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Russia takes a harsher line on Ukraine

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Statements by representatives of the Russian authorities – in particular Sergei Glaziev, an advisor to the Russian President whom the Kremlin has used to communicate its position –as well as their official and unofficial activities show that Moscow is taking a harsher line on Ukraine. In the media there is also an intensive information campaign in support of the Kremlin's political objectives. First of all, Russia is clearly expressing its opposition to any concessions to the opposition by the authorities in Kyiv, and is increasing the pressure on President Viktor Yanukovych to use force to suppress the protest movement. Secondly, Moscow has indicated that if these demands are not met, Ukraine will not receive the economic support it has been promised, and Moscow would support the idea of a *de facto* controlled division of the Ukrainian state into autonomous regions, some of which would be more closely linked with Russia. To reinforce this message, Russia has initiated or supported the activities of pro-Russian political forces, especially in the south and east of Ukraine, which aim to bring this about. Thirdly, Moscow has demonstrated its growing exasperation at the involvement of the EU and the USA in Ukraine, demanding that the Western partners enter into discussions on this topic. The Kremlin hopes such talks would lead the West to refrain from 'interfering' in Ukraine, to Russia obtaining a *de facto* veto over individual decisions by the West on the issue of Ukraine, and ultimately to an informal acknowledgment of Russian strategic control over that country.

Yanukovych should end the protests without any compromise with the opposition

In an interview with the daily *Kommersant-Ukraina* on 6 February, an adviser to President Vladimir Putin on Eurasian integration, Sergei Glaziev, stated that the events in Kyiv are an attempt to bring about a coup, and that the Ukrainian authorities will be obliged to use force against the protesters. He criticized the Ukrainian government for its lack of decisiveness, and urged it not to make any concessions to the opposition. This shows that Russia is concerned about the prospect of President Yanukovych making further political concessions to the opposition (most likely his proposal to grant opposition representatives the post of Prime Minister and some ministerial portfolios in the Ukrainian government). Moscow is putting pressure on the Ukrainian president to suppress the protests by means of force.

Part of this pressure is the suspension of the previously announced economic support for Kyiv, and hints that Moscow may once again resort to the use of economic coercion. The sequence of events shows this: On 7 February, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Viktor Yanukovych met in Sochi. There were no reports on the progress of the meeting. However,

after the meeting, the Russian finance minister Anton Siluanov said that the purchase of a second tranche of Ukrainian treasury bonds for US$2 billion (from a pool of US$15 billion promised on 17 December 2013) will not be concluded until Kyiv repays its debt for Russian gas of over US$3 billion. At the same time, there are signals that Russia is willing to apply economic pressure to Ukraine. Some Ukrainian air carriers have reported that since 28 January, Russia has tightened up border customs checks on Ukrainian products, similar to those in August 2013 (these reports have not been confirmed, although on 6 February a Ukrainian government representative stated that the problems had been resolved). On 6 February, there was a report that Russia was not admitting Ukrainian food products, or coal extracted by companies belonging to Rinat Akhmetov. On 12 February, the Eurasian Economic Commission (a body of the Customs Union) that the duties on steel pipes imported from Ukraine may be raised.

Russia considers actions aimed at dismantling Ukraine

The above declarations and actions suggest that for Moscow, keeping strategic control of the whole Ukrainian state is still the ideal variant. However, in the event of Yanukovych displaying a lack of will or ability to use force, the Kremlin is considering the backup option of the controlled dismantling of Ukraine. This is shown by the expression of support at ever higher levels for the idea of regionalisation – a signal to pro-Russian groups in Ukraine which support this idea. In Glaziev's interview, the idea arose that regionalisation is necessary in Ukraine, with independent regional policies for the economy, and to an extent foreign relations, in order to prevent the disintegration of the state, which Russia does not want. For several weeks a similar proposition has been put forward by pro-Russian groups in Ukraine, including Viktor Medvedchuk; he is the most pro-Russian politician in Ukraine, a friend of President Putin, and considered a mouthpiece for Kremlin propaganda.

Russia is not limiting itself to declarations alone, but has also initiated and supported initiatives to put this idea into practice. In Crimea and Odessa (among other places), at the start of February local Russian organisations, in conjunction with the Russian party *Rodina* founded by Deputy Prime Minister Dmitri Rogozin, set up a structure called the Slavic Anti-Fascist Front. This grouping appealed to President Yanukovych to calm the situation in the country, and appealed to President Putin to take diplomatic action to defend the interests and the rights of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, in connection with the Russophobia and neo-Nazism widespread in the country. Similar initiatives have been taken, probably after consultation with Moscow, by the authorities of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The republic's parliament has announced that during its forthcoming session on 19 February, it intends to appeal to Russia for protection and support. In turn, under the patronage of Mikhail Dobkin, the governor of Kharkov oblast, the regional structures of the Party of Regions formed a Ukrainian Front, drawing on Soviet traditions, which has declared war against "the fascist forces" of the opposition, and propagates the idea of federalising Ukraine.

The West must take the Russia's interests regarding Ukraine into account

In *Kommersant* Glaziev urged the West to stop blackmailing the authorities in Kyiv, and that trilateral talks (with Russia) on Ukraine should be held. He accused the United States of financing and training militant groups. This means that Moscow is becoming more and more exasperated by the West's political involvement in Ukraine (proof of which is the plan, announced by the US and the EU, for political and economic support to Ukraine, as well as the threat of Western sanctions against Ukrainian officials if force is used against the protesters).

Earlier, on 4 February, Russian users uploaded to YouTube two extracts of tapped telephone conversations between diplomats from the US (Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State, and Geoffrey Pyatt, the US Ambassador in Kyiv) and Europe (Jan Tombiński, the EU's ambassador in Kyiv, and Helga Schmidt, Deputy Secretary-General of the EU's External Action Service). From these conversations, especially those of the Americans, a certain patronising attitude towards Ukrainian politicians comes through. The Western politicians were discussing plans to shape the future government of Ukraine in accordance with their own preferences. The recordings also revealed the differences between the US and the EU in terms of their policy towards Ukraine. Nuland's crude criticism of the EU's attitude as disclosed in the conversation sparked a scandal. The most likely source of the leak is the Russian secret services; the incident case was heavily touted by the Russian media. In this way, Russia wants to demonstrate that the authorities of the Russian Federation are fully informed about the West's backroom deals; their intention is to embarrass and drive a wedge between the United States and the EU.

By these actions Russia is trying to exert pressure on the West to limit its involvement, and to hold formal dialogue with Russia on Ukraine, with the intention of a *de facto* recognition of Ukraine as part of the Russian sphere of influence. To this end, Russia would like to take advantage of the European Union's agreement on establishing a special working group to 'clarify' the consequences of the possible signature of the Association Agreement and the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and the Eastern Partnership countries (including Ukraine).