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France towards the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in the Donbas between 2014 and 2022

Introduction

Since the beginning of the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in the Donbas, France (together with Germany) has remained strongly involved in the negotiation and mediation process for its settlement. This resulted from both the role of the mediator in the so-called Normandy Format (N4) and frequent contacts with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine, as well as President E. Macron's personal willingness to use the European leadership in negotiations for internal use (leader image). This is because it was assumed in the Élysée Palace that, through dialogue and by 'drawing' Russia into the role of a responsible co-architect of European security, European stability would be enhanced, which is in the interest of both the EU and Russia.

The role and importance of France in the creation of the Normandy Format (N4)

The annexation of Crimea by Russia (2014) and the war in the Donbas have resulted in a temporary freeze in French-Russian political relations.¹ In the summer of 2014

¹ The President of France, F. Hollande, annulled the contract and France cancelled the delivery of two Mistral-type ships to Russia.

(6 June), during the celebrations of the 70th anniversary of D-Day and the allied forces landings in Normandy, at the invitation of the President of France, François Hollande, a four-party meeting between the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia, France, and the German Chancellor took place. The meeting resulted in the creation of the so-called Normandy Format (N4).² In this way, France, together with Germany, became involved in the process of international negotiations aimed at settling the crisis in the Donbas and working out a political solution for the issue of Crimea's nationality.

The Normandy Format meeting of the Presidents of Ukraine, Russia, France, and the German Chancellor, who signed the so-called Minsk II agreement (the Minsk Protocol on a bilateral ceasefire) on 11–12 February 2015, was to be crucial for the resolution of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. The Minsk agreements were intended to put Putin on the diplomatic path and provide a framework for political dialogue. At the same time, a commitment was imposed on Ukraine, among other things, to the adoption of a new constitution and the implementation of a law granting special status to 'some regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts'.³

Contrary to the expectations of mediators from Paris and Berlin, a year after the conclusion of the Minsk agreements, none of the postulates were fully implemented and, at most, the fighting stopped on a larger scale and the number of fatalities was significantly reduced. Meanwhile, the military situation in the conflict zone escalated in July 2016. Both parties intensified their exchange of fire, including the use of heavy artillery, along the entire demarcation line. In consequence, since the end of that year, negotiations and talks in the Normandy Format reached an impasse. France and Germany were seeking accord from Russia and Ukraine to implement a package of commitments based on the Minsk proposals, including those concerning the elections in the Donbas, which were to determine its future status. The lack of both parties' readiness to make any commitments in the above areas resulted in the freezing of all undertaken initiatives.

French diplomacy towards the resolution of the conflict in the Donbas in the years 2017–2018

Shortly after taking office as President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, who adopted a pragmatic stance towards the Kremlin, hosted his Russian

² *Jak doszło do porozumień mińskich*, speech by former President of France, François Hollande at the symposium "Revolution, War and Their Consequences" at the College of Europe, Natorlin, 16 March 2018, <http://czasopisma.isppan.waw.pl/index.php/sm/article/view/164/121> [accessed: 22 November 2022].

³ *Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements*, Minsk, 12 February 2015, UN Peacemaker, https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/peacemaker.un.org/files/UA_150212_MinskAgreement_en.pdf [accessed: 02 March 2022].

counterpart, Vladimir Putin, in Versailles (29.05.2017). Following this visit, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Jean-Yves Le Drian, visited Moscow (20.06.2017), where he met with the heads of the ministries of foreign affairs and defence. In parallel to the revival of cooperation between Paris and Moscow, the new administration of the ambitious President Macron was building a dialogue with Ukraine, which was demonstrated by President Petro Poroshenko's visit to Paris (26.06.2017). France's position towards Kiev assumed France's opposition to the annexation of Crimea and recognition of Ukraine's full sovereignty and territorial integrity. At the same time, it assumed support for Ukraine within the N4. France also engaged with Germany and the United States in establishing a UN mission in the Donbas, the aim of which was to provide political support for the implementation of the Minsk agreements and assistance to humanitarian organisations in the conflict zone. Rapid disillusionment with the lack of effects of the 'opening policy' towards Russia in terms of stabilising the situation in Ukraine led to a reduction in the number of bilateral contacts and a slowdown in the dynamics of the French-Russian cooperation. Despite this, France made efforts to work out progress in improving the security (the ceasefire) and humanitarian situation (an exchange of prisoners of war in accordance with the guidelines set out by the ICRC). On 23 December 2017, President E. Macron and Chancellor A. Merkel issued a joint statement on the situation in the Donbas.⁴ In it, they pointed out that the increase in the number of violations of the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine is unacceptable and called on both parties of the fight to fulfil their commitments as soon as possible, improve the situation of the civilian population, and fully implement the Minsk agreements.

