



## Ukraine: as European as Farage by Simon Belt

After a fairly rehearsed Leaders' debate on Europe, **Nigel Farage** lobbed a hand grenade into the discussion on **Ukraine** when he said "

*We have given a false series of hopes to a group of people in the western Ukraine. So geed up were they that they actually toppled their own elected leader. That provoked Mr Putin.*

***I think the EU frankly does have blood on its hands in the Ukraine***

." Why did this comment cause such outrage?

The following morning, **Nick Clegg** came to the defense of his beloved European Union and said: "It shows quite how extreme people can be – like Nigel Farage – when their loathing of the EU becomes so all-consuming that they even end up siding with Vladimir Putin in order to make

their point.

To suggest that somehow it is the EU's fault that the Ukrainian people rose up, as many did on the streets of Kiev, against their government seeking to claim greater democracy, greater freedom, is such a perverse way of looking at things." So will Cold War rhetoric help Nick and the EU?

Firstly, let's think about the dynamics of the recent protests in Kiev that led to the annexation of Crimea. The technocrats of the European Union may well eschew the geo-politics of nation building and national interests, but that doesn't mean they don't exist. Indeed back in 2008 when the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO or the EU, many European powers and the US conceded at a summit of the Western Alliance in Bucharest that it was not just a technical affair. That diplomacy of wider interests seems to have been sidelined in the latest approaches to extending the influence of Europe into Ukraine. Indeed David Cameron's announcement last July was in startling contrast when he said that the EU should stretch from 'the Atlantic to the Urals'.

At the heart of European policy is an inbuilt drive to restrain the expansion of German economic and foreign policy. Indeed, in a secret 1991 Foreign Office telegram, Sir Ewen Fergusson, the British ambassador to Paris, writes about how the modern EU was developed to shackle a reunified Germany and prevent it taking a powerful, geopolitical role in Europe, 'Unease over Germany translates into an almost obsessive anxiety to contain it within reinforced European structures as quickly and thoroughly as possible'. Whilst Britain and France were opposed to the reunification of Germany, Putin on the other hand reminded Germany when announcing the annexation of Crimea that Russia supported their reunification as it understood the geopolitical importance of historic and blood ties.

Through the EU's 'enlargement and neighbourhoods' policy strategy, Ukraine has been encouraged to break from its historic ties to Russia and look West, but the national interests of each European nation differ markedly, making common policy approaches rather fractious and

fragile to say the least. The result is a tendency towards gesture and reactive political grandstanding focussed more on internal European maneuverings than considered diplomacy. Encouraging Ukraine to join NATO for example introduces huge political pressures into the region without necessarily having thought through the consequences.

If Ukraine was in NATO, EU countries and the West would be obliged to go to war over Crimea. Asking the question 'Would you die for Sevastopol?' really does bring home the issues at stake. Many Russians would be prepared to die for Crimea, but I doubt many Western Europeans would. That difference is the living reality of geopolitics. To pretend that such divisions do not exist is positively dangerous, and Nick Clegg may seek the comfort of the old Cold War rhetoric against Nigel Farage on the issue, but it's the people of Ukraine who pay the price for such glib politicking.

Giving the lead to Nick Clegg's rather old fashioned Cold War response and giving impetus to Nigel Farage winding up Clegg on the issue, Green and conservative MEP's tried to get a clause added to the European Parliament's resolution on Crimea saying 'The European Parliament regrets statements made by former German chancellor Gerhard Schröder about the crisis in Ukraine, and suggests he should make no public statements about [this issue].' Schröder has also questioned the role of some European politicians and saying the EU made some 'initial mistakes'. Well censoring private citizens from being critical of European policy seems a funny kind of democracy to me, but not so different to encouraging the population of Ukraine to topple the elected president of Ukraine because he opposed further integration into the EU.