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Comment: Reconciliation needed for a truly free Ukraine

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Reciprocity means responding to a positive action with another positive action. Reciprocity and reconciliation can help Ukrainians build a free and independent state, regain confidence in their government, and restore trust in the European Union and its community values.

The international community had already been losing its reputation among Ukrainians when it began condemning the Ukrainian government without supporting the people of Ukraine directly. Nevertheless, the international community can still help Ukraine find trust as it builds a democratic community and government institutions.

Endemic corruption and ineffective governance brought the country to default, and they remain central issues for Ukraine. When the crisis ends, addressing economic issues will be a major objective of a new elected government of Ukraine.

Ukrainians are anxious about their own future and the future of their country. The instability and insecurity brought by the revolution might not be seen as a positive change if the interim government is unable to embrace that change effectively.

The Russian invasion of Crimea, which took place after the end of the Sochi Olympics with the proclaimed aim of protecting its Russian-speaking population, jeopardized European security and pushed Russia into a confrontation with the West unlike any since the Cold War era. Current Russian aggression in Crimea brought even more confusion to the people of Ukraine. Transitioning from the Soviet ideology of being one Soviet nation and Soviet people, it is still difficult for them to comprehend that they are not one anymore.

Still, they are feeling proudly Ukrainian, even if they are ethnic Russian, Belarusian, Armenian or some other group. All are fighting for dignity and peaceful existence and against any dividing lines on Ukrainian territory. They are united because they want the same peaceful future for their friends, families and all residents of their country.

The Ukrainian interim government made a few unsuccessful moves, which worked against those aspirations. The recent vote of the parliament to deny regions the right to give official status to languages other than Ukrainian definitely works against the national interest. The law was vetoed by the interim president, Oleksandr Turchynov, but is likely to have a significant effect on political stability and territorial integrity in Ukraine in the near future.

The parliament also failed to bring politicians from eastern Ukraine, where the majority speak Russian, into the government.

The interim government and Turchynov should start building their social capital, based on community responsibility and civic engagement. That is where the western community, including Canada and the U.S., can offer help, without pushing Ukrainians straight West and expecting them to take sides.

Western countries can share their political culture and knowledge, providing expertise and empowering communities inside Ukraine. For example, the Polish government has already offered free treatment and rehabilitation for wounded Ukrainians in its hospitals.

The West can also help financially. Acting-government officials predict Ukraine needs \$35 billion in bailout loans to get through the next two years. On Wednesday, the U.S. said it was considering offering Ukraine's economy — which faces default — loan guarantees of up to \$1 billion.

Culturally, Ukraine is diverse. Being a native Belarusian citizen raised in Ukraine who completed my postgraduate degree in the the U.K. in 2004 and is finishing a PhD in Victoria, I know that identity can become easily blurred, but it is your own roots that help you build up your strength.

Taras Shevchenko, the national poet of Ukraine, showed Ukrainians that the only road to freedom is based on principles of unity, brotherly love and self-sacrifice.

It remains to be seen whether the interim Ukrainian government, with the support of the international community, including Russia, can take effective action. It can either deepen ethno-linguistic political divisions and weaken tolerance within the country or empower Ukrainian society and support establishment of a democratic government controlled by Ukrainian people.

What can Ukrainians learn from this situation? That unity and a national idea are giving them strength. Hatred makes them weaker. Dignity, historic memory, civic responsibility, respect and love are basics, which make them listen to their own fellow citizens and make the international community respect them.

Fighting against corruption and for the rule of law can only happen when all Ukrainians and the international community, including Russia, start co-operating.

Ukraine reminds the whole international community that reconciliation and reciprocity are vital in solving any political or economic conflict.

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