukrainian money, Ed Rogers can skilfully continue the Never Trump campaign in the context of Ukraine, building a non-partisan

group of US politicians who are opposed to Trump's stated intention of improving relations with Russia.

US Vice President Joe Biden is expected in Kiev in the next few days. Ever since the uprising three years ago, he has been the personification of America's support for the Poroshenko regime, which unleashed the war in Donbass. It is clearly yet another attempt by the outgoing government to make it harder for the new administration to conduct a constructive dialogue with Moscow.

It is an obvious conspiracy by the 'formers'. With the support of current senators, this group of 'lame ducks' is planning to put a spoke in the wheel for the new US president, since each duck is convinced that it knows best how America's foreign policy should be. Ukraine is one of these spokes in the wheel. Poroshenko's devious plan is for Ukraine to be given this role. And to continue the war while stuffing his pockets.

### **P – Pinchuk**

Ukrainian oligarch Viktor Pinchuk, the son-in-law of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma, has also tried to head off Donald Trump with his own devious plan, and the foundations of this plan have been a long time in the making. Firstly, an article appeared in The National Interest written by four lawyers who proposed a plan for Trump and Putin on Ukraine consisting of three steps. The plan suggests that Crimea remain with Russia, with all parties agreeing to recognise this in practice while not agreeing with it legally. In 'exchange', the DPR and LPR will remain part of Ukraine, Kiev will relinquish its association with the EU, returning to a trade partnership with Russia, and Russia will pay for everything, financing the restoration of Donbass and a refugee aid programme. There is no doubt that the plan is a cunning one, but the most cunning thing about it is the mystery surrounding its appearance.

Yet another mystery is an article published in the German newspaper Bild at the end of December last year, in which the proposal by the four lawyers seems to have been overdubbed and reinforced by the name Henry Kissinger. Bild doesn't spare the dry ice as it talks excitedly about certain European intelligence agencies which have allegedly found out that Kissinger has a plan he is getting ready to present to Trump, and that Kissinger himself will mediate between the US and Russia to restore relations. In addition, Bild refers only to a well-known interview given by Kissinger, in which he talks about the possible autonomy of Donbass as a way of resolving the conflict in Ukraine. The authors of the article in Bild add that Kissinger has a plan by which the West must unofficially recognise Russia's right to Crimea while formally continuing to consider the peninsula a part of Ukraine, and in return Russia will guarantee «security in Donbass». Doesn't this sound remarkably similar to the four nifty lawyers' proposals?

The answer to the origin of all these ideas appeared on the pages of The Wall Street Journal, where a plan almost identical to that of Kissinger and the four international lawyers was put forward by Viktor Pinchuk. His suggestions are as follows:

- Ukraine should eliminate EU membership from its short-term goals;
- it should put off the issue of Crimea’s return for 15-20 years, while maintaining the position that «Crimea is part of Ukraine»;
- it should agree to local elections being held in Donbass under current conditions as a compromise that will facilitate a peaceful reunification;
- the country should give up the idea that it will join NATO in the near- or midterm; and
- it should agree to the lifting of sanctions imposed on Russia.

It is not difficult to see that the same idea crops up again and again: Crimea in exchange for Donbass, with the mandatory specification that Russia’s ownership of Crimea will not be formally recognised. This is a slight change to the four lawyers’ suggestion that Ukraine give up its European aspirations, namely the EU Association Agreement that does not promise any benefits to Ukrainians. Holding local elections in Donbass will link the territories of the DPR and the LPR to Ukraine. The ‘bait’ in Pinchuk’s devious plan is Ukraine giving up the idea of joining NATO, so the removal of this irritant for Russia. In fact, Pinchuk is suggesting that Ukraine be returned to how it was three years ago, before the uprising, by giving Donbass back.

It is understandable that Pinchuk laid out his plan in The Wall Street Journal following the publication of the other two articles in The National Interest (US) and Bild (Germany). The plan is primarily targeted at a response from the West. In Ukraine, the oligarch’s television channels, which glorify the war in Donbass in a general media chorus, protect Pinchuk from accusations of disloyalty to the government. The response from the Poroshenko administration, however, which was also published in The Wall Street Journal in early January, suggests that Pinchuk’s devious plan has failed miserably: Poroshenko has no interest in it and is betting on his own devious plan – to continue the war.

So we have a battle between two devious plans: the devious plan of Ukraine’s fourth richest oligarch against the devious plan of Ukraine’s sixth richest. Each of these devious plans is written from the perspective of personal gain. So either way, Donbass will be given an unenviable role: under Pinchuk’s plan it will be reunited with a Ukraine that glorifies Nazis (using the «we’ll hang them later» formula), and under Poroshenko’s plan – war. The common link in both devious plans is that Donbass should be ‘given back’ to Ukraine. This is despite the fact that during a thousand days of war, the DPR and LPR have not only defended themselves, but become self-proclaimed states. The only difference between Poroshenko and Pinchuk’s plans is that Ukraine’s sixth richest oligarch is proposing that these unrecognised states be fired upon with guns, and Ukraine’s fourth richest is pretending they’re simply not there at all.