

# Bridge Forum THE EU AND RUSSIA – UKRAINE, A BORDER OR A BRIDGE ? 8 May 2014

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THE BRIDGE  
FORUM DIALOGUE



From left to right: . Werner Hoyer, EIB President; Pat Cox, former President of EP; Vítor Caldeira, ECA President

## A historic date

The conference was held at the European Investment Bank at the eve of May 9, which in the EU is Europe Day. Robert Schuman laid the foundation in 1950 for the beginning of European integration, the “reconciliation créatrice” (creative reconciliation) through new supranational institutions.

May 9 has also been celebrated in the former Soviet Union as the day of Nazi Germany’s capitulation. It therefore risked of being a flashpoint in Ukraine, especially in Donbass, because of the emotions and the images that it evokes. Some of the ghosts of modern European history are stalking in Ukraine, specifically the image that what happened in Kiev on the Maidan was a neo-Nazi, anti-Russian, anti-Semitic coup d’état.

## A bridge or a border

Pat Cox fears that the complexity of the present situation has pushed back the moment when the bridge analogy can actually find expression.

He calls today’s situation the most frightening time in the history of independent Ukraine. This began with a referendum in December 1991. A majority of over 90% voted in favour of independence, including a very high vote in favour in Crimea.

The territorial integrity of Ukraine has been breached in Crimea by Russian revanchism. Pat Cox recalls the history of Ukraine and Russia, their relations and roots, but also the power of law and international relations, which today are cast aside. There is no point in having debates about we want to do if we do not know what it is we are dealing with, he says.

Presidential elections will take place on May 25<sup>th</sup> and secessionist referenda have been called for. President Putin has called on the secessionists to postpone their referendum initiative and has even called for the federalisation of Ukraine. Pat Cox thinks that this is a matter in principle for the Ukraine to determine.

Russia has called for the withdrawal of Ukrainian defence forces from the East of Ukraine. The issue is complex, but Pat Cox thinks that the tone of Putin is deceptive, especially as his call was issued before the special day of the May 9<sup>th</sup>.

Nobody knows what the result will be. The situation is in permanent flux. To give leeway to *agents provocateurs* internal and external, and to well-armed insurrectionists is to risk escalation, further bloodshed, civil war.

It is very hard to assess whether the Kiev authorities are in control or being controlled by these phenomena. At this point, any number of scenarios are possible. A dialogue within Ukraine between dissenting factions and the Kiev authorities is one scenario, greatly to be hoped for. Creeping disintegration is the alternative.

## Greater Russia

President Putin is enjoying great popularity at home. Greater Russia is the second theme of Pat Cox, and he lets Putin speak for himself through his quotations. Putin is trying to push his concept of the Eurasian Union and pursues an ambitious thought of higher level integration with the European Union.

He criticises the EU's manifold empty promises of competition and free access to global markets. Nationalists, neo-Nazis, terrorists and anti-Semites executed the coup in Ukraine.

Pat Cox concedes that maybe some neo-Nazi groups were involved on the Maidan, but when eight hundred thousand people come into the streets for an idea about values, transformation, change in the freezing cold, the protest is no doubt about something else. People objected to corrupted politics in Ukraine; it was not an anti-Russian neo-Nazi conspiracy.

In Crimea, President Putin's doctrine asserted a Russian right of intervention in defence of Russians or Russian interests, and was dismissive of Western concerns on the violation of international law.

### Ukraine and the EU's foreign policy

Resuming the recent history of Ukraine and President Yanukovich's wish to link the country's modernisation and reform prospects to signing the agreement with the EU, Pat Cox feels that, in truth, the Kiev administration never really was free to choose. The pressure of the trade war forced the Ukrainian government to reverse course. News of the suspension of signing an association agreement initiated the first wave of protests on the Maidan in favour of European integration.

The European Parliament elections will take place shortly, and most of the discussion about the EU at this point is about the next European Commission President. The European institutions will be progressively renewed, but no discussion has focused yet on the next High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. In this the European Council carries a high responsibility.

EU foreign policy needs to become more strategic on the big questions, including relations with Russia, the evolution of the EU's neighbourhood policy and of the Eastern Partnership policy. We need strategic prioritisation and decide whether we prefer multilateralism over bilateral relations.

Pat Cox suggests a less cautious policy in relation to sanctions, but warns, at the same time, of doing too

much. Doing too little risks diminishing the force of the EU's values-based soft power projection. Doing too much could induce a Russian response that could undermine the EU's fragile economic recovery.

The greatest impact of the EU sanctions has been market based. As to potentially turning off the energy tap to the EU, Russia itself would not be immune from the consequences, but the EU needs to reduce its dependency on imported energy and accelerate the diversification of supply. There are still too many energy islands within the single market.

### Conclusion.

Every effort should be made to seek to stabilise the situation in Ukraine. Pat Cox discerns a to-do list. The status of the Russian language should be put beyond any doubt. A new constitutional settlement to assure the territorial integrity of the Ukraine should be formulated, assuring sufficient decentralised autonomy. The guns should be removed from Ukrainian politics. Administrative buildings should be returned to their normal functions, and some form of post-revolutionary amnesty process should be engaged. The international community and especially international financial institutions, such as the EIB, should remain engaged to build a new equilibrium for a new Ukraine.

This crisis should not be wasted. Ukraine deserves a chance.



Pat Cox, former President of EP