Twitter Thread by Daniel Szeligowski

Daniel Szeligowski
@dszeligowski

[THREAD] With the first anniversary of the Normandy Summit in Paris approaching, expires the deadline for the ultimatum set by Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky regarding further negotiations with Russia on the situation in Donbas



Spring this year, Zelensky told the Guardian he gave a 1-year deadline from Paris summit to find a breakthrough. The deadline thus expires on Wednesday, 9 XII. According to Zelensky, 2-3 scenarios were ready in case of withdrawal from talks with Russia

https://t.co/zj3lUm9ePF

In fact, National Security and Defence Council prepared as much as 5 scenarios for president Zelensky (no details were given). Before the Paris Summit, the first one - "Plan A" - was approved for implementation, with the aforementioned one-year deadline

https://t.co/PB3dogvirX

Over the last 12 months, Zelensky expressed clearly his readiness to make concessions towards Russia. Sometimes these concessions were to be so far-reaching that Angela Merkel herself held him back, as was the case with "Consultative Council", which fortunately never materialised

Yet Russia pushed further with new demands. In response to RU accusations of breaking the ceasefire, Ukraine agreed for inspection of its troops at the frontline, but RU demanded the inspection's territorial scope be extended & a protocol signed, so the inspection was cancelled

Particularly painful for Zelensky was lack of progress in the talks on the prisoners exchange. While the deal in Paris was again to exchange 'all for all', this never happened in practice. First, in December last year, around 200 people were exchanged

https://t.co/LJYUoy2knR

Then, in April, 34 people were exchanged. Putin acknowledged, not without a valid reason, that prisoners exchange is Zelensky's Achilles' heel (he cares too much about it) and suspended talks, making them conditional on Ukrainian political concessions

https://t.co/USRKTmXAkx

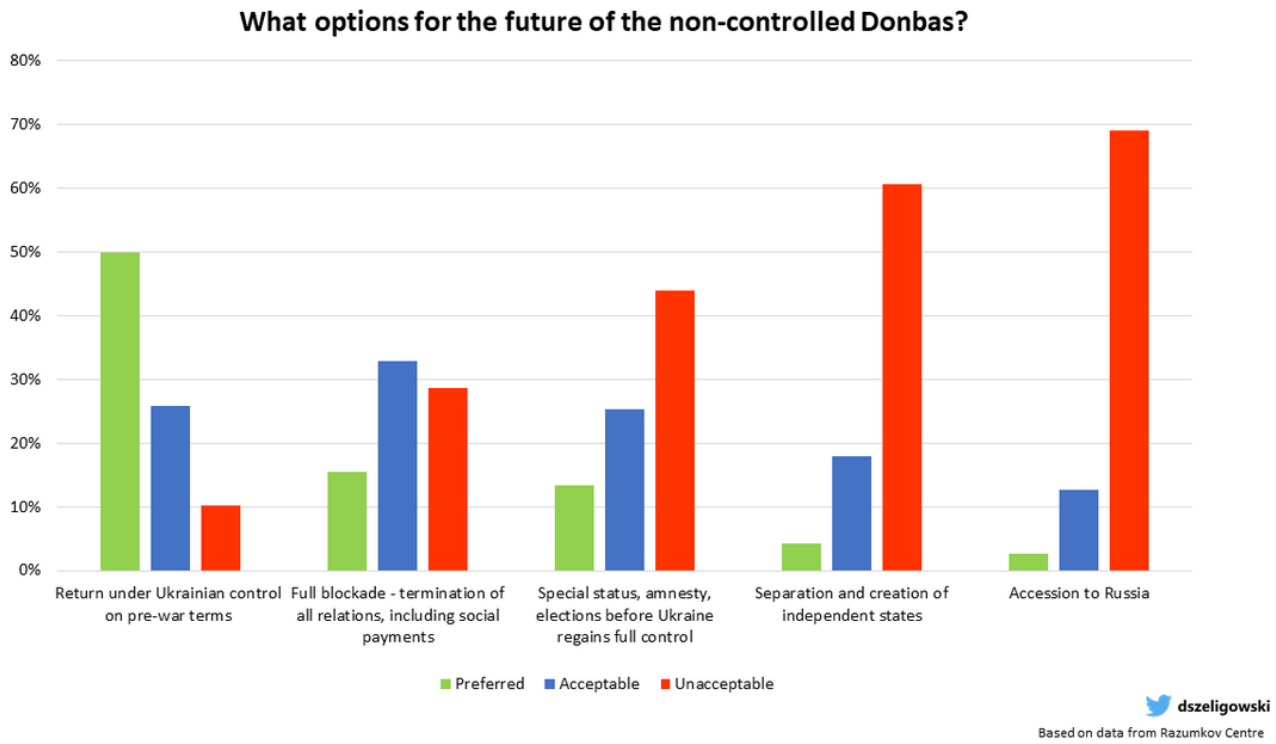
The key Russian demand for Ukraine is to amend the constitution in a way that the "special status" of Donbas is included in its provisions. According to Der Spiegel, the Russian delegation required Ukraine to submit draft amendments by 6 July this year

