



Anti-government protests in Kiev, 2014

Author: Sasha Maksymenko; URL: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-government\\_protests\\_in\\_Kiev\\_\(13087644205\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Anti-government_protests_in_Kiev_(13087644205).jpg)

## Introduction. The Ukrainian Crises in European Media and the Public Sphere

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The situation in Ukraine is the subject of an intense discussion in the public sphere and the media across Europe. But what do we know about how our neighbouring countries are reflecting on the crisis, its historical background and its meaning for the relationship between our countries, Ukraine, Russia and the European Union? During 2014 and 2015 the Cultures of History Forum asked historians and sociologists from more than 15 European countries, the US, Israel and Turkey to reflect on the media coverage and public debates regarding the Ukrainian crisis in their countries.

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## Introduction. The Ukrainian Crises in European Media and the Public Sphere

Media throughout Europe began covering the events in Ukraine when the massive demonstrations on the Maidan in Kiev began in November 2013, after then Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich unexpectedly refused to sign a planned association treaty with the EU in Vilnius and turned instead to Russia and negotiations over a multimillion-dollar line of credit. After the first demonstrators were tortured and shot to death by Ukrainian security forces in January 2014, the Ukrainian protest movement became a lead story. Further developments in the crisis have since been subject to heated debate in television news, daily newspapers, talk shows, roundtables, and special reports. From the escalation of violence on the Euromaidan in February 2014 to Yanukovich's flight to Russia to the installation of a new government in Kiev, the crisis in Crimea, and the armed conflict and escalating disturbances in eastern Ukraine, coverage of these events has been fraught with emotions, historically grounded fears, and partisanship.

### The Ukrainian Crises in European Media and the Public Sphere. Introduction

"There is no Europe without Ukraine, and no Ukraine without Europe!" With this sentence, the 1 May 2014 celebrations in Warsaw marking the tenth anniversary of Poland's entry into the EU were brought to a close.

Media throughout Europe began covering the events in Ukraine when the massive demonstrations on the Maidan in Kiev began in November 2013, after then Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich unexpectedly refused to sign a planned association treaty with the EU in Vilnius and turned instead to Russia and negotiations over a multimillion-dollar line of credit. After the first demonstrators were tortured and shot to death by Ukrainian security forces in January 2014, the Ukrainian protest movement became a lead story. Further developments in the crisis have since been subject to heated debate in television news, daily newspapers, talk shows, roundtables, and special reports. From the escalation of violence on the Euromaidan in February 2014 to Yanukovich's flight to Russia to the installation of a new government in Kiev, the crisis in Crimea, and the armed conflict and escalating disturbances in eastern Ukraine, coverage of these events has been fraught with emotions, historically grounded fears, and partisanship.

Not all countries have demonstrated the same degree of solidarity with the Maidan movement and attempts at reform in Ukraine as has Poland, which for years has seen itself as the advocate for its eastern neighbour in the EU, both because and in spite of the fraught history that the two countries have shared, especially in the twentieth century.

What do we know of how our neighbouring countries view the crisis, its historical background and current meaning for the relationship between their countries, the Ukraine, Russia and the European Union?

We asked historians, sociologists, political scientists and journalists from more than 15 European countries, the US, Israel and Turkey to write about the media coverage of and public debates on the Ukrainian crisis in their own countries for the Imre Kertész Kolleg's Cultures of History Forum. The authors summarize the main issues raised in reflections on the Maidan movement and the situation in the Ukraine and Crimea and point to shifts in this thinking over time. In particular, their contributions highlight the frequent recourse to historical issues and narratives in discourse on the Ukrainian crisis, prevailing images of Ukraine, Russia and the European Union, and the historical concepts and

stereotypes on which those images are based.

Some articles, like those by Estonian political scientist Maria Mälksoo and Serbian historian Ivana Dobrivojević, also consider the effects this conflict has had on debates in their own countries regarding ethnic minorities, such as the Russian-speaking minorities in Estonia and Latvia or the situation between Serbia and Kosovo.

The German historian Kai Struve analyses the highly controversial German debate about German-Russian relations, its historical background and the question of the politically correct attitude towards Putin and his policies, as well as the right-wing Ukrainian groups at the Euromaidan.

The analysis of media coverage of the Ukrainian crisis in the Netherlands was written in the traumatic aftermath of the crash of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17. During the Year of Friendship between Russia and the Netherlands in 2013, only a few people in the Netherlands paid attention to what was happening in the Ukraine or criticized policies against opposition groups in Russia. Beginning in November 2013, the protests in Kiev attracted the attention of a broader public, but it was only after the 17 July 2014 crash, when the Malaysian aircraft was shot down over eastern Ukraine by pro-Russian separatists on its way from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur, that the Ukrainian conflict suddenly became for several weeks the most important topic throughout the media and in household conversation.

The report on news coverage in Ukraine itself is an analysis of the structure of the Ukrainian media landscape, which underwent considerable upheaval as a result of the Maidan protests. While state-run television channels and the private stations owned by oligarchs featured government-friendly news coverage or devoted their programming to entertainment, the protests saw the launch of a number of independent internet television stations and web portals. In her article, Natalya Ryabinska investigates the different ways specific media reported on the protest movement, the violent clashes of February 2014 and the political transformation; what role and what kind of influence Facebook and Twitter have had on the Maidan movement; and whether and in what way the Ukrainian media landscape has been altered.

Naturally these individual contributions can present only a limited view of the discourse in each country and of its participants, and the selection and configuration of emphases are also determined by the respective perspectives of their authors.

The majority of the articles were written between early April and late May 2014 and were thus already outdated by the time the difficulties and horrible events of the last weeks came about. Others were written between May and October 2014, but focus largely on events between November 2013 and May 2014. In the future, and at broader intervals, further articles may be added and existing ones updated should developments in Ukraine and changes in reporting require it.

In the meantime, a spate of recent publications, representing a variety of perspectives and points of departure, has begun to provide initial analyses and contextualisation of Euromaidan and the political upheaval and armed conflict in Ukraine.<sup>[1]</sup> Particular mention should be made of Claudia Dathe's and Andreas Rostek's impressive collection of essays and articles *Majdan! Ukraine, Europa*, which was published in March 2014; one of the very first books to appear about Euromaidan, it provided the inspiration for this project.<sup>[2]</sup>

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to all of the authors, who were both generous and positive

in engaging this format and who, despite numerous other obligations and at rather short notice, provided us with these intelligent, knowledgeable, and critical analyses.

## Footnotes

[1] Svetlana Suveica, Biljana Vankovska, Dorian Jano and Murat Önsoy, Dossier: Perspectives on the Ukrainian Crisis, *Südosteuropa* 62, no. 2 (2014): 208-264; Simone Geissbühler and Andreas Umland, eds., *Kiew - Revolution 3.0: Der Euromaidan 2013/14 und die Zukunftsperspektiven der Ukraine*, Stuttgart, 2014; Konrad Schuller, *Ukraine: Chronik einer Revolution*, Berlin, 2014; Juri Andruchowytsh, *Euromaidan: Was in der Ukraine auf dem Spiel steht*, Berlin: Edition Suhrkamp, 2014; Andrej Kurkow, *Ukrainisches Tagebuch: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Herzen der Proteste*, Innsbruck, 2014.

[2] Claudia Dathe and Andreas Rostek, eds., *Majdan! Ukraine, Europa*, Berlin, 2014.

