

# Without stronger support from the West, Ukraine will continue to live under the threat of invasion

*The deployment of thousands of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border has raised fears of a possible invasion. Oleg Chupryna reflects on the eight years that have passed since the beginning of the Euromaidan revolution and examines what the future might hold for Ukraine.*

In November, Ukraine marked the eighth anniversary of the beginning of the Euromaidan revolution, the third revolution in this former Soviet country since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The revolution, which started as a protest against the unexpected refusal of then President Viktor Yanukovich to sign an Association Agreement with the European Union, marked Ukraine's final breakaway from centuries of dependency on Russia and seemingly set the country on a path toward Europe and further democratisation.

Yet in the eight years since, Ukraine has had to live with the persistent threat of a Russian intervention in the country. Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its support for anti-government forces in the Donbas war made clear the Kremlin was unwilling to allow Ukraine to exit its orbit without a fight. Fears of a wider Russian invasion of the country have never disappeared, and in recent months, they have become heightened by the [buildup of Russian troops](#) near the Ukrainian border. This raises the question of whether the progress made during the Euromaidan revolution might ultimately be lost.

## The legacy of Euromaidan

Yanukovich's refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement in November 2013 was officially portrayed as an economic decision and a call for further negotiations. In reality, the Ukrainian President had been summoned to the Kremlin by Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier that month due to the perception the agreement would threaten Russia's geopolitical interests in its own backyard. Shortly after Yanukovich's return to Ukraine, his government indicated that it would no longer be signing the agreement.

The decision prompted people to take to the streets. On the cold and rainy evening of 21 November 2013, about fifteen hundred civil society activists and opposition politicians gathered on the *Maidan Nezalezhnosti* (Independence Square) to protest the decision. Many Ukrainians felt the government had betrayed their aspirations to integrate with Europe and thus, the movement was dubbed 'Euromaidan'. On the following day, thousands of people protested in cities across the country hoping they might encourage the government to change course and sign the long-expected agreement at an upcoming EU meeting in Vilnius.

But their demands were ignored, and although President Yanukovich attended the meeting in Vilnius, he did not sign the document. As an old Ukrainian saying goes, 'the train was gone', and most of the protesters, although deeply disappointed, dismantled their camp on the Maidan and went home. Not all, however, left the square and a few hundred protesters, mainly young students from Kyiv universities, decided to continue the protest and remained on the Maidan overnight. Then, in the early hours of 30 November, riot police suddenly attacked them without provocation. The news spread quickly and generated renewed anger against the authorities.

It was this anger that finally brought down the regime. Remarkably, over twelve per cent of the country's population participated in the subsequent protests. The protesters came from all walks of life: male and female, young and old, Ukrainian and Russian speakers, Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar, Jewish, Armenian, Belarusian, Polish, Russian, and others. Almost two-thirds of the participants had attained higher education, and more than half were not from Kyiv but from the rest of Ukraine. Alcohol was banned completely on the Maidan, and many noted the unprecedented level of civility and the absence of any incidents of antisocial behaviour on the side of the participants.

After an extraordinary three months of protests, regime change was finally achieved at the end of February 2014. It was a bittersweet moment, with over a hundred protesters paying with their lives and hundreds more suffering injuries. Victory was achieved thanks to tremendous determination, selflessness, and courage, combined with a high level of self-organisation. Ukraine still has many problems such as corruption, but the Euromaidan revolution remains an iconic achievement in Ukrainian history, marking a final breakaway from centuries-long dependency on autocratic Russia. It is this legacy that is now at risk.

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## The West and Putin

In July, Putin published a widely covered [essay](#) that sets out his views on the relationship between Russia and Ukraine. In the document, he emphasises his belief that Russians and Ukrainians are the same people and argues that an independent Ukraine should be regarded as ‘historical nonsense’ – a concept created by the West to weaken historical Russia.

The essay has been taken by many observers as an [accurate representation of Putin's personal beliefs](#), but even if it amounted to a simple propaganda stunt, it is clear that as long as Putin remains in power, he will never leave Ukraine alone. He has shown willingness to use all available means to bring Ukraine under the Kremlin's influence or even to incorporate it fully into Russia itself. What remains to be seen is whether Russia is content to persist with the hybrid warfare strategy it has adopted until now, or whether a full-scale military offensive is now on the cards. Evidence of the latter scenario is what prompted [recent warnings](#) by the United States about a potential invasion taking place early next year.

The outcome will depend to a large extent on the path the West chooses to take. Putin is nothing if not a skilled and pragmatic politician. He is unlikely to risk everything by pushing for an invasion of Ukraine unless he is sure of a positive outcome. If he becomes convinced that Ukraine will not resist or that the West will remain on the sidelines, the threat of an invasion will become ever larger. The West must make it clear to the Kremlin that Ukraine will get its full support and that Russia will suffer from international isolation and economic sanctions if it takes military action. This is the message that US President Joe Biden [appears to have articulated](#) to Putin in a video call on 7 December.

The stakes could not be higher. If Putin does not believe in the West's commitment to Ukraine, then war and the flight of millions of refugees into Europe will become a very real possibility. This could potentially lead to the collapse of the European and international security system as we know it. Almost eight years have passed since Russia's annexation of Crimea and its proxy intervention in the Donbas region. The West has had ample time to learn that Russia is willing to use military force in Ukraine if it believes it can do so with impunity. Now is the time to make clear that such actions will not be tolerated.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the author, not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy or the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [European Council](#)*

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