

# **EAST/CENTRAL EUROPE, THE WEST AND VLADIMIR PUTIN**

**Notes for Hon. David Kilgour,**

**PARLIAMENT HILL RALLY**

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## **Poland**

It is an honour to join you and our guest speaker from Warsaw ( Gazeta Polska editor Tomasz Sakiewicz).

The recent appointment of Poland's prime minister, Donald Tusk, as president of the European Council is a good indicator of Poland's rising importance; also, that distinctions between West and Central/East Europe are disappearing. Problems under communism, including poor growth and low incomes, led Poland's new democratic government to adopt a strategy for economic transition in 1990. Poland is the only European country to experience economic growth in every quarter since 2008.

## **East/Central Europe**

The implosion of the Soviet Union after 1991 brought freedom to almost 20 restored or new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe. Europeans were reunited, independent and free after almost half a century of oppression. Russian leaders Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin encouraged both national self-determination and democracy. The EU added ten east-central European countries in 2004 and 2007 and 80 million Europeans to its union of democratic nations.

National transitions were difficult, but in virtually all east-central European countries, life appears to be significantly better now than in 1989. Despite

its current serious problems, the EU, with 28 member countries, already a population of 503 million and prospects for further enlargement, continues to be a beacon for democracy, human rights, economic prosperity and stability for many across the world.

## **Ukraine**

Few North Americans have captured what is going on in Ukraine as well as Timothy Snyder, the history professor at Yale and author of *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. He wrote a few days ago: “To understand Putin, Read (George) Orwell”:

- “If (Putin) meets with other leaders, we must simply expect that this is cover for the latest outrage, as with the entrance of Russian troops, armor and artillery during the recent talks in Minsk.”
- “Russian propaganda daily pounds out two sides to every story, both of which are false, and each contradicts the other. Consider the propositions in italics below, all of which should by now, after eight months of repetition, sound familiar...(For example) *Russia is making war to save the world from fascism*. (In fact, it is Russia where the far right exerts dictatorial power, the head of state enunciates a Hitlerian doctrine of invading another country to protect ethnic brethren. Russia’s political allies are Europe’s far right parties, including the fascists and neo-Nazis.) Meanwhile: *fascism is good*. (In Russia, Hitler is now being rehabilitated as a statesman, the Jews are being blamed for the Holocaust, gays are presented as an international conspiracy, Russian Nazis march on May Day and Russian Nazis in Ukraine are presented as heroes.”)

I share the conclusion to Snyder’s piece as well, “Oppression in Russia, war in Ukraine and the destabilization of the West are grotesquely high prices to pay for (Putin’s) preferences...we had better think instead about what we value and what we can do to protect it. If Ukraine becomes Novorossiia, Europe becomes Eurasia, and the West collapses, it will not be because of Russia’s physical strength, but because of our mental weakness.”

## NATO

Before last week's summit in Wales, statements by NATO officials that it will defend the three Baltic member states, but not non-member Ukraine, were short-sighted and foolish. Stephen Blank, senior fellow for Russia on the American Foreign Policy Council, notes:

- Throwing Ukraine figuratively under the bus before the summit is unlikely to encourage other neighbours of Russia, whether or not they are NATO members.
- Such talk appears to concede Putin's right to ignore a host of international treaties, to re-establish Cold War spheres of influence and to attack any or all of his neighbours whenever he can fabricate an excuse for doing so,
- Some key NATO member countries (Germany, France and Italy) are already showing too much concern for their economic ties with Russia,
- The US and UK have done little or nothing to enforce guarantees given to Ukraine in '94 and letting Ukraine go would indicate to others that our guarantees are worthless if/when the crunch comes.
- Putin's record since 2000 includes seeking bases in Serbia and Montenegro; fomenting so-called frozen conflicts in Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine; perpetuating conflict in Bosnia, Kosovo and Nagorno Karabakh; annexing Crimea; currently annexing provinces of Georgia.

I agree with Blank that Ukraine needs NATO support in the form of weapons, advisors and training. Also, EU and EU financial and political support. As he says, "NATO was created precisely to thwart actions such as Russia's current invasion (of Ukraine)."

President Dalia Grybavskaitė of Lithuania said, "Ukraine is being attacked because of its European choice. It is not only defending its territory, but also Europe and its values.

## Conclusion



*Soldiers without insignia in Crimea. Putin later admitted that they were Russian troops.*

Boris Yeltsin unfortunately resigned his presidency in 2000 to former KGB lieutenant colonel Vladimir Putin, who would later assert that the “collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the century.” Mr. Putin’s clear goal at present is to destabilise the new Ukrainian government in Kyiv as much as is feasible; if he succeeds, he’ll doubtless invent other problems elsewhere as excuses to meddle or intervene there directly. All Europeans and the rest of the world with independent media now know that nothing he says can be believed.

Mr. Putin must be persuaded by “smart” and progressively tighter sanctions and NATO to end support for the rebels in eastern Ukraine. He must come to see that a collaborative engagement with the larger European community is necessary in today’s world or that Russia will be completely isolated by European neighbours.

Given that huge sums are being withdrawn from Russia, including as much as \$70 billion in the first quarter of 2014 alone and that the ruble has just hit a new low, Mr. Putin might begin to accept that European harmony is necessary if the Russian economy is to improve the lives of its citizens. One worries that he simply doesn’t care about 140 million Russians in general.

The former world/Russian chess champion and democracy advocate Garry Kasparov makes much sense:

*... If the West punishes Russia with sanctions and a trade war, “it would be cruel to 140 million Russians, so instead sanction the 140 oligarchs who would dump Mr. Putin ... if he cannot protect their assets abroad. Target*

*their visas, their mansions and IPOs in London, their yachts and Swiss bank accounts. Use banks, not tanks.”*

The main conclusion, however, is that betraying Ukraine and Ukrainians will bring neither peace nor security now or in the future.

Thank you.