

Brussels Forum

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Meeting Topic: A Conversation with Andrii Deschchytsia

Mr. Craig Kennedy: And now, for our final conversation before we go to dinner, we're delighted to be joined by the foreign minister of Ukraine, Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia and we've asked David Ignatius of *The Washington Post* to do the honors. David.

Mr. David Ignatius: Thank you, Craig. It's a pleasure to be here. I want to add to the introduction that Craig just gave that, for these purposes, it's important to say that I'm a trustee of the German Marshall Fund, have been for 12 years, and I want to join in the universal thanks and applause for Craig Kennedy, who has been a wonderful leader, and a friend, and who did the thing we all dream of in life, which is to make the world a little bit better by what he did.

So we now want to turn to the dark subject, the difficult subject of Ukraine. Ukraine really has fallen like a shadow across the life of Europe and the United States and the world as a whole. We're lucky to have the Foreign Minister of Ukraine, Mr. Deschchytsia, here with us. And I want to start right in and I want to begin with the events of the last several days. Your troops have been withdrawing from Crimea. They have not fired a shot. They have left peacefully. So I want to ask you, is Crimea gone? As those troops leave, do you

imagine a time when the Ukrainian flag will fly over Crimea again and if so, how soon?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: The Crimea is not lost for us. We believe that Crimea is integral part of Ukraine. And what the--our Navy and soldiers did not shoot, it's because they have shown their restraint and all the world has seen this, how the spirit and courage can confront with the Kalashnikovs.

Mr. David Ignatius: So the obvious next question the world has is if Russian troops or unmarked personnel, as in Crimea, should begin to intervene in eastern Ukraine and in cities likes Donetsk, and Kharkiv, will Ukraine, in that case, fight? And, that's the first question. Let me let you answer that.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: So I probably have to write down if you have more questions. Look, I think you probably know our position. The position of the Ukraine government, that we are going for the peaceful settlement of this crisis and this conflict and we've been using--will continue to use all the diplomatic means, all the economic means, to overcome this.

At the same time, of course, we will--we are perfectly understand that there probably would be a lot of provocations made by Russians in eastern Ukraine. They already did some. But we have learned the previous lessons and we will not go for these provocations and, we, of course, cannot stop Ukrainian people to defend

their homeland. And of course, probably as any other person or any other nations, if we will see--we'll appraise the threat, the military threat, the military intervention to this in Ukraine, the people will defend their homeland.

Mr. David Ignatius: So that sounds like the key part of your answer, that if eastern Ukraine is threatened, people will fight to defend their homeland.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Absolutely.

Mr. David Ignatius: So the question then is, Ukraine's army has a lot of conscripts, estimates of 100,000 conscripts, but it's said that the number of effective military fighters is far, far smaller. The number that people cite is 6,000. Not an army strong enough to resist the Russian military on its own. So the next question, and forgive me for being so blunt, but I think this is what people want to know the answers to, if your military is under attack by Russian troops, would you seek military assistance from other countries?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: First of all, I want to say even to compare the military strength of Ukraine and military--Ukrainian military in comparison to Russian military, of course, we have less to offer. And it's obvious because Russia is much more stronger in military sense so we have to rely on our own forces, first of all. Secondly, what is also very important for

us is to feel a support that we can get from the western world and the support that we can get from the international institutions, but also for the partner states.

And it's--of course, it'll very much depend how the situation will develop, but at this moment, as I said, we still believe that there is a chance for the diplomatic and peaceful solution of this conflict.

Mr. David Ignatius: So let me turn to that diplomatic area now. President Obama and Secretary Kerry, in their statements over the last week, have continued to make clear that they think that the U.S. should continue to provide an opportunity for Russia, for President Putin, to select an off-ramp, is the phrase that they use, a way to de-escalate this crisis. Do you think it's too late for that kind of talk after this military intervention in Crimea? Should they stop talking about off-ramps and start talking about different policies?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytzia: You know, it's not--it's never late to talk about the peaceful co-existence. And, unfortunately, the Russian leadership was not very cooperative and on creating a framework or creating a contact group which will deal these--with the beginning of the intervention of Russian troops to the Crimea. I've been in Paris as the same day when Mr.--Minister Lavrov was in--two weeks ago. And with the presence of

Secretary Kerry and other EU foreign ministers, they made a lot of reference to create this contact group to discuss--to establish the group to find out the solution of the crisis.

