



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)

## Russia - The Discourse on the Ukrainian Conflict in Russian Media, November 2013 – April 2014

Alexander Graef

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The present brief report describes the main fault lines of Russian media discourse on the political crisis in Ukraine between late November 2013 and April 2014. It focuses on the characterisation of the Maidan movement, the Crimean Crisis and the development of separatist movements in the Donbass region as three distinct episodes of the conflict. The report is based on articles and transcripts from the archives of online versions of a number of newspapers and one TV channel, whose reporting ranges across the political spectrum. This is intended to provide a broad overview of perceptions and an evaluation of both the dominant state discourse and marginalised liberal discourse.

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## Russia - The Discourse on the Ukrainian Conflict in Russian Media, November 2013 – April 2014

The present brief report describes the main fault lines of Russian media discourse on the political crisis in Ukraine between late November 2013 and April 2014. It focuses on the characterisation of the Maidan movement, the Crimean Crisis and the development of separatist movements in the Donbass region as three distinct episodes of the conflict. The report is based on articles and transcripts from the archives of online versions of a number of newspapers and one TV channel, whose reporting ranges across the political spectrum. This is intended to provide a broad overview of perceptions and an evaluation of both the dominant state discourse and marginalised liberal discourse.

The overwhelming majority of Russians rely on state TV as their primary source of political information.<sup>[1]</sup> As a consequence, Anti-Maydan views expressed on state channels, for example by Dmitry Kiselyov in his weekly TV show *Vesti Nedeli*, are quite influential in forming public opinion in Russia. However, as it is difficult to analyse untranscribed media data, I largely rely on articles in the widely read tabloid *Argumenti i Fakti*,<sup>[2]</sup> the online newspaper *Vzglyad*<sup>[3]</sup> and *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*<sup>[4]</sup> in order to reconstruct the sentiment of the dominant (state) discourse. Instead of concentrating exclusively on the latter, this short report highlights the diversity of reporting by including representatives of Russia's liberal press as well. One caveat, however, is that opinions diverging from the official point of view, such as those expressed in *Novaya Gazeta* and on *Slon.ru*, are read only by a minority and remain marginalised in Russian society. On the other hand, they are arguably shared by the liberal segment of the Russian intelligentsia as well as by educated young people in metropolitan areas such as Moscow and St. Petersburg. In the following, I refer to these broad differences with the labels 'liberal' and 'dominant' (state) discourse.

### The Majdan-Movement

In keeping with basic differences in ownership, political outlook and audience, the beginning of the Maidan movement in late November 2013 was characterised very differently across the Russian media landscape. Whereas in the dominant discourses the Ukrainian movement was analysed mainly from a geopolitical point of view and with an eye to Russian economic interests, liberal newspapers concentrated on stories on the ground, with a focus on the activists on the Maidan and their motivations. They framed their activism and courage in positive terms<sup>[5]</sup> and stressed the prevalence of young people among the demonstrators,<sup>[6]</sup> who were characterised as having 'realistic ideas' about Europe. Russia's liberal press also emphasised the largely peaceful character of the Maidan movement and the harmlessness of nationalist and anti-Russian sentiments.<sup>[7]</sup> In turn, the decision by president Yanukovich to hold back his signature on the Association Agreement with the European Union was widely described as a result of Russian pressure or as a betrayal of the dreams and hopes of the Ukrainian people. Later, the sincerity of Majdan was contrasted with the hollowness of the so-called Anti-Maidan. In this regard, historical differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine were used as a springboard for understanding. Whereas those people who demonstrated on the Maidan were described as freely supporting the idea of a democratic, European future for Ukraine even at the risk of losing their jobs, those participating in Anti-Maidan were portrayed as people from the East who were different in their

appearance and customs, and who had been bussed in to Kiev and either paid or threatened to ensure their support for the state authorities.<sup>[8]</sup>

The differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine also took center stage in the dominant discourse, but in a different context. Eastern and Western Ukraine were said to represent two different states "less similar to each other than the US and the UK".<sup>[9]</sup> The status of Ukraine was compared to that of eighteenth-century Poland, which switched back and forth between different poles of influence and political orientation until it finally lost its sovereign statehood in 1795. Against this idea of prospective political turmoil and instability, Yanukovich's decision was seen as a sovereign one and as being in the interest of the Ukrainian state, while European values were discredited as involving violence, deceit and double standards.<sup>[10]</sup> In the context of increasing radicalisation and more frequent violent clashes between demonstrators and the Ukrainian Special Forces (Berkut), the focus shifted to what was perceived as the anti-Russian attitude of Maidan activists, who were characterised as "ignoring court decisions, blocking and seizing state institutions, while attempting to repeat the scenario of the last 'Orange Revolution'".<sup>[11]</sup> In turn, actions taken against such illegal acts were said to be reasonable and justified, especially by comparison with much stronger interventions by Western police forces in similar situations.<sup>[12]</sup> The involvement of the US as the main sponsor of the coup d'etat (pervorot) and its strategic interests in separating Ukraine from Russia were contrasted with the natural brotherhood of the Russian and Ukrainian people and their sincere interest in each other. More generally, the West was accused of hypocrisy, of attempting regime change and of the ruthless pursuit of its own strategic geopolitical and economic interests.<sup>[13]</sup> In addition, the responsibility for the political crisis was ascribed to a 'Ukrainian fifth column' financed by the West for the last decade and now mobilised by European institutions.<sup>[14]</sup> In this context, according to one observer, covert Western support for the Ukrainian opposition now revealed the doublespeak of the European Union and its view of Ukraine as a "colony, one of the many poor territories that depend on the mercy of Brussels and dream of the standards of a united Europe".<sup>[15]</sup>

In January 2014, reporting in the Russian media took a turn. The springboard for this was the amendments and laws adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) on 16th January, which introduced a comprehensive set of measures that affected the freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of speech and expression and freedom of association and the right to a fair trial.<sup>[16]</sup> These "laws of dictatorship" (zakony diktatury), as they were dubbed by Ukrainian and Russian media alike, triggered among other things the eruption of heavy violence on Hrushevskoho Street and clashes between members of the Right Sector (Pravyi Sektor) and Berkut forces that lasted until the end of January 2014. President Yanukovich, in a helpless attempt to regain control of the situation, offered the position of prime minister to Arseniy Yatsenyuk and accepted the resignation of prime minister Mykola Azarov. In turn, the Verkhovna Rada annulled most of its earlier decisions and voted instead for a law granting amnesty to protestors under the condition that they would clear seized administrative buildings and transport roads.<sup>[17]</sup> Against this backdrop, the language used by state-controlled media and those newspapers that had been critical of the whole revolutionary process from the very beginning, became harsh and even hostile. More importantly, the more visible presence of Ukrainian nationalists on Maidan became the dominant lens through which the ongoing crisis was evaluated. For example, Andrej Sidorchik emotionally condemned the ongoing riots on Hrushevskoho Street as the "attempt of a fascist rebellion" and Maidan as a "demo-version of a fascist state".<sup>[18]</sup> On the other hand, the well-known former Kremlin spin-doctor and political strategist Gleb Pavlovsky argued in a much more analytical fashion that the radicals would be helpless to withstand a serious attempt to disperse them. He suggested that the consolidation of Ukrainian statehood had simply become much more difficult due to the rise of radical nationalism.<sup>[19]</sup>

With the hasty flight of President Yanukovich on 21 February 2014 and the subsequent take-over of power by the parliamentary opposition,<sup>[20]</sup> the political judgment of the dominant media discourse in Russia became unambiguous: the new government in Kiev was a coalition of the mafia-like, new rich and banderovtsy<sup>[21]</sup> who, being in the majority now, were no different from the elite nomenklatura against whom the Maidan movement had been directed.<sup>[22]</sup> In this context, participation in the new government by members of the far right (Right Sector and the Svoboda party) was perceived as especially outrageous.<sup>[23]</sup> The new power and all its decisions were regarded as illegitimate.<sup>[24]</sup>