France was also very disappointed to learn of Russia's withdrawal from the Joint Centre for Control and Coordination (JCCC) formed by representatives of the Ukrainian and Russian armed forces, which plays a key role in respecting ceasefire agreements under the auspices of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission.⁵

In order to streamline the work of the N4, French and German diplomats proposed to undertake talks in two parallel N3 sub-formats, i.e., France – Germany – Russia and France – Germany – Ukraine at the level of diplomatic advisors, whose first meetings took place in January and February 2018. This formula was to ensure a freer exchange of views and not to incite mutual Russian-Ukrainian accusations. On 22–23 March 2018, French Minister of Foreign Affairs, J.-Y. Le Drian,

⁴ K. Rapoza, *Angela Merkel Tries Pressuring Vladimir Putin On Ukraine War*, Forbes.com, 24 December 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2017/12/24/angela-merkel-tries-pressuring-vladimir-putin-on-ukraine-war/?sh=6d43a0052486> [accessed: 26 December 2022].

⁵ *Retrait des représentants russes du «centre conjoint de contrôle et de coordination»*, 19 December 2017, <https://ru.ambafrance.org/Ukraine-Retrait-des-representants-russes-du-centre-conjoint-de-contrôle-et-de> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

was on a visit to Kiev. It was the first bilateral visit of the head of French diplomacy to Ukraine in 13 years and was aimed at emphasising France's commitment to resolving the conflict in the Donbas.⁶

French diplomacy found itself in a difficult position. On the one hand, it provided support to Ukraine, e.g., during the meeting between Presidents Macron and Poroshenko and Chancellor Merkel in Aachen on 10 May 2018, a package of solutions prepared by French diplomacy to improve the humanitarian and economic situation of the civilian population in the Donbas was discussed. On the other hand, France pursued its own agenda in relations with Russia, both the one resulting from the international situation (Iran/JCPOA, Syria, Libya, Central African Republic) and the economic one (tightening cooperation in strategic sectors of the economy, increasing trade and investment). This aspiration was reflected in President Macron's visit to Russia, combined with participation in the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (24–25 May 2018). The French President's visit was negatively received in Ukraine, especially since, despite the invitation, he did not visit Kiev on his return trip. What is more, the next meeting of the N4 heads of diplomacy in Berlin on 11 June 2018 did not result in progress in resolving the conflict in the Donbas, maintaining mediation channels or preventing further escalation. At that time, there was an intensification of cooperation between Paris and Berlin, which consisted in exerting pressure on both Moscow and Kiev to induce both parties to make concessions and end the conflict in the Donbas. As a result, on 11 November 2018, President Macron, together with Chancellor Merkel, issued a joint statement pointing out the illegal and contrary to the spirit of the Minsk agreements nature of the elections in some regions of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts that took place on that very day.⁷ President Macron and Chancellor Merkel stated that these so-called elections undermine the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, contrary to OSCE standards. However, Russia's goal was to achieve the autonomy of the Donbas and to permanently prevent Ukraine from moving closer to the Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO/EU). This led to a deep impasse in the implementation of the Minsk agreements, exacerbated by President Putin's efforts to position himself as a mediator and to 'place' the Ukrainians in direct confrontation with the separatists as parties to the frozen conflict.

