

## Andriy Meleshevych: Crimean Crisis Will Not Affect Stability in the Balkans

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Andriy Meleshevych Photo: [jmce.ukma.kiev.ua](http://jmce.ukma.kiev.ua)

The Crimean crisis will not have a profound impact on the regional stability and economy of the Balkans, says Dr. Andriy Meleshevych, Dean of the School of Law at the National University of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy and a key advisor on legal matters in Ukraine, in an interview with Independent.mk.

Dr. Meleshevych has widely published internationally in the fields of European human rights law, institution-building in the post-Soviet transitional countries including current EU members (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), political consequences of electoral laws and executive-legislative arrangements, political parties, comparative constitutional law and constitutionalism, and

philosophy of law.

He is often invited to hold scientific and educational seminars in leading universities of Europe and the U.S.

**How would you explain the fact that the Western countries supported Kosovo's independence and have different attitude towards Crimea?**

-The issue of double standards in international relations and international law is nothing new. It is quite often that big and powerful countries are rightfully accused of applying double standards against smaller and weaker nations. Russia is a good example. The Russian Federation suppressed, at the cost of many lives and much suffering, Chechnya's claim of independence. Amnesty International estimates that over 25 thousand civilians have been killed in Chechnya. However, Russia supported Abkhazia and South Ossetia when they split from Georgia. Now, Russia encourages Crimean secession from Ukraine.

There is a difference between Kosovo and Crimea. Kosovo wanted to establish an independent country. It has not and, for the time being, it is not going to join Albania. At the same time, Crimea wants to join Russia and Russia proclaimed that it is willing to accept Crimea. This is an extremely dangerous case of the redrawing of borders in post-war Europe and clear violation of the Helsinki process. Moreover, the mechanism that Russia uses to absorb Crimea resembles very much Hitler's Anschluss of Austria and annexation of the Sudetenland in 1938. Kosovo went through a long, painstaking, and largely transparent process to seek independence.

**EU Energy Commissioner Guenther Oettinger is to delay talks with Russia on the South Stream gas pipeline project. What do you think will happen further? Would you say the crisis in Ukraine could provoke gas crisis in Europe?**

-In 2006 and then again in 2009, the Russian Federation used its natural gas supply to Europe as a political tool. From the Russian perspective, this tactic proved effective and Europe should expect that Russia is considering using it again. It is in the best interests of European countries to diversify their gas and oil supply to decrease their dependence

on Russian energy sources. The South Stream pipeline project means heavier reliance on the Russian gas.

### **How would this influence the regional stability, the economy in the Balkans and Macedonia?**

-I do not think that the Crimean crisis will have a profound impact on the regional stability and economy of the Balkans. However, let me strike a note of caution here. Last week, a number of Serb Chetniks emerged in Crimea to defend their "Russian Orthodox brothers".

For example, one of them, Bratislav Zivkovic, claimed he fought in Kosovo, Bosnia and Croatia. If this scenario continues then some Bosnians might want to defend their Crimean Tatar Muslim brothers or Croatians would come to help Ukrainian Catholics. The complexities of that scenario playing out would not have negative consequences only for Ukraine.

### **Do you think the crisis in Ukraine may further develop? Are there signs that the conflict may escalate to world war?**

-War must be avoided at all cost. We all hope, here in Ukraine, that war will be avoided. The Russian military is much stronger and much better equipped than the Ukrainian army. However, both the Ukrainian military and civilians would resist the further Russian occupation of Ukraine. Hopefully, the blatant aggression of one independent country against another independent country in Europe in the 21st century will not be tolerated. In addition, the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, signed by the US, UK, Russia and Ukraine, pledged Ukraine's territorial integrity in return for it giving up nuclear weapons.

### **In your opinion, what will happen after the referendum in Crimea?**

-After the referendum, Crimea will secede from Ukraine and will join Russia. Since Crimean Tatar and Ukrainian communities do not recognize the referendum and will boycott it, it is very likely that Crimea will become another hot spot in the Russian Federation.

The main asset of Crimea is its tourist industry. I do not think that anyone wants to spend their hard-earned vacation in an unstable and dangerous region. Crimea might just turn into another impoverished Abkhazia which used to be a much desired resort on the Black Sea in the Caucasus. Today, continental Ukraine has a real chance to move closer to European democratic and human values. At the same time, Crimea as part of the Russian Federation will move away from democracy and human rights.

### **Is there a way out of Ukrainian crisis?**

-Ukraine will most certainly find a way out of the crisis. The faster Russia stops its aggression against Ukraine, the sooner Ukraine will return to normality. The Euro-integration process will move ahead in full speed. The EU announced that very soon the political section of the Association Agreement with Ukraine will be signed. The economic section will follow. Yes, it would be troublesome to exist next to an unfriendly aggressive nation. But let me pose this question: Does Russia have any friends left?

Marija Bozinovska