## The Crimean Crisis

With the transition of power to the opposition in Kyïv, the situation in Sevastopol', the capital of Crimea, changed quickly. On 26th February 2014, ten to fifteen thousand demonstrators - both supporters and opponents of the new Ukrainian government - gathered around noon in front of the Supreme Council (parliament) building. One day later, unidentified armed men forced their way into the building. The Supreme Council convened an emergency session, passed a motion of no confidence in the executive Council of Ministers and dismissed Anatoliy Mohyl'ov as its chairman. The leader of the Russian Unity Party, Sergey Aksyonov, became the new prime minister of Crimea. The Supreme Council also organised a referendum on greater Crimean autonomy to be held 25th May 2014,<sup>[25]</sup> which was then moved forward to 30th March due to "the difficult situation of the conflict, which had gone beyond the reasonable".<sup>[26]</sup> Voices of the dominant discourse interpreted this development as the natural consequence of the nationalist Euromaidan with its slogan "Ukraine for Ukrainians".<sup>[27]</sup> Aksyonov's concentration of power was characterised as necessary in order to prevent "the next waves of disorder and provocation coming from Maidan".<sup>[28]</sup> This evaluation of events was apparently also shared by ethnic Russians in Simferopol' who were interviewed by Novaya Gazeta. To them, all the people on Maidan were banderovtsy, while they described Russia as their true rodina, or homeland, to which they wished to return after twenty years of occupation.<sup>[29]</sup> By contrast, the liberal press accentuated the Russian influence and strategy by arguing that on 25th February the Russian Security Council had already confirmed the directive to transfer military troops to the Crimea under the pretext of military exercise in the border region.<sup>[30]</sup> The decision itself was said to be irrational, inadequate and the beginning of the end.<sup>[31]</sup> No annexation - neither in Southeastern Ukraine nor in the Crimea - would correspond to any rational Russian interests.<sup>[32]</sup> In this regard, an article published by Andrey Zubov, a professor at the Moscow Institute for International Relations (MGIMO)<sup>[33]</sup> associated with the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, became especially prominent. In it, he compared the annexation of Crimea to the Anschluss of Austria to the German Reich in 1938 and called upon the readers to "say no to this insane and, most importantly, completely unnecessary aggression".<sup>[34]</sup> Three days later Zubov was informed of his removal from the university,<sup>[35]</sup> a decision enforced on 24th March.<sup>[36]</sup> In addition, Novaya Gazeta provided a platform for liberal-minded economists to warn against the negative consequences for Russia of annexing the Crimea<sup>[37]</sup> and also published an open letter by Grigory Yavlinsky, former leader of the social-liberal party Yabloko, in which he called for an international conference on Ukraine and highlighted the importance of territorial integrity for both Russia and Ukraine.<sup>[38]</sup> Further, Slon and Novaya Gazeta were among the small number of news outlets that extensively reported on the anti-war protests taking place on 2th and 15th March 2014 in Moscow, which had more than 30 000 participants.<sup>[39]</sup> Most other news sources either did not take them seriously or did not cover them at all.

In the aftermath of the Crimean referendum on 16th March 2014, in which - according to official sources - 96.77% voted for reunification of Crimea with Russia,<sup>[40]</sup> the legitimacy of the referendum and the result itself became the major contested issues. In this context, legal and historical considerations of the right of the inhabitants of Crimea to secede were mixed. On the one hand, Crimea's secession was justified