And it seems to me that there is a different approach that we have with Russians to work this effort and toward this contact group. In case of Russia, they see this effort and see this mediations to discuss and solve the internal situation--internal conflict, internal problems in Ukraine as we see this, it's what's--and we have passed and forwarded this to Russians straightforward, through our mediators, of course, that we see this, the intervention and the bilateral issue between Ukraine and Russia. And we were not to talk with Russia directly or through the mediators or through the contact group, but as a full-fledged member and as a partner in--equal partner of Russia in this group.

Mr. David Ignatius: So I want to ask you whether there have been yet any contacts direct or indirect between your interim government in Kiev and the Russian government, like what Secretary Kerry was seeking in Paris. It didn't seem to have happened then, but since then, have there been any contacts to discuss things like the May 25 elections, things like changes in the Ukrainian Constitution, the range of bilateral issues going forward for Russia and Ukraine?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Unfortunately, not on the level of the government, not on the level of the head of the government and not on the level of the foreign ministries or foreign ministers. The only telephone conversation, as I can recall, was the eve of the Russian invasion to the Crimea. And that was a telephone conversation between the speakers of the parliaments and acting president of Ukraine, and Mr. (inaudible) and the head of the government. Unfortunately, this telephone conversation was rather ultimatum and not cooperative talk. And, personally, I asked--I requested for telephone conversation with Minister Lavrov since already three weeks since I'm in the office and we are not able to talk. So but I've been trying two or three times through our embassy in Moscow to establish such a contact.

And we believe that it's only through the dialogue we can find a solution. We are ready to talk with Russians. We are ready to talk about the existing crisis, existing state of affairs. We are ready to talk about the Russian minority in Ukraine, the Russian language in Ukraine. We are ready to talk about the Constitution reform in the Ukraine, but only if it's talks around the table, but not on the streets with the guns.

Mr. David Ignatius: Can you give us any clearer sense of what this--what you described as the ultimatum

from the Russian Parliament Speaker on the eve of their intervention in Crimea was? Was it a statement that unless you do X, we will take action? What was it?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Yeah, as far as I remember, it was like please--no, not please. Don't-- I'm too diplomatic. Don't terrify Russians in Ukraine. And, otherwise, we will make an order to send troops to the Crimea, to send troops to eastern part of Ukraine. So, and the answer from Ukrainian officials was very simple. Can you show any Russian tortured in Ukraine? Or maybe Russian language is not in use, in full use? There was no argument to say--so the argument was only the force from the Russian side.

Mr. David Ignatius: You made some interesting comments a moment ago, I thought, about Ukraine's openness to discussions with the Russian government about a range of issues. And I know U.S. officials in the State Department had believed that if conversations could have been facilitated through this contact group that Ukraine was prepared to offer the Russians reassurances about a number of issues, such as the rights of Russian-speaking Ukrainians and other matters that would reassure the Russians that they would not be facing a hostile state on their border.

Do I have that--is that an accurate summary of the views of your interim government?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Look, what we have now, the biggest concern or the question which was question mark which was used by Russians' officials at the beginning of this crisis was that why the new Ukrainian government is not allowing Russians to use Russian language in full.

And, of course, it was a mistake by the Ukrainian Parliament to adopt a new law, but the mistake which was corrected immediately and the acting president did not side this law on the use of national minorities' languages. So we have now, in force, the law on languages of national minority languages out from 2012, the law that was submitted by the party of Region members and the law that guarantees their use of Russian language in more than 15 regions of Ukraine out of 25.

So there is no--any--there is no ground for blaming Ukrainian government of not allowing Russians to use Russian language. From the legal point of view, they have a law, moreover we are drafting a new law on the languages, national minority languages. And this law is drafted together with the renowned European institution like Council of Europe and OSCE. So from the legal point of view, there is no concerns.

From the practical point of view, I would advise all of you to go to Ukraine, in any region, I believe, and including the Russian Ukraine, and speak Russian in



cafés, restaurants or on the street and you will get a response in Russian. Go to the cafés in Eastern Ukraine. You will find menu in Russian, maybe English language, but not in Ukrainian. So there is no problem with using Russian language.

Mr. David Ignatius: Let me ask about a particular practical problem in Crimea, which is their supply of electricity and water. Am I right in believing that Ukraine is continuing to supply water and electricity to Crimea today? And if that's true, are there circumstances under which your government might cut off those supplies of water and electricity? And can you tell us what they might be?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: At this moment, we do continue supply for water and electricity to the Crimea. And one of the main--

Mr. David Ignatius: And why? Explain why you're doing that.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Why? Because the Crimea is a part of Ukraine. We consider the Crimea the part of Ukraine. One thing--the other thing, there are Ukrainian citizens living in Ukraine so we cannot cut them off the electricity and water and we are taking care of them.

