

Blame Game Over Ukraine And Crimea's Status

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From the position of his country's best interests, ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych had valid reasons for not signing the European Union Association Agreement (EU AA). One need not be a Yanukovych supporter to see the reasoning behind this opinion. This last thought relates to Yanukovych's shortcomings as a democratically elected president. At the same time, legitimate issue can be taken with how some of the opposition to him have carried on, before and after he left Kiev.

In the lead up to Yanukovych not signing the EU AA, he did not do an effective job in communicating the reservations over that accord, from the perspective of Ukraine's best interests. The \$15 billion dollar Russian aid offer to Ukraine came around the time that Yanukovych began to increasingly hedge on the EU AA.

The robust offer from Russia was something that Yanukovych could not so easily reject. From the position of its interests, the Kremlin wants to be assured as much as possible that any assistance it gives to Ukraine is not counterproductive. The EU has revealed a similar mindset from its vantage point. Prior to the escalated violence in Kiev, Yanukovych and the Russian government supported three way (Russian, Ukrainian and EU) talks, for the purpose of reaching a mutually agreed regimen for improving Ukraine's economy. With a zero sum game attitude, the EU rejected this proposal.

The EU and American government made it a point to underscore their preference for Ukraine to sign the EU AA. A good portion of Ukraine's population was disenchanted with Yanukovych, regardless of whether or not he signed that accord.

The full text of the EU AA with Ukraine is not so readily accessible. An [online version](#) has this disclaimer: "Please note that the documents published on this website are only for information purposes. The official version of the Association Agreement - once signed - will be published in the Official Journal of the European Union. The texts are capable of neither conferring any rights nor creating any legally binding obligations of public international law."

After his ouster, Yanukovych noted the EU AA would have required Ukraine to change the width of its railroad tracks to conform with Western standards - an aspect that was previously mentioned by some other sources I came across. The EU AA presented to Yanukovych, put the onus on Ukraine to undergo a series of sharp changes, with no specified aid package and date for when that nation could expect full EU membership. There is also the question mark of how willing that organization wants to actually take in Ukraine?

Yanukovych's refusal to sign the EU AA did not see him pledge a move towards joining the Customs Union, involving Russia and some other former Soviet republics. He ideally sought a renegotiated arrangement with the EU, when he accepted the generous Russian aid

package, which Brussels did not match.

Yanukovych did not violate the February 21 accord, which had him in a coalition government, with his opposition until an election this coming December. Events show that he had good reason to flee Kiev. The group now influencing Kiev's Rada declared that he is wanted for mass murder. In contrast, little, if any effort is made to seek justice against those who engaged in fatal violence from the anti-Yanukovych side. There is a reasoned basis to [question the legitimacy](#) of the group in the Rada who have gone against Yanukovych – a point which serves to offset the second guessing of the changed political process in Crimea.

The public showing of Yanukovych's lavish mansion is done to highlight corruption in a country where many struggle economically. What would a similar display reveal of the oligarchs, who have since been appointed to head some areas in Ukraine?

In a not so distant PBS NewsHour segment, Adrian Karatnycky said that high level political success in Ukraine is greatly determined by the support and influence of the country's oligarchs. Agree, disagree, or partially agree, Sergey Glazyev's National Interest article of this past December 29-30 "[The Mania of Ukraine's Euromaidan](#)", delves into the balancing act that the Ukrainian oligarchs at large play between their interests with Russia and the EU. As a follow-up, Peter Lee's February 25 Counterpunch piece "[The EU Played Hardball Against Ukraine...and the EU](#)", discusses (among other things) how a noticeable and influential number in Yanukovych's [Party of Regions](#) dropped their support of him, in a getting [flipped](#) kind of way.

Yanukovych faced a tough situation in Ukraine. The people who have put themselves in Yanukovych's role are now faced with his problems. Under difficult circumstances, it is supremely imprudent to engage (in one form or the other) in behavior which unnecessarily alienates a good portion of the population.

In 1954, Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea from Russia to Ukraine, at a time when the two republics were part of the same nation. This changeover was officially done to highlight the signing of a treaty in 1654 which (at the time) reunited Russia with much of Ukraine. (Modern day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus are descended from Rus.) Upon the Soviet breakup, there have been periodic rumblings in Crimea to seek independence from Ukraine. This desire was offset with that territory having a degree of autonomy, while feeling a relative enough ease with the Ukrainian government.