With V. Zelensky's victory in the presidential election in May 2019, France and Germany encouraged the new president of Ukraine to make a number of unilateral gestures towards the occupied territories and their inhabitants, which was intended

⁶ *Déplacement de M. Jean-Yves Le Drian (22–23 mars 2018)*, <https://ru.ambafrance.org/Ukraine-Deplacement-de-M-Jean-Yves-Le-Drian-22-23-mars-2018> [accessed: 06 November 2022].

⁷ *US join EU in condemning 'sham' Donbas elections*, Euractiv, 13 November 2018, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/us-join-eu-in-condemning-sham-donbas-elections> [accessed: 12 December 2022].

by Paris and Berlin to force similar concessions from Russia.⁸ At the turn of June 2019, French and German ministers of foreign affairs, J.-Y. Le Drian and H. Maas, travelled together to Kiev.⁹ At the same time, President Macron invited Russia to co-create a ‘new architecture of security and trust’ with the EU, which he expressed on 19 August 2019 at the Brégançon Fort, his summer residence, where he hosted the Russian leader. In President Macron’s opinion, Russia played an important role in resolving many international crises (Iran, Syria, Ukraine), which raised the need to define a common action agenda to resolve them, including in the scope of arms control.¹⁰ President Macron believed that isolating Russia would turn Moscow towards Beijing and strengthen Russia’s alliance with China, which was not in Europe’s interest. Meanwhile, Russia’s goal was to maximize power (classical realism) and security (neorealism) by controlling other participants in international relations and maintaining the *status quo* (neoclassical realism). The French diplomatic proposal, however, did not take into account the fact that, in practice, by giving rise to the conflict in the Donbas and Crimea, V. Putin degraded and disintegrated the architecture of European security in order to subjugate Ukraine and stop the West.¹¹

The 2019 N4 Summit in Paris

The breakthrough meeting of the N4 was to be the meeting of the Normandy Format leaders on 9 December 2019 in Paris. Certainly, already bringing the meeting to be held at the highest political level was undoubtedly a success of French diplomacy as well as President Macron’s personal success. The N4 summit, which became the occasion for the first Putin-Zelenskyy meeting, was expected to give an impetus to the ongoing negotiations. In practice, however, this time too, it failed to bring breakthroughs and the final declaration largely duplicated the provisions of earlier decisions that had failed to be implemented.¹² Nevertheless, the summit – after three years (since 2016)

⁸ cf. H. Stark, *La politique de défense de l’Allemagne: un tournant historique?*, “Politique étrangère” 2022, vol. 87, no. 3, p. 100.

⁹ *Ukraine – Déplacement de Jean-Yves Le Drian à Kiev (30–31 mai 2019)*, France Diplomatie, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/ukraine/evenements/article/ukraine-deplacement-de-jean-yves-le-drian-a-kiev-30-31-05-19> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

¹⁰ *Déclaration de M. Emmanuel Macron, Président de la République, sur les relations franco-russes et la situation internationale, à Brégançon le 19 août 2019*, Vie-publique.fr, 19 August 2019, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/269690-emmanuel-macron-19082019-france-russie> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

¹¹ cf. T. Gomart, *Russia is waging a colonial war in Ukraine under nuclear protection*, IFRI, 23 May 2022, <https://www.ifri.org/en/espace-media/lifri-medias/thomas-gomart-russia-waging-colonial-war-ukraine-under-nuclear-protection> [accessed: 04 March 2023].

¹² The summit reaffirmed the urgent need for a full and complete ceasefire (by the end of 2019), the development and implementation of a disengagement and disarmament plan, and the improvement of the functioning of the OSCE permanent special mission, as well as the holding of elections and reaching an agreement on the special status of some regions of the Donetsk

of no meetings at this level – should be assessed positively. The French leader assessed that ‘the construction of a new architecture of [European – TM] trust and security is ensured by regulating the conflict in eastern Ukraine and within the framework of the Minsk agreements,’¹³ while Chancellor Merkel argued for ‘overcoming the period of standstill.’¹⁴ The formulation in the final declaration of a ‘shared aspiration’ (N4) to shape a ‘sustainable and comprehensive architecture of trust and security in Europe, based on the OSCE principles’ was a ‘compliment’ to President Macron’s promoted concept of a new architecture of European security.¹⁵

