

# SOWING THE SEEDS OF DISSENT?

## Tracing the conflict between Russia and Ukraine

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In recent developments to the Ukraine crisis, various sanctions have been introduced by the United States (US) and European Union (EU) to persuade Russia to maintain the ceasefire declared in September in Eastern Ukraine. While the world seemed preoccupied with Russia's reaction, what is equally as fascinating is the response of Ukraine to this concerted action. Speaking at an international conference in Kiev, Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko claimed 'I never before felt this level of solidarity. I feel myself a full member of the European family' <sup>www</sup>. The significance of these comments can be revealed by a glance at the *Chatham House Online Archive*, where tensions surrounding both Ukraine's relationship with Russia and the nature of its support in Europe can be traced.

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Having only gained independence from the USSR in 1991, Ukraine appeared to be finding its identity during much of the decade, as its people sought to adapt from a totalitarian regime to a democratic society. One essential element of this was establishing peaceful relations with its European neighbours, a sentiment which is expressed in



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two archival sources. Firstly, in his 1995 Chatham House speech, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Hennadiy Udoenko expressed the importance of European integration for Ukraine, which is deemed crucial to maintaining national security <sup>IPG</sup>. Given the number of references to security in Mr Udoenko's speech, the vulnerability of the newly independent nation emerges as a distinct theme.

Interestingly, this feeling is echoed in an article in *The World Today* by leading international expert on Ukrainian politics Taras Kuzio. He argues that there is a tension between vulnerability and influence in European affairs for Ukraine, attaching great significance to Ukraine's search for 'strategic partners' <sup>IPG</sup>. What is particularly revealing in light of the current conflict between Russia and Ukraine is the importance Kuzio gives to the threat of Russia. He feels that they have 'very different views about the content of any strategic partnership', feeding his belief that it is primarily the threat of Russia which should drive Ukraine's search for European partners <sup>IPG</sup>. By contrast, Udoenko, speaking only the previous year, is far more optimistic about the prospects of cooperation between the two countries. While acknowledging Russia's unease towards Ukrainian independence on the one hand, he nevertheless forecasts 'very good prospects for the improvement of our relations with Russia' <sup>IPG</sup>. Despite these differences in opinion regarding future relations,



the overarching theme from this insightful material is of the instability of the Russo-Ukrainian relationship. It could then be inferred that tensions between the two nations were present from the very beginning of Ukrainian independence.

Further documents support this sentiment; that Russia has perhaps persistently struggled to disentangle itself from Ukrainian affairs, backing Udovenko's contention that a change in the Russian mentality

towards Ukraine would 'take some time' . In a *Royal Institute of International Affairs* report, the extent of Russia's determination to maintain some form of hold over Ukraine is exposed. Here, Russia is perceived to be enhancing its economic ties with Ukraine in an attempt to bring the latter further away from NATO . Although Ukraine was officially accepted into NATO in 2008, an image published in *The World Today* in the aftermath displaying Ukrainian protest indicates that this was far from conclusive . Perhaps this confusion can also help to explain the conflict between the two countries today, adding weight to the *Report's* conclusion that the 'no confidence' relationship between Russia and Ukraine is likely to last for the foreseeable future .

These excerpts from the archive indicate that the underlying mistrust between the two countries has never subsided; even now, the tentative ceasefire in eastern Ukraine has been interpreted by some as a symbol of Russia's continuing dominance over its neighbour . The foundations for the present dissent can therefore be traced back to Ukraine's uneasy separation from the USSR, with Ukrainian attempts at closer European integration often being balanced against Russian appeasement. President Poroshenko's delight that his country finally seems to have some concrete backing from its European neighbours can now be more fully understood. [GALE](#)

## Read and view extracts from referenced *Chatham House Online Archive* articles

Mr Udovenko. "Ukrainian Foreign Policy: Realities and Prospects." RIIA/8/5666.6. Chatham House, London. 13 Dec. 1995 

Kuzio, Taras. "A Way with Words: Keeping Kiev Secure." *The World Today* 52.12 (January-December 1996) 

Polyakov, Leonid. "Ukrainian-Nato Relations and New Prospects for Peacekeeping." Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2003. Russia and Eurasia Programme 

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