with reference to other international cases. The tabloid *Argumenti i Fakti*, for example, published a short discussion of territorial redistribution since 1945, which included, among others, Tibet 1950, Northern Cyprus 1974, German Democracy Republic 1990 and Kosovo 1999.<sup>[41]</sup> Especially with regard to Kosovo, whose declaration of independence from Serbia had been uncritically acknowledged by many Western states, any critique of the Crimean referendum by the West could only be understood as hypocrisy and as an application of double standards, according to this argument. Due to the unconstitutional and violent coup d'etat of nationalist radicals in Kiev and the danger it posed for the whole territory of Ukraine, the decision of the Crimean people was said to conform to the right to self-determination supposedly guaranteed by the United Nations Charter. In addition, the support for Crimean secession from Ukraine by Crimean Tartars, who constituted 13% of the population of the Crimean Peninsula, became crucial in legitimising the referendum and enhancing its democratic credentials. Depending on their political orientation, the media presented different experts and representatives of the Tartars as bearing witness to, alternately, the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the referendum. By contrast, voices from the liberal discourse emphasised the statements made by representatives of the Meilis - the highest executive-representative body of the Crimean Tatar People - such as Mustafa Dzhemilev and Refat Chubarov, according to whom the great majority of Tartars had not participated in the referendum at all. On the other hand, the dominant discourse pointed to the disunity of Tartars by quoting Lenur Usmanov, the leader of the Crimean Tatar community of Sevastopol', who supported the annexation and said that the position of the Meilis was not constructive.<sup>[42]</sup>

The result of the referendum was taken as a reflection of the true, authentic sentiments of Crimeans and of the hopes of ethnic Russians to restore historical justice. According to this narrative, the majority of people had decided to 'come home' on emotional grounds, long before the referendum took place.<sup>[43]</sup> In his address on the occasion of their unification on 18th March 2014, Russian president, Vladimir Putin, strongly emphasised these historical and emotional bonds in explaining Russia's position:

Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where prince Vladimir was baptised. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilisation and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. The graves of Russian soldiers whose bravery brought Crimea into the Russian empire are also in Crimea. This is also Sevastopol' - a legendary city with an outstanding history, a fortress that serves as the birthplace of Russia's Black Sea Fleet. Crimea is Balaklava and Kerch, Malakhov Kurgan and Sapun Ridge. Each one of these places is dear to our hearts, symbolising Russian military glory and outstanding valour.<sup>[44]</sup>

In addition to these symbolic-historical reminiscences, Putin claimed more concretely that the decision of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet to transfer the Crimean region from the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic to Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in February 1954 had been unconstitutional and only based on the personal will of the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikita Khrushchov.<sup>[45]</sup> Furthermore, he reminded his audience of the unorganised collapse of the Soviet Union, where "millions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in different ones"<sup>[46]</sup> and that "residents of Crimea [...] were handed over like a sack of potatoes" as a consequence.<sup>[47]</sup> The reality of Crimea's inclusion in Ukraine, according to Putin, could only be endured as long as Ukraine remained a good neighbour, a democratic and civilised state that would protect the rights of Russian citizens and Russian speakers. For Putin, as for many other members of the political elite, these preconditions were no longer fulfilled after what they perceived as a coup d'etat led by "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites."<sup>[48]</sup>

