Princeton University Model UN Conference

Ukraine in Turmoil

1. Although I have an immense interest in world affairs and make a point to keep up with current events, I have never attended an official Model UN conference. I have, however, attended a mock UN conference over the summer where it was run very similarly. We were assigned countries or committees and we were left to debate, form alliances, and ultimately try and take down our enemy countries. This is what got me interested in attending a formal Model UN conference, in which I would get the chance to talk to other students who feel as passionately about current events and world affairs as I do. I enjoy debating and discussing the political and economic crises that the world is going through, as I find it interesting what other’s opinions are compared to mine.
2. As someone who has grown up surrounded by the Ukrainian culture and language, this crisis has had a drastic effect on me and my family. Since November of last year when the protests started, I have closely followed the news, read articles, and discussed with family and friends that live in Ukraine about the revolution that turned the country where I came from upside down. This issue soon overtook my daily thoughts and before I knew it, I was on a plane to Ukraine to join the protests myself. Upon arriving, I learned about Ukraine’s economic, political, and social crises that were simultaneously occurring. It clearly became evident to me that this was not just about politics, but it also encompassed human rights violations and poor standards of living. Worse yet was the fact that Russia tried to take matters into its own hands and essentially caused the current crisis that is happening. This is why this issue is so interesting to me. It started as a protest against the government and quickly escalated because the people of Ukraine realized that they did not have the same things that other developed countries did. As someone who has experienced the events in Ukraine firsthand, I am always interested in talking to others about this topic and listening to their point of view, making me eager to participate in this year’s Model UN conference.
3. Ukraine is geographically and geopolitically very important, making it have crucial relationships with both Russia and the West. Regarding resources, Ukraine has an abundance of coal, iron, natural gas, petroleum, and minerals which makes it very appealing to Russia. Because it is placed to the west of Russia but to the east of the rest of Europe, it acts as a type of buffer between those two areas of the world. Even throughout history, Ukraine was the country that kept the Mongols from invading the rest of Europe. In addition, Russia provides gas to the rest of Europe through a pipeline that passes directly through Ukraine. Now, Ukraine and Russia cannot agree on a price at which Russia would sell the gas to Ukraine and therefore they have stopped shipping to Ukraine; however, the pipeline still goes through Ukraine and they are trying to find a way to buy gas from European countries instead of directly from Russia. Russia is using the gas as a type of political tool to coerce Ukraine into forming closer ties with them. This has caused tension between Russia and many other European countries because of Russian pressure. To try and further Russian control of Ukraine, Putin has attempted to seize different parts of Ukraine. This has become very apparent in recent times especially. Ukraine has gone through a revolution and its citizens are feeling a surge of democratic feelings and freedom. This makes the Russian government nervous because they heavily rely on Ukraine for many things and if they were to completely cut off ties with Russia, it would be devastating for Putin’s control of them. This is why relations between the two countries have been tense and also why Russia invaded eastern Ukraine. Regarding the West, Ukraine’s relations with them have been slightly more successful than with Russia. During the times of the Soviet Union, Ukraine willingly gave up its arsenal of nuclear weapons in return for the US, Britain, and Russia giving them protection if anyone should ever go against Ukraine. In signing the Budapest Memorandums, Ukraine left itself defenseless and relied solely on the protection of these countries should anything happen. Because of recent events, the US has in fact provided sanctions against Russia in response to their actions threatening Ukrainian sovereignty although they have not sent in any kind of army. Ukraine’s resources and geographical location make it an important and desired country causing mixed relations with the surrounding areas.
4. The question of whether or not Russia violated international law in its annexation of Crimea has been an issue that has divided the West and Russia. Because of several unfair events that occurred, I believe that the annexation should be considered a crime. The vote itself had many inconsistencies; the ballot only had the choices of annexation and joining Russia or separating and being on its own. There was no choice of staying and being part of Ukraine, which I believe is unfair. During the actual election, there were armed militias standing nearby intimidating people, therefore it could not be a fair vote. Because of this, it was later reported that many people who would have voted against annexation to join Russia did not show up to vote at all. In fact, it was later reported that only 30% of the population showed up to vote. This would mean that only 15% of Crimean citizens voted for annexation. This is a drastic difference than what was originally reported by the Russian government that claimed that there was an 83% turnout and out of those citizens, 97% voted for annexation. In elections where it is likely that voter fraud will be committed, it is important to have international observers. Unfortunately, none were allowed to observe the elections. This means that the elections could have been completely fraudulent but no one would be able to prove that they were or were not. There were too many biased actions for the vote to be considered legal and justified; therefore I believe that the annexation of Crimea was a crime committed by the Russian government in an attempt to gain control of Ukraine.