In the following months, French and German diplomacy focused on the implementation of the summit decisions at the level of diplomatic advisors and talks within the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) for the settlement of the situation in south-eastern Ukraine (TCG – OSCE mission, Ukraine and Russia). However, Paris’s efforts, aimed at fully implementing all decisions taken at the December N4 summit, were met with reluctance on the Russian side to disengaging areas and disengaging forces and equipment (*disengagement*). Despite this, French diplomacy remained in favour of maintaining contact with Russia, which was confirmed on 15 February 2020 – during his speech at the Munich Security Conference – by President E. Macron, who stated that a strategic dialogue should be built with Russia, the aim of which should be, among other things, to jointly reflect on issues of security architecture and which should lead to its understanding of its role and responsibilities in this regard.¹⁶ Meanwhile, the linking of the Donbas issue to President Macron’s desire to build a new architecture of trust and security with Russia’s participation, caused disappointment on the Ukrainian side and a misunderstanding of the French efforts to resume dialogue with Russia, which did not agree to give Ukraine control over its eastern border.

and Lugansk oblasts (in accordance with the provisions of the Minsk agreements of 2015 and the “Steinmeier formula” of 2019, which provides for granting them a special status); see *Paris “Normandie” summit – Common agreed conclusions*, Élysée, 9 December 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/12/09/paris-normandie-summit.en> [accessed: 13 January 2023].

¹³ *Déclaration du Président de la République – Conférence de presse à l’issue du Sommet au format Normandie*, Élysée, 9 December 2019, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2019/12/09/sommet-de-paris-en-format-normandie> [accessed: 16 January 2023].

¹⁴ “Standstill now overcome”, The Federal Government, 10 December 2019, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/normandie-gipfel-in-paris-1705166> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

¹⁵ cf. S. Liechtenstein, ‘If we want to defend Europe’s interests, we have to engage with Russia’ [interview with Ambassador Pierre Vimont], Security and Human Rights Monitor, 14 April 2021, <https://www.shrmonitor.org/if-we-want-to-defend-europes-interests-we-have-to-engage-with-russia-dialogue-with-russia> [accessed: 13 March 2023].

¹⁶ *Discours à la Conférence de Munich sur la sécurité 2020*, Élysée, 15 February 2020, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2020/02/15/conference-sur-la-securite-de-munich-faire-revivre-leurope-comme-une-puissance-politique-strategique> [accessed: 15 January 2023].

The following months were characterised by a slowdown in the pace of the work of the Normandy Format, influenced, among other things, by a difference of opinion between Kiev and Moscow as to the organisation of local elections in the Donbas and its status, and the transfer of control over the Ukrainian-Russian border. The Russian obstruction of the negotiation process resulted from demands for direct talks between the authorities in Kyiv and the separatists, as well as accusations from the Ukrainian side regarding the failure to comply with the arrangements contained in the Minsk agreements regarding the special status of some regions (of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts).¹⁷ The movements of the Russian armed forces generated escalation and the main achievement of the Paris Summit regarding the ceasefire was repeatedly violated.¹⁸

On 16 April 2021, President V. Zelenskyy visited Paris. During the visit, President Macron called on Russia to ‘de-escalate tensions,’ reaffirming the determination to fully implement the Minsk agreements and a lasting political settlement of the conflict.¹⁹ Thus, the dual-track nature of the French diplomacy’s actions is noteworthy: on the one hand, the Élysée Palace strongly supported Ukraine for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in the Donbas; on the other, it kept open channels of dialogue with the Kremlin (Quadriga meeting, i.e., a joint meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs and national defence of the two countries on 12 November 2021 in Paris), rejecting Ukraine’s aspirations for EU accession.²⁰ Indeed, Russia remained an important partner for France on major issues on the global agenda (Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Libya, Yemen, and Central African Republic).

