

# BATTLE FOR UKRAINE

April 2014

Ever since President Yanukovich walked away from a historic deal with the European Union in favor of closer ties with Russia, Ukraine has been embroiled in a seemingly unending conflict, but Ukrainians are not the only ones entangled in the issues. Russian troops have occupied Crimea ostensibly to support Crimea's separatist goals while Western countries have decried Russia's actions as an illegal violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity. Some contend the sharp increase in tensions are reminiscent of the Cold War. What are the arguments surrounding Ukraine's alignment with the EU versus Russia and what are the respective interests involved?

## Putin's Russia: Reestablishing Political Dominance

Russian President Vladimir Putin had once decried the collapse of the Soviet Union as the "greatest geopolitical tragedy" of the 20th century. Accordingly, many experts contend that Putin's move to occupy Crimea in southeastern Ukraine is part of an overarching goal to reestablish Russian dominance in former Soviet states and create a Eurasian Union on par with the European Union.

Under the guise of protecting the "legitimate interests of the population of Crimea," Russian troops rolled into Crimea on February 28 and parliament approved military intervention a few days later. Beyond potentially returning Crimea to Russian sovereignty—which would protect Russia's right to maintain the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea—analysts contend Putin hopes to destabilize pro-Russia regions of southern and eastern Ukraine to the degree of forcing Kiev to establish a new form of government:



namely, a federation. Federalization would give pro-Russian regions significant leverage over crucial decisions (such as EU integration), thus making Ukraine more dependent on its eastern neighbor.

Even if the conflict in Crimea is contained to the peninsula, it may not be against Putin's interests for Crimea to remain in international law limbo similar to other "frozen conflicts" such as Moldova and Georgia—where Russia plays a major role in breakaway territories that do not recognize their respective central governments.

## The European Union and the West: Freedom and Free Trade

Just as instability could play into Russia's interests, a stable, politically and economically sound Ukraine is very much in the interests of the EU and the US. While Western leaders have spoken of a desire for Ukrainians to determine their own destiny and lauded the movement which ousted pro-Russian President Yanukovich as a reflection of the people's voice, between the lines are the interests of trade and energy.

The EU is Ukraine's second largest trading partner. It exports over \$20 billion in goods to Ukraine per year and Ukraine, one of the world's largest growers of wheat and corn, exports to many EU countries. Distance



from Russia could open Ukrainian markets to increased European trade. This is one major reason the EU continued negotiations with Ukraine's interim government for a free-trade agreement despite unresolved tensions.

Some experts say even more crucial than Ukrainian markets is gas. Currently, Ukraine is heavily reliant on Russian oil and gas giant, Gazprom. Disrupting that reliance could create an opening for the US and EU to move in with their own exports, as these countries are discovering new domestic extraction methods (e.g. hydraulic fracturing). Since several European countries also rely on supply from Gazprom and many pipelines run through Ukraine, breaking Ukrainian dependence could also lead to breaking European dependence. This could be a huge windfall for the US.

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- National Capital (2,650,000 in 2004)
  - over 1,000,000
  - over 500,000
  - over 100,000
  - over 25,000
  - other main city
  - Capital of province (Oblast)
- Ukrainian provinces (Oblast) have the name of the province in their names.

## UKRAINE'S INTERNAL DIVISIONS

Similar to former colonial states, the current borders of Ukraine cut across ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures with little consideration of regional or demographic similarities. Indeed, it wasn't until the 20th century under Soviet rule that Ukraine become a consolidated whole; the region which is the modern state of Ukraine has historically been settled and ruled by various powers which ultimately shaped cultural, linguistic and religious affinities seen today.

The western regions of Ukraine, where people tend to lean toward European integration and pro-West

politicians, became part of the Soviet Union only after the end of WWII. Previously, this region was governed by different Western powers such as Poland, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Czechoslovakia. The eastern regions, on the other hand, where most people support pro-Russia policies, came under Russian Imperial rule much earlier: from the late 17th century. Beginning in the 20th century, many areas in the east were settled by ethnic Russians following Soviet ethnic cleansing.

Crimea, the major hotspot for current tensions, was also resettled by ethnic

Russians after Stalin forcibly relocated the entire indigenous population of ethnic Turks (the Tartars) to Central Asia. Many Tartars have since returned and represent a strong anti-Russia faction, but they remain the minority in Crimea. According to public opinion polls, around 15 percent of Crimeans consider themselves as "Soviet people" and only 40 percent consider Ukraine as their homeland. Much of this history contributes to the overwhelming support among Crimeans to separate from Ukraine and be annexed by Russia.

UKRAINE

0 km 45 90 135 km