https://t.co/KbeTqVOqRM

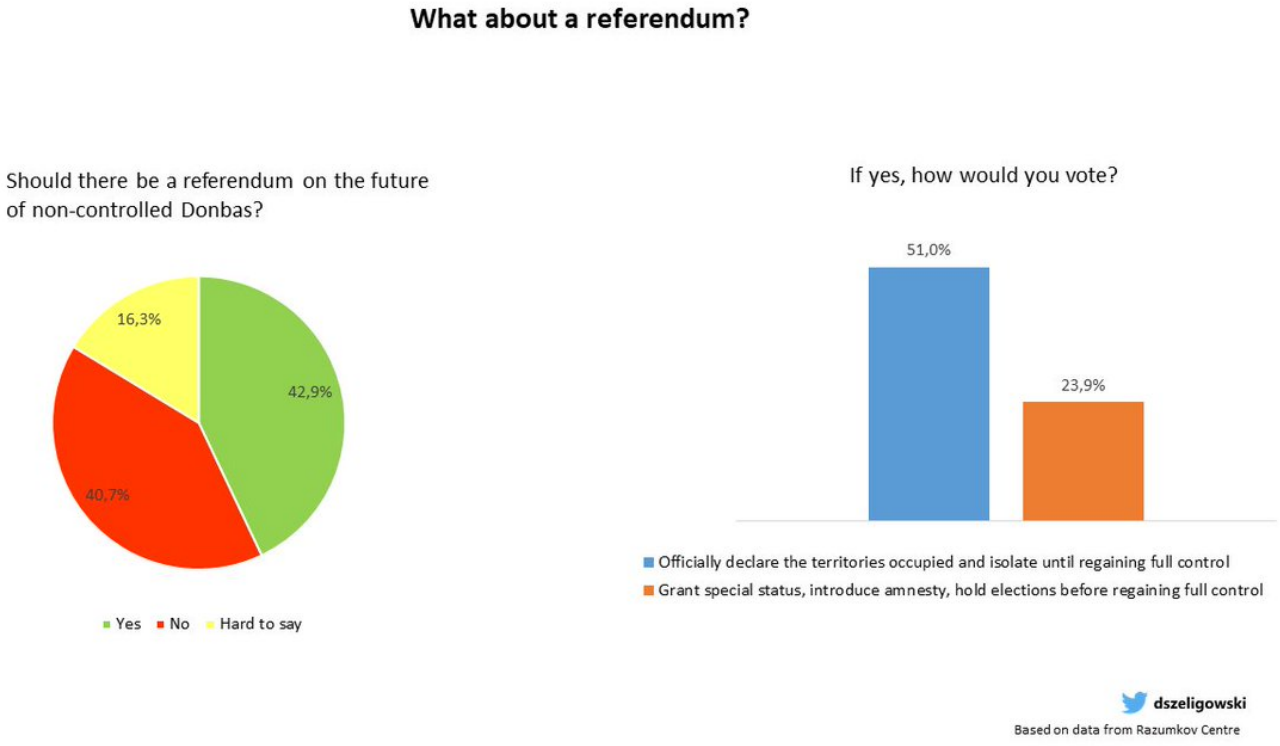
Ukraine has not complied with Russian demands, ruling out the possibility of any constitutional changes. As a result, the Normandy format meeting of political advisors (Berlin, 4 July) took place in a tense atmosphere. The talks lasted for over 10 hours

https://t.co/xecznsPXSe

Although the constitutional changes stem directly from the Minsk Agreements, their implementation in Ukraine would be tantamount to political suicide. Ukrainian society allows for two options only - regaining full control over the occupied Donbas or isolating these territories



If the referendum was held, half of the Ukrainians would vote for the official recognition of the Russian-controlled part of Donbas as the occupied territory, and for the full isolation of these areas until Ukraine regains control