## The Conflict in Donbass

In late February 2014, Russian media reported Anti-Maidan gatherings in Donetsk and Kharkov after proponents of the new government in Kiev had captured the local administration buildings. Similar to reporting on the events in Crimea, Russian media evaluations of the ongoing protests, which soon became known as the 'Russian spring', differed considerably from one media outlet to another. While some highlighted the "aggressive character of the coming event" triggered by Titushki (young, presumably simple-minded and aggressive men in athletic kit) and the unfriendliness of the demonstrators toward Ukrainian journalists,<sup>[48]</sup> others primarily quoted representatives of the demonstrators, such as Pavel Gubarev in Donetsk, who denounced the government in Kiev as illegitimate and called for the governor of the oblast, Andrey Shishatsky, to step down. Readers were also informed about an alleged appeal made by the "small number of Euromaidan protestors" to the Right Sector for ideological support.<sup>[49]</sup> On 6 March Gubarev was taken into custody by the local Security Service of Ukraine (SBU). Subsequently, regularly demonstrations were held in Donetsk, demanding his release and a referendum on the status of the Donbass.<sup>[50]</sup> On 16 March the protestors stormed the regional prosecutor's office.<sup>[51]</sup> While reporting on events in both Donetsk and Kharkov was similar across the media landscape, the devil was in the details and in the different assessments. In a kind of reverse mirror of the Maidan reporting, the dominant discourse now emphasised police violence (e.g. use of flare shells) against the protestors and pointed to links between local fascists and regional representatives who did not support the demonstrators, such as the mayor of Kharkov, Gennady Kernes.<sup>[52]</sup> On the other hand, representatives of the liberal press reported the clash of pro-Russian and anti-interventionist protestors and, with reference to the former, emphasised the presence of "aggressive, half-drunk men" - figures familiar from Maidan - who had been brought to the center of Donetsk by unknown agents.<sup>[53]</sup> More precisely, it was argued that the driving core of the separatists was constituted by groups of fighters coming not from Ukrainian territory proper, but from the Rostov oblast in Russia, just across the border.<sup>[54]</sup>

## Conclusion

The present report shows that discourse on the Ukrainian crisis in the Russian media has been more diverse than the widespread Western perception of it as uniformly Anti-Maidan propaganda would suggest. In fact, the Russian media produced at least two distinct discourses. On the one hand, the dominant state media and widely read tabloids largely framed the take-over of power by the Ukrainian opposition as a fascist coup d'état, supported by Western governments.<sup>[55]</sup> Moreover those media outlets legitimised the annexation of Crimea as an expression of the genuine will of the Crimeans to rejoin their historical motherland, Russia. On the other hand, Russia's marginalised liberal press has viewed in the Maidan movement an expression of the Ukrainian people's will to overcome the corrupt regime of President Yanukovich, and they heavily criticised the annexation of Crimea as being against both Russia's true interests and international law.<sup>[56]</sup> Despite the attempt to base these characterisations on a sound empirical basis, it goes without saying that the present report cannot do justice to the great complexity of events and the nuances of the Russian media discourse covering them. In particular, a comprehensive analysis of Russian media discourse on the Ukrainian conflict would necessarily have to include Russian state TV channels such as Pervy Kanal, Rossiya-1, Rossiya-24 and NTV, whose news broadcasting reaches almost the entirety of Russian households and remains the dominant source of political information in Russian society.



