

## Russian War in Ukraine

### The Global Political Trend and Those Affected by It

*by Stepan Nasada*

All is quiet where the wheat fields flow like silk in the wind. This imagery reminds of the Midwestern region of the United States. It is a place where people peacefully go about their business at their own pace. It used to be much the same throughout rural



Vera Anoshina walks her bicycle on a path in the village of Spartak.  
Credit: Brendan Hoffman

Ukraine too. Town and village residents

in the Eastern parts have tried their best to preserve their way of life.

Although history has shaped cultures differently across continents, when concerns arise, the more common responses come to the surface. Change is one such concern.

Years preceding the winter of 2013/2014 seemed calm and ordinary to most Ukrainians, and busy personal lives came first before politics. However, in the background there was a revolution brewing. Ukraine, like many European countries, allows multiple political parties to come and participate in their parliamentary government. With that said, it is not uncommon to have some strange characters become prominent every now and then. This time that character was Victor Yanukovich, a pro-Russian ex-convict who claimed to understand the struggle of the lower class.

With the help of Paul Manafort, who is better known to some as a recent campaign manager for Donald Trump, Yanukovich got elected president of Ukraine in 2010 by popular vote, after having lost in the previous election. Despite growing disagreements between Western and Eastern ideologies in the

region, Yanukovich could have perhaps finished his term, if not even gotten re-elected. That did not happen. He made a pivotal decision in November of 2013, which is allegedly why Putin and Russia have had his back ever since.

In the years leading up to this, Ukraine had been moving closer to cooperation with the European Union, and Yanukovich had to go to Vilnius, Lithuania, to sign the Association Agreement which would enhance the relationship. He and his party went, but at the summit they changed their mind and did not sign. This drastic change of course had many on edge in the country, especially in the central and western regions. A large but peaceful demonstration started in Kyiv's Independence square.

A big difference between the United States and Ukraine is their size. While in the U.S. even the biggest crowd will just make the news and at best start a conversation nationwide, in Ukraine a crowd of 100,000 or more can have a crucial impact. After the protesters arrived from all over the country, both East and West, national celebrities became involved. It wasn't long until Yanukovich made his second mistake – ordering the use of brutal police force on peaceful protesters. Civilians were forced to make shields out of scrap metal to protect themselves against rubber bullets, grenades, and even snipers. Kyiv resident and witness to this, Oleksiy Sklyarenko, who was just a passerby one night said “We were just peacefully in the street with some protesters, the gas was burning in our eyes and throats, and a bullet ricocheted from the ground and hit me in the leg.” Instances such as this only escalated the conflict. Eventually Yanukovich resigned, fleeing in the dark of the night to Russia where he remains protected by the Kremlin authorities. Interpol marked him as a wanted individual by request of the Ukrainian government. They are still due to review his appeal.

These events, although messy, formed an arguably favorable situation for the Russian government to intervene however they chose. After annexing Crimea, they also implemented a less obvious strategy - helping people in the East of Ukraine to rebel and pronounce themselves as their own separate republic. These separatists have been seen armed with Russian military vehicles and weapons and some have been unusually skilled indicating training.

In the same regions where there is war between the Ukrainian military and Russian-backed separatist forces, there are people who never got the chance to escape due to the hasty nature of the conflict. Even having been given time, some would not have the resources to do so. For Raya Shaparova, the village of Spartak has been her home for over 70 years. She says “I don’t want to leave this place because it’s my homeland. I gave birth to my children here.” She is living in constant danger of being hit by an explosive, yet in the comfort of her home she reads the Bible, tends to her garden and goes for walks around the village. She has a strong spirit, which is necessary in these circumstances. “He who suffers will be saved in the end. Maybe it’s my fate to suffer, maybe it’s because I’m a woman” she said.

Shaparova has a neighbor, Vera Anoshina, who was 52 at the time of the interview, a few years ago. Vera told an NPR reporter about their neighbors, “Many have died or been maimed, sometimes it happens when a shell hits the ground and limbs are blown off.” She also said that they have to bury the dead right there on the spot, because moving them is too dangerous. Another resident said that there is no water and no electricity, so they are just living without it.

Not only do the elderly live in these areas, but people of all ages. For example, there is Vika, a girl who was 10 years old at the time. Her parents lost their jobs when the war broke out and therefore could not afford to move. Later, her mother died of an illness, and father moved away without her, so she lives with her grandmother in a basement of a building.

It is a difficult life on both sides of the war. Besides the contested land, behind each line of defense it is not much easier. On the separatist side of the warzone, people are finding Soviet-era fallout shelters to live in and hide from explosions. Technology there is still from the 70’s, and people are complaining that the rebels who run the towns are not helping them enough. On the Ukrainian side, the situation is very poor in the town of Avdiivka, where there is a large coal-converting plant that has been struck by shells over 300 times. It is still operational, although a dangerous place to work at as it is a target in the conflict.

Alexander Hug is the deputy chief monitor in the region for the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Here he describes the residents for NPR, "They are not in tanks and in armored vehicles, they are in their houses and beds. They are in the streets and in their gardens and they are fully exposed to these risks, and that has to be acknowledged. It is for them that this should come to an end."

Wars like this one are difficult to sort out. There are arguably more than two sides in this conflict: Western and central Ukrainians who want to be considered Europeans and be a part of the European Union, people from the Eastern parts of the country who want to live in Russia but also want Russia to come to them, people who want to live in the past when it was all Soviet Union, and there are also some that just want to live their life without having to worry about politics at all. One could reasonably hope that the worst part is finished. Ukraine is working on improving their financial standing after the turmoil, as well as growing its military to combat Russian military advances. The divided country is solidifying but also struggling, all while the politicians are tapping into people's fears in the fight for power.

It is sometimes hard to foresee events that will change the course of history so dramatically. Not many saw Yanukovich's drastic change of plans coming, regarding the European Union. It is possible to see patterns though. One thing led to another. The connection of Paul Manafort to Victor Yanukovich and his tactics to gain political power are remarkable and likely bring about more questions. Given only few of the stories out of many that have not been told yet, it can be seen that not only did those suffer who saw the storm coming and protested for their rights, but so did the supporters of the unlikely president turned tyrant. Peaceful resolve is not only for those who seek it, it is for everyone.

## Sources

Interpol (03/06/2014). INTERPOL reviewing Red Notice request by Ukrainian authorities for arrest of Victor Yanukovich. [www.interpol.int](http://www.interpol.int)

Nelson, S.S.(08/04/2017) In Eastern Ukraine, A Struggle For Survival In The Crossfire Of A Little-Seen War. [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org)