Faced with Ukrainian 'NO', Russia once again blackmailed Normandy format members. Dmitry Kozak sent to Chancellor Merkel's advisor a peculiar letter, full of irony, in which he put into question the sense of further talks between the N4 political advisors

https://t.co/HF9I8HM7h9

The Ukrainian authorities therefore started talking more loudly about the need to revise the Minsk agreements. Leonid Kravchuk, head of the Ukrainian delegation for talks in Minsk, underlined a way out of this situation must be found at the highest level

https://t.co/850JjPxYfX

Russia took advantage of the Ukrainian position and came up with a new, more detailed version of the Minsk agreements, providing for "special status" for Donbas until 2050. Formally, the document was put forward by "the republics" within TCG in Minsk

https://t.co/q0C6LrsNxB

Giving credit where it is due, it was a smart move of Russia. The document was written in such a way that it was unacceptable to Ukraine. The Ukrainian delegation would therefore have had to reject it, although Kyiv had only just requested a revision of the Minsk agreements

Ukraine came out of this situation in a different way. Kyiv demanded that Russia puts forward its own plan, rightly pointing out that "the republics" are not formally part of the Trilateral Contact Group in Minsk, so their proposal cannot be considered

https://t.co/8HaZxlj4MC

Still, Ukraine was only buying some time. Having worked out the details, the Ukrainian delegation presented its own plan how to move the negotiations forward. As expected, however, Russia rejected it as incompatible with the Minsk agreements

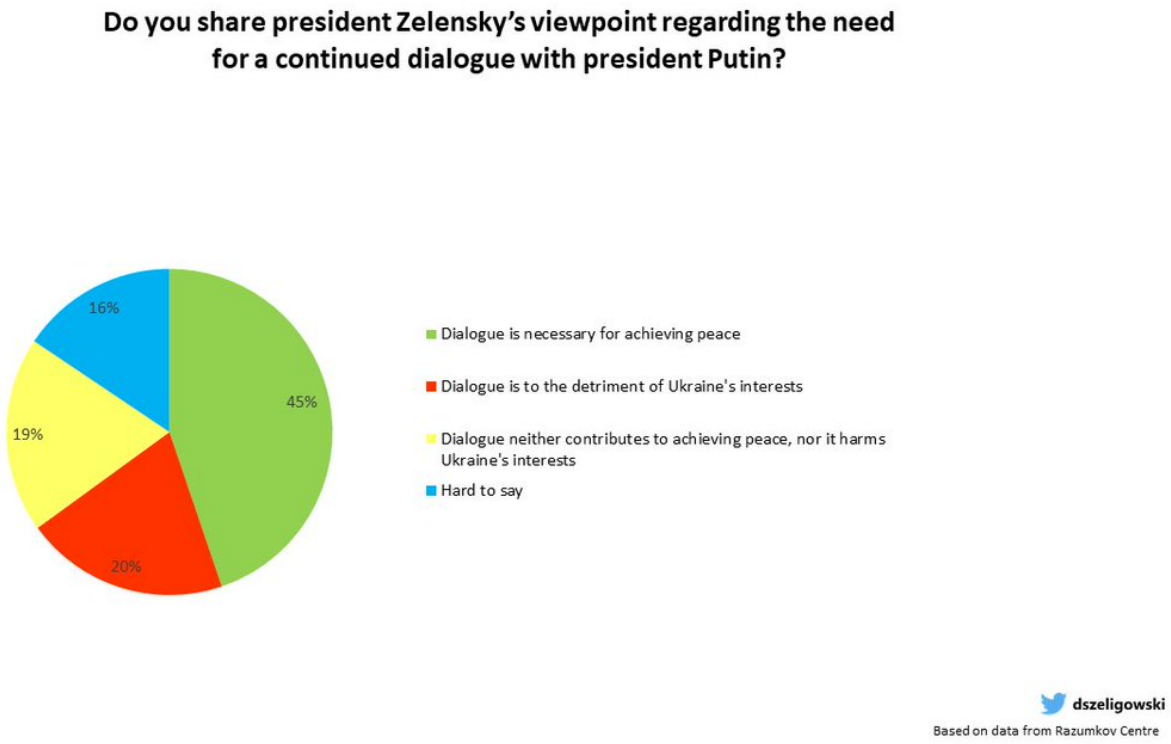
https://t.co/1jGhzb6gjZ

This brings us to November/December. The negotiations both within Normandy Format and Trilateral Contact Group are still locked in an impasse. But time is running out, and the "Plan A", adopted by the Ukraine's NSDC before the Paris summit, expires in a few days' time