## Footnotes

1. According to polls conducted by the Levada centre in April and May 2014, either 94% or 92% of the Russian people received information on the Ukrainian crisis from TV, while only 16-22% informed themselves via online newspapers, and 9-11% via print newspapers. *Situatsiya v Ukraine: otsenki, ozhidaniya, perspektivi*, Levada-Tsentr (30 May 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.levada.ru/30-05-2014/situatsiya-v-ukraine-otsenki-ozhidaniya-perspektivy>.
2. Generally *Argumenti i Fakti* is regarded as one of the most widely read newspapers in Russia. According to an analysis by journalists from *calvertjournal.com*, it has a readership of 5.9 Million, see *Media compass: Russia's changing media landscape*, *The Calvert Journal* (April 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://calvertjournal.com/features/show/2234/russian-media-independent-compass>.
3. *Vzglyad* is owned by Konstantin Rykov, former member of the State Duma for United Russia. He is known for his public support of President Putin (see for example his website *Za Putina* (For Putin), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://zaputina.ru>).
4. *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* is the official daily newspaper of the Russian government and publishes official decrees, statements and documents.
5. See Katerina Kobernik, *Noviy ukrainiy Maydan: Vzglyad iznutri*, *Slon* (25 November 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://slon.ru/world/novyy\\_ukrainiy\\_maydan\\_vzglyad\\_iznutri-1024333.xhtml](http://slon.ru/world/novyy_ukrainiy_maydan_vzglyad_iznutri-1024333.xhtml).
6. See Ol'ga Musafirova, *Ya vishel na Maydan: A ty?*, *Novaya Gazeta* (22 November 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/61101.html>.
7. See Pavel Kanygin, *Samo rassosetsya?*, *Novaya Gazeta* (11 December 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/61401.html> and his interview with Petro Poroshenko in which Poroshenko claims that the protestors ("we") were fighting against violent provocateurs and were "absolutely tolerant and even enthusiastic towards Russians", see Pavel Kanygin, *Ya v etoy strane rabotayu Petrom Alekseevichem Poroshenko*, *Novaya Gazeta* (26 December 2013) retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/politics/61576.html>.
8. See Katerina Kobernik, *Kto i zachem prishel na Antimaydan*, *Slon* (16 December 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://slon.ru/world/dva\\_maydana-1034476.xhtml](http://slon.ru/world/dva_maydana-1034476.xhtml) and Pavel Kanigin, *K razdache opozdal. Minus 250 griven*, *Novaya Gazeta* (6 December 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/61312.html>.
9. Andrey Sidorchik, *Neskazannoe na TV, ili Ukraina, pomni o Pol'she!*, *Argumenti i Fakti* (22 November 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.aif.ru/opinion/1033062>.
10. See Dmitriy Kiselyev, *Ukraina i evrointegratsiya: Ukrainskaya oppositsiya sobiraet maydan*, *Vesti Nedeli* (24 November 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://vesti7.ru/news?id=41744>.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Especially in the cases of Occupy Wall Street and the anti-government strikes in Tbilisi.
13. Interestingly, some people and organisations in the West, such as the OSCE and the then Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radoslaw Sikorski, have been praised for better understanding and for their critique of protestor behaviour.
14. See Evgeniy Shestakov, *Kiev: perevorot pod flagami Bandery i Vrosoyuz*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (6 December 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.rg.ru/2013/12/06/ukraina-site.html>.
15. Evgeniy Shestakov, *Vo vsyu evropeyskuyu priit*, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (9 December 2013), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://rg.ru/2013/12/09/ukraina-site.html>.
16. For an overview of the laws and amendments adopted by the Verkhovna Rada in English, see the summary by Transparency International Ukraine: *Summary of Laws Adopted by the Ukrainian Parliament on 16 January 2014* (17 January 2014), Transparency International, retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://ti-ukraine.org/news/4269.html>, and the information provided by the Information Department of the Verkhovna Rada of the Ukraine Secretariat: *For the period of January 14-17, the Verkhovna Rada adopted 11 Laws and 1 Resolution*, Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://rada.gov.ua/en/news/News/News/87088.html>. For a discussion of their consequences and lawfulness, see the opinion by the OSCE/ODHIR: *Opinion on Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Passed on 16 January 2014*, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.osce.org/odihr/111370?download=true>.
17. See *Daily digest of main Ukrainian news (Euromaidan focus): January 30*, *Euromaidan Press*, retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://euromaidanpress.com/2014/01/30/daily-digest-of-main-ukrainian-news-euromaidan-focus-january-30/>.
18. Andrey Sidorchik, *"Korichnevii" myatezh na Ukraine*, *Argumenti i Fakti* (20 January 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.aif.ru/euromaidan/opinion/1086019>.
19. See Lola Tagaeva, *Pavlovskiy: "Zvaniya 'revolyutsiya' i 'geniy' prisvaivayut posmertno"*, *Slon* (22 January 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://slon.ru/russia/pavlovskiy\\_slovo\\_revolyutsiya\\_kak\\_i\\_geniy\\_prisvaivayut\\_posmertno-1046562.xhtml](http://slon.ru/russia/pavlovskiy_slovo_revolyutsiya_kak_i_geniy_prisvaivayut_posmertno-1046562.xhtml).
20. On 22 February 2014 Olexander Turchynov was first elected Speaker of the Verkhovna Rada. It was in this capacity that he became Acting President of Ukraine the following day, after the impeachment of Viktor Yanukovych. On 27 February a new government was formed under the leadership of Arseniy Yatsenyuk.