¹⁷ While Kyiv assumed that the status of the Donetsk and Lugansk oblasts would be regulated by a special law as part of the decentralisation reform and that free elections would be held after the withdrawal of troops and taking control of these regions, Russia and the separatists demanded appropriate provisions in the constitution on autonomy.

¹⁸ *Statement by Mr. Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs (9 April 2021)*, France Diplomacy, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/ukraine/news/article/ukraine-statement-by-mr-jean-yves-le-drian-minister-for-europe-and-foreign> [accessed: 25 February 2023].

¹⁹ G. Segers, *French President Emmanuel Macron says international community must draw “clear red lines” with Russia*, CBS News, 17 April 2021, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-says-international-community-must-draw-clear-red-lines-with-russia> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

²⁰ *Entretien de M. Clément Beaune, secrétaire d’Etat aux affaires européennes, avec Radio J le 15 avril 2021, sur l’Union européenne face à l’épidémie de Covid-19, les relations avec la Turquie et la construction européenne*, Vie-publique.fr, 15 avril 2021, <https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/279512-entretien-clement-beaune-15042021-union-europeenne> [accessed: 15 February 2023]; cf. T. Chopin, Ch. Lequesne, *The European Union in a continent at war*, “Politique étrangère” 2022, vol. 87, no. 3, p. 78; M. Le Drian et Mme Parly reçoivent leurs homologues russes, La France dans l’UE, 12 November 2021, <https://ue.delegfrance.org/m-le-drian-et-mme-parly-recoivent> [accessed: 15 February 2023].

Failure of the N4's efforts to implement the Minsk agreements

With the deployment of Russian troops along the Russian-Ukrainian border at the turn of 2022, France took firm action, and the position of French diplomacy was clearly presented by the Minister of Foreign Affairs before the National Assembly of the French Republic on 15 December 2021. In his speech, Le Drian indicated that France took seriously Russia's threats of a possible violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and warned that this would entail 'massive strategic consequences'.²¹ The French minister also indicated that the N4 talks should be resumed with the aim of a ceasefire and the implementation of humanitarian measures. To this end, a meeting of diplomatic advisors to the N4 leaders was held in Paris at the end of January 2022 (26.01.2022), while the French President's special envoy, Pierre Vimont, went to Moscow.²² All the efforts made by French diplomacy did not bring the expected results in view of the 'game of appearances' that was already being played by Vladimir Putin at that time.

On 7–8 February 2022, the President of France (who was then also acting as President of the Council of the EU) visited Moscow and then Kiev. The visit was primarily aimed at obtaining a gesture of de-escalation from the two conflicting parties.²³ Unfortunately, these efforts did not result in a return to the talks within the Normandy Format. This increased the disappointment of the French president, who did not get what he was seeking, i.e., the withdrawal of the tens of thousands of Russian troops (135,000) gathered on the border with Ukraine.²⁴ In response, President Macron condemned the Russian military invasion of Ukraine (24 February 2022) and warned Russia about the uncompromising response of France and announced support to the authorities in Kiev in the form of supplies of military

²¹ *Ukraine: la Russie subira des «conséquences stratégiques massives» en cas d'attaque, avertit Paris*, Le Figaro, 15 December 2021, <https://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/ukraine-la-russie-subira-des-consequences-strategiques-massives-en-cas-d-attaque-avertit-paris-20211215> [accessed: 15 March 2023].

²² *Déclaration des conseillers des chefs d'État et de gouvernement du format Normandie*, Élysée, 26 January 2022, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2022/01/26/declaration-des-conseillers-des-chefs-detat-et-de-gouvernement-du-format-normandie>; *Ukraine: Emmanuel Macron va proposer un «chemin de désescalade» à Vladimir Poutine*, TF1 Info 24 January 2022, <https://www.tf1info.fr/international/crise-ukraine-russie-emmanuel-macron-va-proposer-un-chemin-de-desescalade-a-vladimir-poutine-2208096.html> [accessed: 16 February 2023].

²³ *Emmanuel Macron prône «la désescalade» à Moscou et à Kiev*, Le Monde, 08 February 2022, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/video/2022/02/08/video-a-moscou-et-kiev-emmanuel-macron-prone-la-desescalade_6112841_3210.html [accessed: 23 February 2023].

