

## The Dalton School: Ukraine in Turmoil

### 1. What is your past Model UN experience?

As a sophomore, my Model UN career is still in its early phases. Though, every committee I have participated in, with the exception of one, has been an advanced, fast paced, and complex crisis committee. I have much experience in crises and believe they are the most interesting and fun part of Model UN. I look forward to putting my knowledge and prior experience to use while accumulating much more in a variety of different committees.

### 2. What interests you about the Ukrainian crisis?

The crisis in Ukraine is in the midst of reshaping Russia's political, economic, and diplomatic role in the global order. President Vladimir Putin's decision to annex the Crimean peninsula and back pro-Russian separatists in the eastern part of the country has the potential to reshape Moscow's geopolitical position in the entire region. How Russia emerges from this turmoil will likely determine its ability to project its power, interests, and security both locally and abroad for years to come. Moreover, the Ukrainian crisis represents a potential turning point in international law. The establishment of the United Nations by the victorious Allied Powers in the aftermath of World War II marked the end of the old world order in which military aggression was a legitimate tool of diplomacy. Should Russia retain Crimea, it will mark the first time since the founding of the UN that a great power has managed to revert successfully to the principles of conquest abolished by the Axis defeat. As a result, the situation is not only a potential watershed in European history but also could set a precedent which would dramatically alter the current rule of international law.

### 3. What are some of the major factors that influence Ukraine's relationship with both the West and with Russia?

For some time after its establishment as an independent state in 1991, Ukraine has been caught between Russia and the West. Due to Ukraine's status as a former Soviet satellite state, Russia and Ukraine share deep connections on a number of levels. Over 30% of Ukrainian citizens – roughly 14 million individuals – identify Russian as their first language. Beyond that, a significant portion of the constituency of Eastern Ukraine identify themselves with Russia ethnically and politically. Such a bond has extended to formal political treaties and economic partnerships. In 2010, former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich signed the Kharkiv Pact, which extended Russia's lease on the Sevastopol naval base, Russia's only warm water port, until 2042. Additionally, almost all oil and gas supplied to the Ukraine stem from Russian companies. As a result of these combined factors, the Ukraine imports more from Russia and exports more to Russia than it does from and to all 28 EU member states combined. Additionally, the Russian naval base in Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula is Russia's only warm-water port and an important part of its security apparatus. To lose control of the Crimea would be to lose control of this critical base.

Ukraine's relationship with Europe is somewhat more complex. Though in many respects it is still dependent on the Russian Federation, especially in its energy sector, the country has drifted somewhat towards the West in recent years. As the results of the Orange Revolution of 2004 suggest, Ukraine citizens have made clear their preference for more Western-stylized governance. Recently, in November 2013, the EU Vilnius Summit was held with the aim to establish association between EU and Eastern European states (including Ukraine) for a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. The measure marked what could have been a path for Ukraine's integration into the EU. Furthermore, the

Euro Maidan protests which drove pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich out of office and incited Putin's annexation of the Crimea stemmed from Yanukovich's choice to choose ties with Russia over those with the EU. That being said, many of these pro-European sentiments were expressed by inhabitants of the Western oblasts of Ukraine; the East's population tends to have significantly more sympathy for Russia. In sum, Ukraine is a nation divided between the East and West. Only the results of the current conflict will tell which way the scales will fall.

#### 4. The annexation of Crimea—justifiable or a crime? Why? Be concise, be specific.

Naturally, Russia's involvement during the Ukraine crisis was, at best, walking a dubious line in regards to international law. That being said, when considered from a perspective divorced from the Western-centric application of international law, Vladimir Putin's decision to annex the Crimea itself in March 2014 was fairly well grounded. To understand Russia's practical and historical claim to Crimea, we must turn our gaze back one hundred years. After the Bolshevik revolution, the communists added large sections of the historical South of Russia to the Republic of Ukraine. Such an act was done with no consideration for the ethnic makeup of the population; today these areas form the southeast of Ukraine though they are predominantly comprised of Russia ethnics.

In 1954, Nikita Khrushchev decided to transfer the Crimean Peninsula to Ukraine, along with the Sevastopol naval base. Yet, this decision was little more than a formality. The territory was transferred within the boundaries of a single state, the USSR. To the Soviets, it was impossible to imagine that Ukraine and Russia would eventually split up. Of course, in 1991 this impossibility became a reality as the Soviet Union collapsed. Today, the total population of the Crimean Peninsula today is rough 2.2 million people, of whom almost 1.5 million are Russian ethnics and 350,000 are Ukrainians who predominantly consider Russian their native language. Such an ethnic and linguistic makeup is largely par for the course for Ukraine's Eastern oblasts, which have decidedly favored pro-Russian candidates in past elections.

Pro-Russian forces held a referendum Crimea on March 16 and residents were given the opportunity to exercise the right internationally recognized right of self determination outlined in the UN Charter. More than 82 percent of the electorate took part in the vote. Over 96 percent of them spoke out in favor of reuniting with Russia. The numbers speak for themselves.

If we wish to remain grounded in international law, we need only look towards the well-known Kosovo precedent established by the West in a very comparable situation. During the Bosnian crisis in the 1990s, the Western powers agreed to unilateral separation of Kosovo from Serbia was legitimate and did not require any permission from the country's central authorities. Pursuant to Article 2, Chapter 1 of the United Nations Charter, the UN International Court agreed with this approach and declared in its ruling in 2010 that: "No general prohibition may be inferred from the practice of the Security Council with regard to declarations of independence."

Practically, the annexation made economic sense – from both the Russian and Crimean perspective. Last year alone almost 3 million Eastern Ukrainians found laboring jobs across the border in Russia because Ukraine failed to afford them the same employment opportunities at home. According to some sources, the 2013 of the earnings from these Russian based jobs amounted to over \$20 billion, around 12 percent of the Ukrainian GDP. Militarily, the Euro Maidan protests in Kiev and subsequent ousting of President Yanukovich threatened Russia's lease over the Sevastopol naval base set to last until 2040. Had President Putin done nothing and Ukraine drifted into the EU and an alliance with NATO, it would have meant that NATO's navy would have access, if not control, of Russia's only warm water port.

Such an event would have created a containment threat to southern Russia reminiscent of Western strategy during the Cold War.

In sum, though at first glance Russia's actions in the Crimea may seem repulsive, when one closely examines the historic, ethnic, moral, military, and economic factors at play the annexation becomes far more reasonable. That is not say that President Putin's actions over the past six months are without fault, but they merit a closer look than many of us have thus far been willing to give.