

March 3, 2014

Mr. Chairman:

Members of the Committee:

My name is Eugene Czolij and I would like to thank you for the opportunity to address today the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs on the situation in Ukraine.

For the record, I am the President of the Ukrainian World Congress, the international coordinating body for Ukrainian communities that was founded in 1967 and represents the interests of over 20 million Ukrainians living outside of Ukraine. The Ukrainian World Congress has member organizations in 33 countries (including the Ukrainian Canadian Congress) and ties with Ukrainians in 14 additional countries.

On behalf of the Ukrainian World Congress, I would first like to express our gratitude to the Government of Canada for its unequivocal support of the citizens of Ukraine and their aspirations for freedom, democracy and fundamental values.

On November 21, 2013, Viktor Yanukovich turned his back on the European Union in total disregard of the will of the Ukrainian people by refusing to sign the *EU-Ukraine Association Agreement*.

Since then, the world has witnessed an unprecedented chain of events that have demonstrated the strength, courage, determination and unwavering resolve of the Ukrainian people.

Ukrainians in Ukraine and around the world, including here in Canada, peacefully protested on EuroMaidans, urging Ukraine's governing authorities to move forward towards Europe and not backward to a neo-Soviet Union.

The response from Ukraine's authorities was a crackdown. Protesters were detained, kidnapped, beaten and killed. Even journalists and medical volunteers became targets.

Amazingly, Ukrainians stood their ground.

On February 18, 2014, when Ukraine's governing authorities sent snipers to shoot at their own people using live ammunition, they forever lost any remaining legitimacy.

This was the turning point that ultimately brought down a highly corrupt and authoritarian regime in Ukraine.

Sadly, in this struggle for democracy almost one hundred Ukrainians made the ultimate sacrifice and a substantial number sustained severe and life-altering injuries.

As Canadians, who cherish democracy, we can honour the memory of these modern-day heroes by supporting the new government in Ukraine in its daunting challenge of restoring stability and implementing the necessary reforms to reestablish Ukraine as a fully democratic, modern European state.

Having barely buried its heroes, Ukraine is facing another crisis orchestrated by a blatantly imperialistic Russian President, who described the collapse of the Soviet Union as the “*greatest geopolitical catastrophe*” of the 20th century and who desperately tried to recreate it under the guise of a *Eurasian Union* of former Soviet republics, including Ukraine, only to see the EuroMaidan put an end to his geopolitical plans.

So, on February 28, 2014, two days after the Crimean Parliament refused to consider any proposed separatist initiatives, Russia invaded Crimea and pro-Russian groups backed by Moscow have been deliberately trying to provoke violent confrontations in several major centers in Southern and Eastern Ukraine to broaden the military invasion. The very next day, the Russian Federation Council unanimously ratified the following appeal by the President of Russia so as to provide a pseudo-legal justification for a Soviet-style military intervention in Ukraine:

Due to the extraordinary situation that has taken shape in Ukraine and the threat to the lives of citizens of the Russian Federation, our compatriots, and the personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation who are deployed on the territory of Ukraine [...], I hereby introduce [...] an appeal for the use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation on the territory of Ukraine pending the normalization of the social and political situation in that country.

In stark contrast, a petition created on February 28, 2014 has already been endorsed by over 130,000 ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking nationals of Ukraine. Addressed to President Putin, it reads as follows:

We, ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationals, do not need other countries to defend our interests. We are grateful to you for support, however would like to inform you that nobody has ever infringed our rights on Ukrainian territory. We have always lived freely and happily, speaking in the language we are accustomed to. In school we have also learned Ukraine’s state language and know it well enough to feel comfortable in a Ukrainian-speaking milieu.

With all due respect for your concern, therefore, we would ask you to not raise an internal question for our country which is not a burning issue for us at [the] Russian Federation state level. Not to mention bringing troops in to regulate a conflict which you may see, but which is not visible to us. Thank you for your understanding.

The Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine violates Russia’s international obligations under the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act, the 1994 Budapest *Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons* and the legal framework regulating the presence of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine.

It needs to be condemned and the international community must pressure Russia’s President to respect Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Should the international community not act decisively in respect of Russia’s invasion of the Crimea, Russia will be emboldened – as was Nazi Germany following the Munich Agreement – to continue to fuel its imperialistic ambitions under the guise of protecting “*the lives of citizens of the Russian Federation*” with possible expansion into Eastern Ukraine and eventually other parts of Europe.

Ultimately, the best way to prevent the Kremlin from continuing to destabilize Ukraine and in the process posing a serious threat to global security would be for Russia to relocate its Black Sea fleet away from its current base in Ukraine to a naval base on Russian territory.

From the onset of the crisis in Ukraine, the Government of Canada has been responsive and reactive to ensure Canada's most effective engagement.

Last week's visit by the Canadian delegation to Ukraine led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Honourable John Baird, the second over the course of these three months, was an important gesture of Canadian solidarity with the people of Ukraine and Canada's clear recognition of Ukraine's new Parliamentary government.

Your continued leadership will be critical in supporting Ukraine in withstanding the pressures being exerted from internal and external forces in an attempt to quell the aspirations for a dignified life in a free society.

What must be the next steps?

The Ukrainian World Congress urges Canada to actively cooperate with the international community to:

1. support the new government of Ukraine;
2. send an international observer mission under the auspices of the UN or OSCE to Eastern and Southern Ukraine, primarily to the Crimea, to monitor the situation on the ground and provide accurate information on developments;
3. offer sending UN peacekeeping forces to Ukraine;
4. support international mediation to de-escalate the crisis in the Crimea;
5. impose sanctions on Russia if it does not respond to the numerous legitimate calls to comply with its international obligations, including visa bans, active money-laundering investigations, freezing of assets, and trade penalties;
6. follow Canada's lead and not attend the next G8 summit in Sochi;
7. suspend Russia's membership in the G8;
8. organize an emergency G7 meeting in Ukraine to address the economic, social and security impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine;
9. offer Ukraine a financial assistance package to avert its economic collapse, help the new government launch necessary reforms of the Ukrainian economy and offset the undue economic pressure being exerted by Russia to punish Ukraine for its political choice to integrate with the European community;
10. organize an international donors' conference in Ukraine;
11. provide quick medical and humanitarian assistance for the victims of the EuroMaidans;
12. send substantial monitoring missions for the May 25, 2014 Presidential elections in Ukraine;

13. engage and support civil society in Ukraine; and
14. provide technical assistance for small and medium businesses that will enhance the development of a much-needed middle class in Ukraine.

The Ukrainian people have paid an extraordinarily high price for the right to live in a democratic European state.

The international community has an obligation to ensure that this choice of the Ukrainian people is fully respected.

Eugene Czolij
President
Ukrainian World Congress