And I don't know what will be in a month. I don't know what will be tomorrow because the situation is developing so fast. But our approach is a very human

one so until we have the Ukrainians citizens in the Crimea, we will provide them with all needs and supplies.

Mr. David Ignatius: And I want to be clear here. Are you leaving open the possibility that there are circumstances where you might decide to halt those supplies in response to some Russian move?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: I think that we might find more creative way of cutting this or stopping this. And we have a very good example of Russian gas supply to Ukraine. So the fuel be not--but I do not believe in this, the fuel be not controlled in Crimea at all. So there is another option, just to raise the price for gas--sorry, for energy and water. That what Russia is doing to Ukraine all the time.

Mr. David Ignatius: I want to ask you about the question that I hear in Washington more than any other issue among policymakers, which is it's essential that the new Ukraine succeed as a free and independent country. And so I want to ask you what ways the people in this room, the world as a whole, can help the Ukrainian project succeed? And if you'd be as specific as possible about the things that your government will need after elections May 25, as you begin to build out a new government. What are you going to need in terms of economic assistance, security assistance? What are the basics?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: We need to start reforms today. We don't have to wait until the results or outcome of the elections of May 25. And these reforms are needed in almost all areas of Ukrainian society and economy. And we need to fight the corruption. We need to improve financial system, banking system. We need to reform our military, our police. We need to reform our diplomatic services. And we need to start it immediately.

So I think that today is very important day for Ukraine. So we did--so what we did today, it's a very good sign in what directions this reform has to go.

Mr. David Ignatius: And you're referring to the EU accession?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Not accession yet, but--

Mr. David Ignatius: Political agreement. Sorry. Jumping the gun here.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Yeah, I--you wanted to--

Mr. David Ignatius: The political agreement.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Political part of the association agreement. It's a very good sign, which shows a direction where we have to go. And it shows not only for Ukrainian society, but also for the rest of the world, particularly for Europe. And if all--we all want it to succeed in this, then we double, triple our efforts--our own Ukrainian efforts to make sure that those European values we've been fighting for during

the Euro-revolution on Maidan will be a part of our lives.

And I believe that also European politicians and European nations will--do support this because of the same values they share--that we share.

Mr. David Ignatius: And would it be your goal someday, building on what happened today, for Ukraine to be a member of the European Union?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Do you want me to answer the diplomat or the Ukrainian average person?

Mr. David Ignatius: Well...

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: As a diplomat would say that we have a right, according to the static [sic] of '49 to apply for the membership--as a European nation to apply for the EU member state. But the Ukraine, I would say that we do feel Europeans and we want to be Europeans.

Mr. David Ignatius: I think we get that parse that further. And so I have to ask you the obvious follow-on question, what about NATO? What about NATO membership?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: With this it's--the answer is not so complicated for me. NATO, the international institution--international organization, political and military, we have a very intensive dialogue with NATO We will keep this dialogue. But you wanted to ask me, probably you wanted to ask me if you wanted to join NATO.

Mr. David Ignatius: Yes.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Then my response would be that, at this moment, we do not have a legal basis to join NATO. There is no document or law in Ukraine which foreseen membership in NATO--Ukraine's membership in NATO So there is no legal basis, neither on the level of the parliament nor on the level of the government.

The new government has a program which foreseen in the foreign policy the three main tasks. It is European Union--association with the European Union, which is almost completed, but we will continue to work on this way. The normalization of our relations with Russia, and the third task is the visa-free regime or liberalization of a visa regime with European Union.

So there is even no mentioning about NATO in the (inaudible) program. So how we could do something which is illegal? So there is no plans to join NATO at this stage. But there is also other aspects of this. I do not believe that there is support for NATO membership now in Ukraine, enough support to apply to be a member of alliance. And there is--I believe there is also not enough support among the NATO member states to accept Ukraine as a member at this stage, where there's such situation inside Ukraine and around Ukraine. So it's not on the agenda.

Mr. David Ignatius: Yeah, it is a fact, however, that Ukraine has been, since 1994, a membership of the

so-called Partnership for Peace Program, which is an adjunct of NATO that allows for discussions, various sort of low level assistance. Is that an area that you think could be pursued to provide, in this period of transition Ukraine, some greater help in thinking about security issues?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Yes. So we are using all the existing bilateral treaties and all the contacts--available contacts and all the channels with NATO to identify our contacts have our cooperation, but it's mainly in the formal exercise, training, exchange of information including classified information. And some support that we can get from NATO that's expertise (inaudible).

