

# UNDERSTANDING CROSS-BORDER CONFLICT: HOW CAN INTERNATIONAL STUDIES HELP?

## Crisis in Ukraine\*

In 2014, anti-government protesters in Ukraine ousted their president, Viktor Yanukovich. The political situation had been tense for a while, as Yanukovich had reversed a previously agreed upon plan to move the country closer to the West, politically and economically. Instead, he announced that Ukraine would extend its ties to its neighbor to the east, Russia. In response to the upheaval, Russia moved into the Crimean Peninsula, an administrative division within Ukraine (see Map 4.3). Despite the turmoil that followed, Crimea's local government held a referendum that endorsed Russia's actions and its subsequent annexation of Crimea. Russian troops remained poised at the Ukrainian border, suggesting the possibility of a broader conflict.

But why should a crisis in Ukraine have anything to do with Russia in the first place? Ukraine declared independence from Soviet Russia in 1991, and elected its first president at the end of that year. Although Ukraine was universally recognized as a sovereign state, Russian president Vladimir Putin sought to reassert control. One key reason was Crimea's strategic location. The Crimean coastal city of Sevastopol had been the historic base for Russia's Black Sea fleet that and had remained so after Ukraine gained independence through a leasing agreement. The economic connections were also quite extensive. Gas pipelines from Russia to Europe crossed Ukraine, while Ukraine was heavily dependent on Russia for its oil supply.

Amidst the uncertainty, elections were held in Ukraine in May 2014 and a new president, Petro Poroshenko, took power. Poroshenko had amassed a fortune by taking a previously state-run candy factory and turning it into the Roshen confectionery company that has extensive holdings. The so-called "Chocolate King," Poroshenko, faced a formidable task as he sought to keep Ukraine intact. The eastern part of the country was populated largely by ethnic Russians who resisted his government and sought to reunite with Russia. While the United Nations called for an end to the violence, the future remained uncertain.

\*[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johncurran/russian-ukrainian-conflict-explained\\_b\\_4909192.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/johncurran/russian-ukrainian-conflict-explained_b_4909192.html)

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/11/ukraine-russia-crimea-sanctions-us-guide-explainer>

What is the role of crossing borders in resolving this conflict? How can the cross-disciplinary focus of international studies help?

## Questions

- What is the role of geography in this unfolding drama? Why do national borders matter here?
- What are the political motives and stakes for the countries involved?
- What are the economic implications for Ukraine and Russia?
- What role do social and cultural factors play in adding to the complexity of the crisis?
- Can the international community offer any solution?

## MAP 4.3 UKRAINE, RUSSIA, AND THE CRIMEAN PENINSULA



Source: CIA World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>).