

# Derek Fraser: Stand with Ukraine



**DEREK FRASER, NATIONAL POST** | January 28, 2014 | Last Updated: Jan 27 4:32 PM ET

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Rob Stothard/Getty Images Anti-government protesters look towards police lines from a wall of tires on Grushevskogo Street on January 27, 2014 in Kiev, Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych is pursuing an increasingly repressive course and has now assumed dictatorial powers. He has also concluded an understanding with Russia that surrenders Ukraine's economic independence and threatens its political independence. His actions could lead to turmoil and perhaps revolt in Ukraine, an indefinite postponement of any return in Ukraine and perhaps Russia to democracy, a shift in the balance of power in Europe, and a period of enmity between the West and Russia.

Since President Yanukovych assumed power in 2010, he has pursued two principal goals – to enrich himself and his family and to ensure by fair means or foul his victory in the presidential election in March 2015. He has certainly has achieved the first goal. There are reasons to believe that the amounts his and his family have robbed run into the billions of dollars. In order to achieve his second goal, that of re-election in spite of poll ratings in the mid-teens, he has pursued an increasing oppressive course. He has done away with the rule of law. He and his allies controls most of the media. He has harassed the opposition, fixed elections and dominated parliament by bribes and blackmail.

Faced with the present unrest, on the basis of a dubious vote in parliament, he has acquired dictatorial powers. His security forces can act with impunity; he can ban independent demonstrations; criticism, whether justified or not, can be treated as criminal defamation; the immunity of parliamentarians can be revoked; opposition activities can be criminalized as extremist; organizations supporting them can be banned. Yanukovych's Ministry of Culture has already followed in Stalin's footsteps by threatening to outlaw the Greek Catholic Church. The Internet is to be controlled; telephone conversations to be overheard, and NGOs receiving outside money are to be treated as foreign agents.

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Faced with the danger of currency collapse and sovereign default because of his economic misrule, President Yanukovych has rejected agreements with the EU and the IMF because of their conditions of democracy and a free economy. Instead he has turned to Russia, which has provided short-term credit and reductions in the price of gas, conditional on good behaviour. Russian and Ukrainian security and police forces are to co-operate closely. Vast sectors of the Ukrainian economy are to come under joint control. Ukrainian customs regulations are to be aligned with those of Russia's Customs Union. Free trade agreements with anyone else will require Russian approval. The Russian presence in Crimea, a territory claimed by Russian nationalists and where Russia has military installations, is to be increased.

Russia's goal is to have Ukraine join the Eurasian Customs Union to be formed next year out of the Customs Union, with, Russia hopes, some sovereign powers. Russia has in the

past spoken of the bloc having a joint foreign and economic policy towards the outside world. Russia would like to see Ukraine also join its Collective Security Organization.

Should Russia succeed in its goals, several things might happen: Ukraine would likely remain in turmoil and revolt; the return of Ukraine and probably Russia to democracy would be delayed. The shift in the balance of power in Europe could be destabilizing in the Baltic, Central Europe and the Balkans. Understandings between Russia and the West could become more difficult. Western consciences would be provoked by oppression in Ukraine. Westerners could be filled with enmity towards Russia in case of a growth in Russian power.

It is important for Canada to remain engaged in Ukraine. Canada should continue its condemnation of human rights violations by the Yanukovich administration. Canada might follow the United States lead in imposing targeted sanctions against persons suspected of human rights violations. Canada should continue to encourage exchanges with Ukraine. It should offer sympathetic treatment of political refugees. Canada should maintain its aid policy in spite of increasingly difficult circumstances, so as to support the civil society, and those Ukrainians fighting for their democratic rights.

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***Derek Fraser was Canada's ambassador to Ukraine from 1998-2001.***