Ukraine/Russia

1.) I participated in the Boston College EagleMUN conference last year in March. I was a member of St. George’s Model UN team throughout my junior year and over the summer I attended a summer program at Stanford University in International Relations where my classmates and I participated in many MUN-type debates and discussions. At EagleMUN last year I participated in the General Assembly’s SOCHUM section with a focus on women’s rights. After my election as this year’s Head Delegate for the St. George’s Model UN team I have had to spend extra time studying Model UN procedure so I can teach the newer members, which has contributed to my experience as well.

2.) The Ukrainian Crisis is interesting because there are good arguments to be made on both sides of the issue. It is rare to find a political dispute where both parties have logic on their side- after all, Russia can claim that Crimea was theirs first and that the citizens don’t mind being annexed, while Ukraine can argue on a more ideological level that it is a breach of their sovereignty (which it is). I also think the Ukrainian Crisis is interesting because it brings to light the fragility of the post-Soviet democracies in Eastern Europe, something Westerners stopped paying attention to around the turn of the century because of the more obvious crises occurring in the Middle East. As Ukraine has tried to leave behind its training wheels and assume a more assertive role as a full-grown democracy, it has become obvious that the peace in Eastern Europe is much more fragile than it seems; Russia is moving back into the limelight as a major international player now that the country has mostly healed from the disastrous fall of the USSR. How this crisis is resolved will likely dictate the path Eastern Europe takes in the coming years, so I am very interested to see how the scene plays out.

3.) Ukraine’s citizens are remarkably divided on their feelings toward the West. On one hand, most believe that securing ties with western trading partners is necessary to revamp Ukraine’s weak economy; Ukraine intends to use its Western allies to become a more powerful country and move away from its reputation as Russia’s buffer state. Trade has a huge impact on Ukraine’s relationship with the West, and it was this factor that caused so many people to vote in favor of Ukraine joining the European Union last year. Ukraine also seems to be moving towards a more Westernized political system, which has led many Ukrainian citizens to favor stronger ties to the West in order to promote liberal democracy and other Western ideas more actively. Finally, Ukraine’s reliance on NATO support in the past has impacted its ties to the West— there was a time when Ukrainian admission to NATO seemed imminent. Although the crisis has hindered this effort, Ukraine maintains close ties with NATO and will most likely continue to.

Russia, on the other hand, is the shadow looming over Ukraine at all times. Once its mother country, Russia still holds a great deal of control over Ukrainian territory and politicians. Although Ukraine’s trade with the West is important, trade with Russia makes up a huge percentage of the Ukrainian economy. Also, the huge percentage of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine make the countries very closely tied. These citizens are a powerful interest group in the Ukrainian government and have a large impact on Ukrainian-Russo relations. Finally, Russia and Ukraine throughout history, which adds a layer of depth to any decisions made between the two countries. Most Ukrainian citizens still feel deeply connected to their former mother country, and Russia seems to still feel ownership of Ukraine.

4.) The annexation of Crimea is a crime. Although I acknowledge the ethnic background of most people living in Crimea, no country is permitted to invade another and seize a bit of land; in my opinion this is a breach of sovereignty no matter which way it is framed. It is dangerous to allow Russia to do whatever it wants because it is a powerful country; Putin cannot be allowed to believe that he can get away with a breach in international law because of Russia’s natural resource market. The annexation of Crimea was a really great way for Russia to emphasize that no matter how free Ukraine claims to be, that can be taken away at any time. Invading another country, even to “check on a naval base”, for the purpose of territorial conquest is a crime. We would not make allowances for other countries invading past allies, so how can we allow this annexation? The answer is that despite the risk to world peace, it is unacceptable to set a precedent for other power-hungry countries to pick on smaller countries for their own gain.