



CANADIAN FRIENDS OF UKRAINE (CFU) CALL ON THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO PRESSURE YANUKOVYCH AND PUTIN AS CRISIS IN UKRAINE DEEPENS

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TORONTO – After weeks of mass rallies in Ukraine’s capital, protesting President Viktor Yanukovich’s decision to withdraw from a planned association agreement with the European Union, demonstrators have come under assault. By beating, arresting, and unjustly imprisoning innocent protestors and human rights activists, Ukraine’s authorities are intent on using the justice system as a repressive weapon.

Yesterday, *Reporters without Borders* confirmed that the “Berkut” Special Forces of Ukraine’s Ministry of the Interior conducted raids on three media outlets sympathetic to the opposition: the newspaper *Vechirni Visti*, the online TV station INTV, and the news website *Cenzor.net*. The attackers removed documents, computer equipment and servers which contained databases and which allowed them to connect to the Internet. *The Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group* continues to document a growing list of government-sponsored attacks on pro-democracy, pro-European activists in Ukraine.

Heavily armed riot troops also broke into the offices of one of the country’s leading opposition party in Kyiv— the pro-Tymoshenko Fatherland Party— tearing out computer hard drives, disabling websites, and blocking access to the building.

Ukraine’s opposition leaders believe that Vladimir Putin is tacitly directing the crackdown. A growing number of analysts contend that Yanukovich is receiving play-by-play instructions from the Kremlin, which has itself used repressive measures to crush a fledgling pro-democratic opposition in Russia.

It is no coincidence, that this week, Vladimir Putin tightened his grip over Russia’s media, by dismantling the country’s state news agency. As a result of the Kremlin’s media clampdown, RIA Novosti and the international radio station Voice of Russia were abolished.

In the past month, Yanukovich has been summoned by the Kremlin’s leadership to several private meetings with Vladimir Putin, where it is believed Putin used political and economic pressure to force the Ukrainian President to end trade talks with the Europeans.

Putin has apparently told Yanukovich that the protests are being engineered by Western leaders, emboldening Yanukovich to undertake repressive actions against his own citizens, further alienating the Europeans and edging Ukraine closer to Moscow.

By refusing to release political prisoners, like former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko; by using riot police to beat peaceful protestors; by conducting state-sponsored assaults on opposition parties; by using special-forces police to raid and confiscate the property of independent media outlets; Ukraine’s President and his officials have sabotaged their government’s legitimacy.

According to a poll published in the *Kyiv Post*, 70% of the EuroMaidan participants remain ready to stay on the streets as long as needed, until the government resigns.

While many Western leaders have spoken loud and clear on the need for Ukraine's leadership to resolve the crisis, even if it means pre-term elections, the position taken by the leadership of the United States of America appears to be timid at best.

Where are CNN's reporters? Why isn't Anderson Cooper on Kyiv's EuroMaidan? This week, actor George Clooney posted a message of solidarity with the EuroMaidan protesters on YouTube. Meanwhile, US President Barack Obama is missing in action.

Canadian Friends of Ukraine:

- Praise Canada's Foreign Minister, John Baird, for meeting with Ukraine's opposition leaders, joining Ukrainian citizens rallying on the EuroMaidan, and calling on Ukraine's Foreign Minister and government to listen to its people;
- Applaud German Foreign Minister, Guido Westerwelle, for meeting with two Ukrainian opposition leaders and visiting encamped protesters in Ukraine's capital;
- Ask the President of the United States to condemn the Ukrainian government's crackdown and Russia's interference in Ukraine and to assert America's support for the Ukrainian people's aspiration to live in a pro-democratic, European state;
- Ask that US Secretary of State John Kerry fly to Kyiv immediately to meet with Ukraine's opposition leaders, visit the EuroMaidan, and demand that the Ukrainian government abide by its constitutional obligations; stop the crackdown on human rights activists and the media; release political prisoners; restore talks with the EU, or resign to make way for an interim government and pre-term elections;
- Ask the leaders of Canada, the US, and Europe to send a clear message to Vladimir Putin and the Russian leadership, that pressure on Ukraine and covert intervention in the form of facilitating crackdowns on the media, political parties, human rights activists in Ukraine and Russia will NOT be tolerated;
- Ask that the US, Canada, and the EU make it clear that, unless human rights violations in Ukraine and Russia end immediately, the assets of officials from Russia and Ukraine, connected to these repressive assaults, will be frozen and targeted travel bans introduced;

Finally, unless Vladimir Putin ceases to exert political and economic pressure on Ukraine, as a means of punishing the Ukrainian people for aspiring to join the European Union, Canadian Friends of Ukraine will call upon the international community to boycott the Sochi Winter Olympics.

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Canadian Friends of Ukraine is a non-governmental organization founded in 1990 to strengthen Canada-Ukraine relations and promote democracy and reform in Ukraine.