In an interview given at the end of November, NSDC's secretary Danilov confirmed the preparations for a review of the situation in Donbas were ongoing. Soon therefore a decision will be taken on further talks between Ukraine and Russia

https://t.co/rzMxdNrHTI

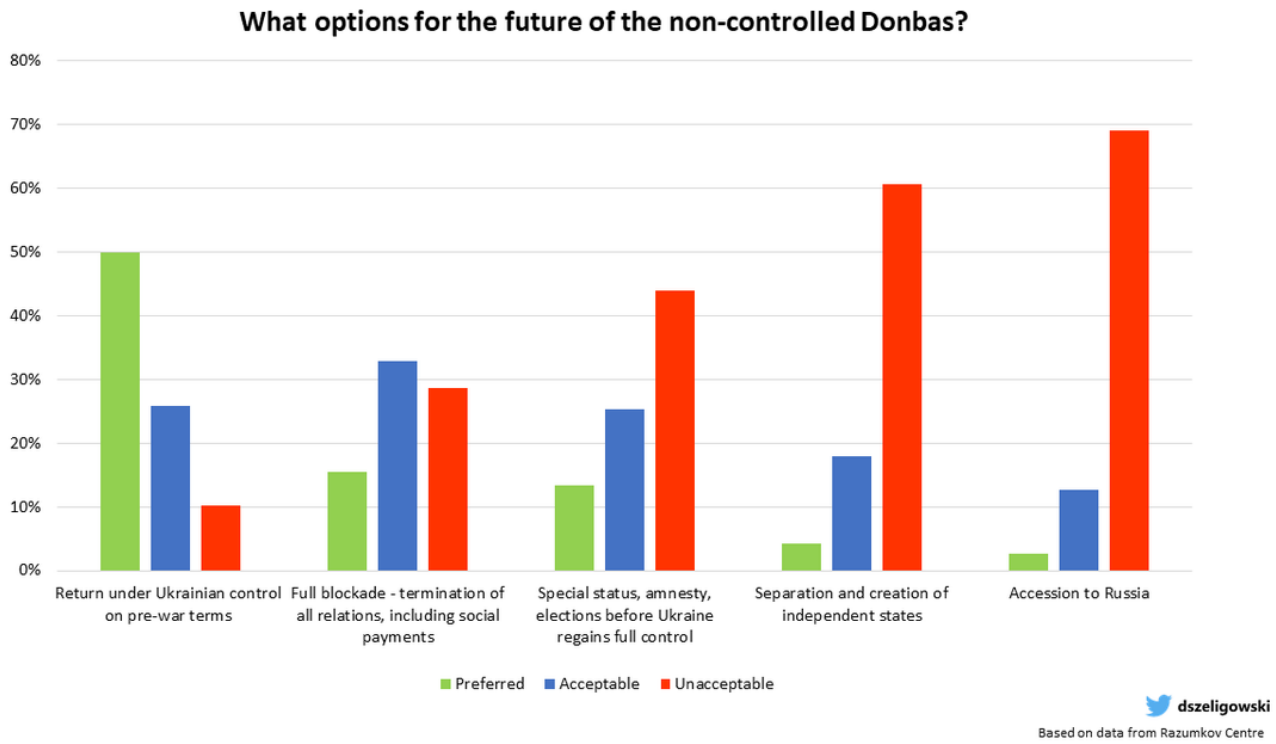
Should negotiations with Russia be continued? Ukrainian society is divided on this particular issue, although supporters of further dialogue prevail



Key question - what if Ukraine moves away from talks with Russia? The alternative scenarios are probably: to deploy the UN peacekeeping mission, temporarily freeze the talks and resettle the population, but possibly also to give up non-controlled Donbas

https://t.co/1bWyuMk8oQ

The most likely alternative option is to temporarily freeze the negotiations and fully isolate the Russian-controlled territories, given that such a scenario would get social approval



Unlikely that anyone in power would speak up about giving up the occupied Donbas. This scenario was recently mentioned by Vadym Prystayko, former MFA, now an ambassador in the UK, but the Ukrainian MFA quickly dissasociated itself from his words

https://t.co/waW4fDVYMN

Painful as it is, the question of regaining control over Donbas is relevant. Ukraine's 2020 Oscar nominee, "Atlantis", raises this question powerfully, depicting Donbas as the region so much destroyed by the ongoing war that it is no longer habitable

https://t.co/5hEkdMKOFi

What decision will President Zelensky make? In the interview with the Guardian, he said he was not going to spend his entire presidency trying to reach a deal with Russia. We will soon find out whether he was serious or just bluffing [END]