²⁴ Moreover, Macron's visit to Moscow was part of the electoral calendar of the upcoming presidential elections in France and was certainly aimed at weakening the far-right political party (National Rally) and his main opponent, M. Le Pen, who enjoyed the support of the Kremlin.

defensive equipment and readiness to deploy additional units on NATO's eastern flank (the Baltic states).²⁵

Conclusions

- Since 2015, France (together with Germany) has been involved in the process of mediation and settlement of the conflict in the Donbas within the Normandy Format (N4) and the implementation of the Minsk agreements. French diplomacy has repeatedly stressed the integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, while pointing out the need to develop guarantees for its security that would be compatible with the postulates made by Russia. In the opinion of Paris, the progressive decomposition and erosion of the international deal, as well as the persistent tensions and the *status quo* in relations with the Kremlin authorities, necessitated the need for dialogue with Russia – from the perspective of Paris, an important interlocutor in many areas of the international agenda (Syria, Libya, Ukraine, Sahel). At the same time, France also tried to use the Normandy Format and direct Macron-Putin communication channels to strengthen its own position on the international arena.
- President Macron, striving to tighten direct political dialogue with Moscow, presented on the European arena an initiative to build a 'new architecture of security in Europe' with Russia's participation. This is because he believed that confrontation with Russia would condemn the EU to political and military dependence on the United States. Therefore, the French leader made efforts to convince his most sceptical partners (Poland, the Baltic States, Sweden, Romania) to this idea. However, the desire to normalise relations with Russia, in the absence of tools to put pressure on the Kremlin authorities, meant that Paris also exerted pressure on Kiev to obtain concessions in the ongoing negotiations of the N4. This leads to the conclusion that the French 'Eastern Policy' towards Russia was unable to find the effective way between Ukrainian building aspirations and Russian interests in the Europe.
- French diplomacy declared its readiness to work out a solution that would offer guarantees to all parties in the conflict, both Ukraine (security guarantees) and Russia (hold up NATO eastern enlargement). However, the restrained tone of Paris and Berlin towards Moscow and the search for a compromise did not bring any lasting commitment from V. Putin and did not have a restraining effect on the Kremlin's aggressive rhetoric. In neither capital it was expected that the Russian leader would reject the offer of a peaceful settlement of the conflict. This

²⁵ *Macron responds: 'without weakness' to Russia's 'act of war'*, RFI, 24 February 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/france/20220224-macron-responds-without-weakness-to-russia-s-act-of-war> [accessed: 13 February 2023].

happened because, from the very beginning, the most important thing for Putin has been the implementation of Russia's geostrategic goals, i.e., freezing the *status quo* in the post-Soviet space by 'absorbing' Ukraine and keeping it within Russia's sphere of influence.

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*France towards the annexation of Crimea and the conflict
in the Donbas between 2014 and 2022*

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse France's actions in relation to the war in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022, based on three pillars: 1) providing support for Ukraine (cease-fire and cessation of military activities); 2) coordinating actions at the international level (TCG, UN, OSCE); 3) maintaining open channels of dialogue with Russia (Macron-Putin) as a pathway to diplomatic solutions. The paper is an attempt at assessing whether and to what extent the joint 'agenda of trust and security' proposed to Moscow by the President of France has influenced the policy of 'de-escalation' of the conflict and the reduction of Russia's neo-imperial ambitions. What were the effects of the dialogue within the so-called Normandy Format and to what extent did it influence the implementation of the Minsk agreements? The author presents the conclusion that from the very beginning, the goal for Russia has not been so much to settle the conflict in the Donbas and restore Ukraine's territorial integrity, but to permanently block Kiev's aspirations for EU accession and to keep Ukraine within Russia's sphere of influence. The references of the paper include official documents, statements from the main decision-making centres (the Élysée Palace, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of France), recognised foreign policy journals ("Politique étrangère"), as well as analyses and studies (French Institute of International Relations, IFRI).

Keywords: France, Normandy format, conflict, Donbas, diplomacy