21. Stepan Bandera (1909-1959) was a Ukrainian nationalist, anti-communist and partisan, who collaborated with Nazi German forces, fighting the USSR during the Second World War. In the Soviet Union (and in Russia today) his name has become synonymous with fascism. The assessment of his person and the Ukrainian Organisation of Nationalists (OUN) remains highly controversial, both in Ukraine and internationally. See, for example: Anthony Faiola, A Ghost of World War II History Haunts Ukraine's Standoff With Russia, Washington Post (25 March 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-ghost-of-world-war-ii-history-haunts-ukraines-standoff-with-russia/2014/03/25/18d4b1e0-a503-4f73-aaa7-5dd5d6a1c665\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/a-ghost-of-world-war-ii-history-haunts-ukraines-standoff-with-russia/2014/03/25/18d4b1e0-a503-4f73-aaa7-5dd5d6a1c665_story.html).
22. See Ekaterina Barova, Aleksandr Kolesnichenko, and Sergey Ocinov, Soyuz 'pidzhakov' i banderovtsev: Kto prishel k vlasti na Ukraine, Argumenti i Fakti (26 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.aif.ru/euromaidan/prediction/1112554>.
23. See Elena Slobodyan, Maydan: torzhestvo ideologii 'pravyh nacionalistov', Argumenti i Fakti (26 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.aif.ru/euromaidan/opinion/1113830>. In total, Svoboda gained four ministry posts: Deputy Prime Minister (Oleksandr Sych), Minister of Defense (Ihor Tenyukh), Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources of Ukraine (Andriy Mokhnyk) and Minister of Agrarian Policy and Food of Ukraine (Ihor Shvaika), see Naznacheni Prem'ier-ministr Ukraini i sostav Pravitel'stva, Pravitel'stvenniy portal, retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/ru/publish/article.jsessionid=7976FDB1704F14175FE9612E4BBA4B38?art\\_id=247059223&cat\\_id=244843950](http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/ru/publish/article.jsessionid=7976FDB1704F14175FE9612E4BBA4B38?art_id=247059223&cat_id=244843950). In addition, Right Sector leader Dmitry Yarosh was offered the post of Deputy Chief of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine (RNBOU), see Verkhovnyaya Rada Ukrainiy sevodnya utverdit novoye pravitel'stvo straniy, Perviy Kanal (27 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.1tv.ru/news/world/253054>, and Na Maydanye Arseniya Yatsenyuka vidvinuli v prem'yeri, BBC Russian Service (26 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: [http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/02/140226\\_maidan\\_government\\_candidates](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/02/140226_maidan_government_candidates).
24. See Ol'ga Gritsenko, "Avakov psikhicheski ne ochen' adekvaten", Vzglyad, (28 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://vz.ru/politics/2014/2/28/674871.html>.
25. See Crimean parliament dismisses autonomous republic's government, KyivPost (27 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/crimean-parliament-dismisses-autonomous-republics-government-337803.html>, Ol'ga Vandisheva, Anton Mesnyanko, Pravitel'stvo Krima otpravili v otstavku, Ekspert online (27 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://expert.ru/2014/02/27/majdan-peremestilsya-v-kryim/> and Pavel Kanigin, "Pokhozhe na brosov "Berkuta", Novaya Gazeta (27 February 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/62466.html>.
26. See Aksenov: perenos referendum v Krimu svyazan s tem, chto konflikt vishel za predeli razumnogo, Interfaks (1 March 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.interfax.ru/world/362023>.
27. Andrey Sidorchik, Vibor sdelan: Zhiteli Krima progolosovali za vkhozhdenie v sostav Rossii, Argumenti i Fakti (17 March 2014), retrieved 17 March 2016, URL: <http://www.aif.ru/euromaidan/prediction/1125430>.
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