



CANADIAN FRIENDS OF UKRAINE
AMIS CANADIENS DE L'UKRAINE
КАНАДСЬКЕ ТОВАРИСТВО ПРИЯТЕЛІВ УКРАЇНИ

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POLICY BRIEF ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN UKRAINE

Presented to: The Rt. Hon. Stephen Harper
Prime Minister of Canada

Background

In reaction to President Viktor Yanukovych's withdrawal from a planned association agreement with the European Union and subsequent imposition of draconian laws that criminalize demonstrations, Ukraine's pro-democracy uprising has intensified and become a nation-wide movement.

To date, the Yanukovych regime, propped up by the Kremlin, has made only token gestures to appease intensifying public opposition.

Although Prime Minister Mykola Azarov and his government have resigned, a politically discredited President Yanukovych, still retains the right to appoint the next Premier and Cabinet.

Ukraine's Parliament refuses to pass an unconditional amnesty for those innocent civilians arrested and detained over the past few weeks.

Official efforts to find countless students and protestors who have disappeared and feared dead, are dismal. Efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the torture and murder of pro-democracy activists are futile.

Despite the repeal of the anti-protest legislation, Ukraine's justice system remains a corrupt and repressive weapon in the hands of government officials. The continued incarceration of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, is a prime example.

For all the above reasons, as countless opinion polls have indicated, the participants of Ukraine's nationwide protests have vowed to remain on the streets until President Yanukovych resigns.

The Russia Factor

Vladislav Surkov, the former First Deputy to the Head of the Russian Presidential Administration under Putin, and the man responsible for using repressive measures to crush a fledgling pro-democratic opposition in Russia, has now been tasked with overseeing relations with Ukraine. Human rights watch dogs and Ukraine's opposition leaders believe that the Kremlin is tacitly facilitating the same type of crackdown in Ukraine.

In December of 2013, Vladimir Putin tightened his grip over Russia's media, by dismantling the country's state news agency. As a result of the Kremlin's media clampdown, RIA Novosti and the international radio station Voice of Russia were abolished.

At the same time, the Russian government is now spending over \$350 million dollars annually on its state-run English-language propaganda news channel known as *Russia Today*, which broadcasts internationally, under the name RT. Former KGB officer Konstantin Preobrazhensky has described the channel as “a part of the Russian industry of misinformation and manipulation.”

RT broadcasts in Canada and has featured inflammatory reports on recent events in Ukraine. These included reporters and commentators who supported the need to use live ammunition by paramilitary officers to shoot protestors in Ukraine; who called EuroMaidan leaders extremists and terrorists; and accused western governments of instigating and financing civil war in Ukraine.

In Brussels recently, at the EU-Russia Summit, Vladimir Putin scolded western leaders for meddling in Ukraine's internal affairs, yet no mention was made of Russian intervention in Ukraine. There is mounting evidence that Russian Special Operation Forces, including the notorious Alpha Units, have been allowed to infiltrate and operate in Ukraine, kidnapping injured protestors from hospitals, torturing innocent civilians, and murdering rally organizers and participants.

On the eve of the Sochi Games, Russian NGO's have reported that they are facing the strongest clampdown on the media and civil society organizations, since the fall of the Soviet Union. While Russia's government has tried to position itself on the international stage as a peacemaker and negotiator on issues related to Iran and Syria, world leaders have failed to hold Putin to account for his misdeeds in his own country and neighbouring backyard. Russia's political and economic blackmail of and covert paramilitary operations in Ukraine, have the potential for profoundly destabilizing Ukraine, and ultimately, Europe.

Upholding Ukrainian independence and democracy is of vital interest, not only to Ukrainians, but the European family of countries. An authoritarian Russia that reintegrates Ukraine would possess the power to bully and intimidate Europe for decades.

Recommendations

GIVEN Canada's historic relationship with Ukraine and the shared values on which the Canada-Ukraine *Road Map* was founded in 2009;

GIVEN Ukraine's important geo-political position in Europe and the far-reaching global impact of a weakened Ukrainian democracy and potential loss of Ukraine as a strategic European partner;

GIVEN Canada's principled stance in defense of Ukrainian independence and democracy, exemplified by the recent introduction of targeted travel bans on Ukrainian officials deemed responsible for the crackdown on Ukrainian civilians;

GIVEN the fact that Ukraine's current President and outgoing government are no longer capable of legitimately governing Ukraine;

GIVEN the ongoing efforts of Russia to gain control of Ukraine's energy sector, strategic resources, trade partnerships, security services, military sector, and political processes;

We submit that

Canada, in coordination with the US and its European partners, including Austria, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, and the UK, identify assets held abroad by Ukrainian and Russian officials linked to repression and human rights abuses, and temporarily freeze access to these accounts;

Canada and its US and European partners support the call for President Yanukovich's resignation, the creation of a transitional government by Ukraine's opposition, followed by new Presidential elections.

Canada encourage the G-20 nations to jointly hold Russia to account by insisting that Russia cease its economic blackmail, political pressure, and covert operations in Ukraine;

Canadian Friends of Ukraine, in cooperation with other Canadian NGO's, media representatives, and Canadian television viewers at large, plan to file a complaint with the CRTC against the Russian state-owned "RT" channel whose broadcasts are carried by cable companies in Canada and whose programming content is inflammatory, filled with factual misrepresentations, hate speech, and disinformation.

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