Mr. David Ignatius: I want to ask you one final question and then I'm going to ask the audience to vote on one of these computer questions. And then if you're willing, I'm going to ask you to comment on what the audience voted. But the final question for you really goes to the question of what the future of your country in between Russia and the European Union, what that future will look like?

A thoughtful American strategist, Zbigniew Brzezinski, has written that he thinks some kind of Finland-ization, a phrase that obviously is rich with history, but I take to mean some kind of independent, neutral status may be the right future for Ukraine.

Graham Allison, one of my mentors at the Harvard Kennedy School, has just written that he favors apropos here in Brussels. He favors the Belgium solution for Ukraine.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: We need a king.

Mr. David Ignatius: Well, you need a--the--you need a king you need chocolates, there's so many things you need. But, what--they both capture a vision of Ukraine that is--where you are standing between east and west, and I want to ask you your reaction to those two descriptions. Do you think Ukrainians today are seeking a more European future where they're really leaning more in that balance, or is something right at the fulcrum what we should imagine?

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: I wanted to clarify something, so what you said. When you ask about Ukraine future between European Union and Russia, I don't think it's a way where we wanted to go. And, when you said about Finlandization, of Finland. Finland is a part of European Union. So, if you go for this--

Mr. David Ignatius: This dates back to the--to another era.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: --if you go for this past, it's not between the EU and Russia. It is about cooperation between the EU member states, Ukraine, and Russia. And good cooperation. Finland, I've been Ambassador to Finland, and I would say that they have a

very good relations. And I think that they have more or less the same border, the lands of the border between Finland and--we have little bit bigger, but it's okay. We can manage to keep a very good neighborhood relations with Russia and we wanted to keep this relations with Russia and Russian people.

Mr. David Ignatius: As the European--

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: As the European member state. As--and then there would be no debate where we have to be in between, to whom we have to belong.

Mr. David Ignatius: That's a very clear and helpful answer. So, let me go to our Brussels connect team, wherever they are, and they--if this is all working, are flashing on the screen. The thing that our audience gets to vote on, I'm going to read the choices. This is meant to be provocative, of course.

If Russian troops invade eastern Ukraine, the west should one, issue a tough statement. Two, seek an off-ramp. Three, provide weapons and training to the Ukrainian military. Four, apply punishing economic sanctions. Five, recall ambassadors from Moscow. Six, threaten direct military intervention.

I think you can only vote for one. So you have--the clock says ten--the clock is ticking down. I'm very curious how people will vote on this. I'm looking at Carl Bildt, who doesn't have--he can't vote, so. I'm



sorry about that. So, do we have the results? We do. Well now that's interesting.

So, the nearly half of this audience saying apply punishing economic sanctions. In other words, continue the kind of policy that we have now, is appropriate. 25% think that we should provide weapons and training, and if you add to that the 13% who feel we should threaten direct military intervention, that is, you know over 35, 38, almost 40% who feel that the military response or the threat of a military response is appropriate.

So I want to ask you the west has now chosen essentially number four. Apply punishing economic sanctions. If this crisis should deepen, with something we all hope and pray won't happen, but if it should happen, do you think we should expand that menu beyond number four to numbers three and six? Or things like them. I don't mean to hold you to that language.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytzia: No, I think that the option for the peaceful solution is the result of this (inaudible). And half of the (inaudible) who participate in the (inaudible) has chosen the non-military pressure on Russia. And, which gives me a kind of optimism that we also have chosen the right path to fight with Russia.

Non-military, but diplomatic economic financial (inaudible) means. And, I think that what is very

important, so that this sanctions and this decisions that the European Union and the U.S. and Ukraine also is taking against Russia is directed against those who made the decision to invade Ukraine, and not to Russian people. And, because Russian people are wise enough, I think, to understand that they also wanted to live in with Ukraine without war. In good neighborhood environment.

Mr. David Ignatius: So, with that, I want to thank Minister Deschchytsia for really remarkable conversation, and I know the audience joins me in that, and in wishing him and his country good luck.

Mr. Andrii Deschchytsia: Thank you.

Mr. Craig Kennedy: Thank you very much. It was really terrific. Okay, now the vote on the mystery session was really close, but 95% did go for the soft power/hard power. We'll announce tomorrow morning or sometime tomorrow who the panelists are. Now, it's my pleasure to invite you to join us for dinner. We're trying a little different experiment this year. We've got square tables instead round. And you'll understand when we get down there. Thank you all.