

Constitution Day in Ukraine: a continuing struggle for sovereignty



UKRAINE'S HISTORICAL SOVEREIGNTY

- Despite the Kremlin's claims to the contrary, Ukraine has had a long history as a unique, separate and cosmopolitan culture that has, by proximity, been intertwined with Russia's.
- Much of Ukraine's history saw this unique identity suppressed by successive Russian regimes (Tsarist, pre and post Stalin), but it has remained present regardless.
- Ukraine obtained official independence in December 1991, and signed the Budapest Memorandum with Russia and the USA (in which it gave up its nuclear arsenal for security assurances) in 1994. But after Putin and the Chekists came to power in 2000, Ukraine faced repeated attempts to suborn it to the Kremlin.

STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

- In 2004, the Kremlin's preferred candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was on track to lose to the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko. In December that year, Yushchenko was poisoned with Dioxin; investigations concluded that the pro-Russian Ukrainian Security Services were responsible.
- Yushchenko survived and won the presidency in the "Orange Revolution." But after Yushchenko announced his administration's aim to align with Europe, Russia announced a significant reduction in gas supplies to Ukraine in the middle of winter. Yushchenko was forced to abandon the initiative.
- Yanukovich eventually became President in 2008. In 2014 he was on track for trade deal with the EU, but performed a U turn and signed a partnership deal with Russia that was on less generous terms. This led to allegations of corruption and protests that turned violent after security forces killed five protestors.
- Yanukovich fled to Russia and within the week armed men dressed like professional soldiers but bearing no insignia seized key areas of the Crimean peninsula. These "little green men" were confirmed to be Russian forces (a fact the Kremlin has inadvertently admitted). The Crimea was then illegally annexed into Russia via a referendum while still under occupation (illegal under international law).
- Post 2014 saw the Kremlin continue to ramp up its assaults on Ukrainian sovereignty. Reports confirmed that Russia continued to support and fight alongside Eastern separatists in the Donbas, while increasingly vitriolic disinformation campaigns accused the Ukrainian government of being Western-puppets driven by Nazi ideology responsible for crimes against humanity and the downing of flight Malaysian Airlines Flight 17; all of which have been disproven.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

- The current invasion of Ukraine is the culmination of a twenty year obsession within the Kremlin to prevent Ukraine becoming an independent, democratic state.
- Throughout the conflict, the Kremlin has engaged in a systematic disinformation campaign to falsely depict Kyiv as a Nazi junta, deny continual evidence of war crimes perpetrated by Russian forces, and deflect blame for the consequences of its invasion and blockade of Ukraine on international food supplies.
- The greatest concern is that these disinformation narratives (with help from the Chinese Communist Party) are gaining traction in the Global South, preventing a unified international response to Russian aggression and prolonging the suffering in Ukraine and beyond. Countering this disinformation and publicising Ukraine's thirty year struggle for sovereignty must be a top priority for the West.
- Like many states in the Global South, Ukraine has had to continually struggle for its right to independence and self-determination. There is a realistic possibility that this narrative could win over members of that community and tip the balance of the conflict out of a stalemate into Ukraine's favor.

CONSTITUTION DAY

Constitution Day is a public holiday in Ukraine to commemorate the ratification of the state's constitution on 28th June 1996. Although the country has a long and unique history, this date marked Ukraine's official break from its (largely forced) unity with Russia and its attempt to forge a new and independent future.

In 2000, Ukraine faced repeated attempts to suborn it to the Kremlin.



A Copy of the Ukrainian Constitution. Source: [Ukrainian Information Ministry](#)