At a [press conference](#) after Yanukovych's ouster, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed support for Ukraine maintaining its Communist drawn boundaries as an independent state. The Kremlin's seeming drift from this position seems to be the result of further thinking about what has become evident in Kiev's Rada (action that has been characterized as extra constitutional and coup like), Ukraine's overall situation and the popular sentiment in Crimea. As a matter of precedent, Putin has referred to the way Kosovo's separation from Serbia is advocated. There is also Turkey's ongoing military presence in northern Cyprus, inclusive of Turkish recognition of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus".

Reasonable concern has been raised over what has happened in Ukraine since Yanukovych's ouster. The majority of people who protested in Kiev are not extreme nationalists. Yet, the clout of the nationalist anti-Russian leaning Svoboda and Right Sector parties is disproportionate. Justin Raimondo's March 5 Antiwar.com article "[A Monster](#)

[Reawakens: The Rise of Ukrainian Fascism](#)” and Gary Leupp’s March 10 Counterpunch piece [“Ukraine: The Sovereignty Argument, and the Real Problem of Fascism”](#), mention the appointments given to Svoboda and Right Sector representatives. (Respectfully put and without meaning to digress, the referencing of these two articles does not necessarily reflect a complete agreement with everything said in them.)

Another opinion claims that the Svoboda and Right Sector presence have a limited influence. Following Yanukovich’s ouster, there are conflicting realities to that view. These instances include the scrapping of a law safeguarding Russian and other minority language rights (later [reversed](#), after events in Crimea unfolded), the destruction of a monument, honoring Russian General Mikhail Kutuzov and the armed policing position of individuals associated with the minority extremists.

[I recently noted](#) that the removal of the Kutuzov monument is something which has been advocated by the Svoboda party. Kutuzov defeated Napoleon’s forces, at a time when the ancestors of present day Ukrainians (Habsburg ruled western Ukrainians included) were mostly supportive of Russia, in its war with France and its allies.

Preventive measures have been undertaken in Crimea to better ensure against the kind of fatal violence that occurred in Kiev. For now, it remains unclear whether Russia will definitely approve taking in Crimea. If not, the northern Cyprus situation will appear as being especially similar (though by no means exact), when comparing other contemporary territorial disagreements.

The leading Western nations have pointedly expressed disapproval with Crimea becoming reunited with Russia. This opposition has included an emphasis that a changed territorial status should be done gradually. The Kremlin can delay a decision on taking in Crimea. This stance serves to quite possibly decrease Western opposition to Russia.

Of some relationship, Pridnestrovia (also known as Transdnestr and closely related spellings) and South Ossetia held referendums, favoring the idea of rejoining Russia. To date, Moscow recognizes South Ossetia’s independence, as a territory which is not a part of Russia. The Kremlin gives assistance to Pridnestrovia, without having formally recognized its declared independence.

Within the Western mass media commentariat, there is the perception that a Crimea cutoff from Ukraine will serve to limit pro-Russian sentiment in that former Soviet republic. Contrary to that thought, the enhanced pro-Russian activism in Crimea, might encourage a bolder activity, among the other Russian speaking/pro-Russian elements in the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

In turn, some Ukrainians who are not necessarily such great Russophiles might come around to realizing the limits of Western assistance, the Russian option as a workable course and the practicality of limiting the preferences of Svoboda and the Right Sector. As has been stated in Western mass media, Ukraine means more to Russia than the West.

There is also the possibility that the zero sum game thinking, which has been evident in the West, might eventually decrease, in a more pragmatic and less confrontational manner, towards Russia and its constructively critical supporters, whose views have been underrepresented in English language mass media.

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In addition to *Eurasia Review* and *Global Research*, his commentary has appeared in the *Action Ukraine Report*, *American Chronicle*, *American Thinker*, *Counterpunch*, *De-Construct.net*, *Eurasian Home*, *Foreign Policy Journal*, *Johnson's Russia List*, *Russia Blog*, *Serbianna*, *Siberian Light*, *The New York Times* and *The Tiraspol Times*.

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