



**CARNEGIE**  
EUROPE

---

Transcript

---

# **CRISIS IN UKRAINE, ONE YEAR ON**

February 10, 2015 | Brussels

**SPEAKER:**

**David Lidington**, UK minister for Europe

**MODERATOR:**

**Jan Techau**, director of Carnegie Europe

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

**JAN TECHAU:** Thank you very much to all of you for coming. It's a bit odd to actually welcome Minister Lidington to his own house in a sense, as Carnegie Europe. This is not Carnegie Europe, in case you haven't noticed yet. We've decided to do it here because we can see people more conveniently here and it's a great pleasure for us to co-host this event with the British Permanent Representation to the EU and that we can hold this at such a timely moment.

We talked about schizophrenia just now. Minister Lidington, on the one hand, has to save the world and at the same time campaign at home and kind of clone himself several times to accommodate all of the tasks that he has at the moment. And it's great that in all of this craziness he finds the time to give us a few words and a few thoughts on where the crisis management effort on the Ukraine file, on the Russia-Ukraine file, stands at the moment and where we stand a year after it all kind of turned hot. I don't really have to introduce the minister. He's a known quantity in this town. He's been the Europe Minister since 2010, almost four years, and what a four years those were.

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Five; nearly five.

**JAN TECHAU:** Nearly five? Yes. Nearly five. This is my math. And so five years of this is of course... we've seen so many things happening, not only on the international scene but in Europe as such. The quality of this integration project is something that we talk about all the time and then, of course, also the domestic situation in Britain that has evolved pretty massively over the last almost five years on the EU file. So, all of this must have taken some kind of toll, even though the minister doesn't show it. He looks like he's ready to rumble and save the world, as he should.

I don't want to go into too much detail but we will do a brief presentation with the minister, a speech he will outline what he has to say, then I will have, certainly, a couple of follow up questions and then it's hopefully up to you. The minister needs to leave at five minutes to five, proper, which means that we have to wrap-up at around ten to five, so we have a very condensed and brief meeting here and the house is swollen. I very much appreciate it that you're all here. Thank you very much, again. Mr Minister, yes, over to you.

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Well, thank you very much, indeed. Yes, it's good to be speaking at Carnegie Europe. I spoke, in the past, at Carnegie Washington DC but, I think, never at a Carnegie Europe before. It was kind of you to mention my long service in this particular job. I'm never quite sure whether having become the longest serving British minister for Europe on record is something I should treat as a vote of confidence by my Prime Minister or a cruel and unusual punishment that is probably in breach of the Convention on Human Rights but it is a role that is both multifaceted and of absorbing interest.

But what I want to focus on today is what I think is now, without question, one of the most serious crises that is facing Europe at any time since 1945. The pundits will argue about whether this is the gravest security crisis since the end of the Cold War or since the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 but what I think is clear from the decision of the leaders of France and Germany to engage in this week's shuttle diplomacy is that we are at a very grave situation and a perilous situation now in Europe.

Yesterday, EU foreign ministers met in the Foreign Affairs Council to set out next steps. That was done for the third time in less than two months and an indication of the seriousness with which every member state in the EU approaches the issue of Russia. And to see why that is the case we just need to cast our minds back 12 months. It is exactly one year ago that more than 100 people died in the centre of Kiev. In Ukraine they call them the heavenly 100; 100 people who died in the name of a

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

movement, Euromaidan, based around an ideal that Ukraine should be free of tyranny, free of corruption and free to choose its own destiny.

And today I want to set out our view of events that followed the start of Euromaidan. I want to address two questions. How should the European Union view Russia? And, given this, what should underpin our approach to Russia and to Ukraine over the coming years? So, how should the EU view Russia? Let's start with the historical context. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991. Some have called this one of the greatest geopolitical catastrophes of the 20th century but I beg to differ. Hundreds of millions of people in East Europe and in Central Asia were freed from the totalitarian rule of the Soviet Communist Party. Dozens of countries regained their independence. And over the last quarter of a century Russia had moved towards integration into an international rules-based system.

And the international community in Europe and beyond made a concerted effort to help Russia through that democratic rule of law transition. We encouraged and we helped Russia to join the World Trade Organization. Russia became part of the G8 and the G20. It joined the OSCE, the OECD and the Council of Europe. The EU created permanent partnership councils and NATO created the NATO-Russia Council. At the same time economic links grew with billions of rubles invested into and by Russian businesses. And millions of people, individual citizens, made personal connections across the old iron curtain, thanks, in part, to organisations like the British Council. And all this was done with one aim in mind. We wanted Europe to build a strategic partnership with Russia.

What we have seen, and what we have seen vividly over the last year, is that President Putin has moved away from this trajectory. He has decided to treat Europe as a strategic adversary, rather than a strategic partner. The Kremlin has torn up the global security rulebook. It has trampled over borders and used foreign populations as a pawn in a greater game, importing what amount to 19th century tactics in 21st century Europe.

Look at the record. Russia continues to interfere illegally in Georgia, most recently with the signature of additional treaties with the two breakaway regions. Russia has meddled in Moldovan elections, providing financial and other support to specific political parties. Russia has kidnapped an Estonian official and imprisoned him illegally in Moscow. Ukraine has been dismembered by the illegal annexation of Crimea and is now in a state of smouldering instability thanks to the Kremlin's puppet uprising in the Donbas. And that against the background of doctrine laid down in Moscow that Russia has the right to intervene anywhere it chooses if it can claim that that intervention is in support of Russian speakers or Russian citizens.

And we can count the cost of the Kremlin's actions in the straightforward terms of human lives, not just the hundreds who lost their lives fighting for freedom in the Euromaidan or the 298 innocent people downed in MH17, but now more than 5,000 deaths in Ukraine, tens of thousands injured and more than 1.5 million people forced to take refuge in other parts of Ukraine or in neighbouring countries. And that situation is getting worse. Violence is escalating, reaching levels not seen since last September. Just a few weeks ago 30 civilians were killed in Mariupol by a Russian missile fired by separatists. The separatists have destroyed Donetsk airport, they're threatening Debaltseve and we believe they've occupied more than 500 square kilometres of additional Ukrainian land since last September.

Now, that is a tragedy but it is not some accidental sequence of events. It is a deliberate, calculated policy of the Kremlin. And I think we need to recognise that we do not have a Ukraine crisis, we have a Russia crisis of which Ukraine is the most acute and immediate manifestation. Russia is responsible for creating the separatists. There was no significant movement a year ago for independence of the

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

Donbas. The first leader, so-called, of the Donetsk breakaway area was removed at the behest of Russia when it was found that he actually spent most of his time living in Moscow and not in the region that he purported to represent.

The separatists are not authentic expressions of democratic opinion, they are instruments of Russian policy and Russia is responsible for arming them; T-72BM tanks, PKP machine guns, Grad missiles, all from the Russian army's stores. Russia is responsible for training them. Camps have been set up on the Russian side of the border. Uniformed men cross in both directions every day. Russia is responsible for logistical support. Its intelligence forces man the command and control units. Its air defence provides a shield for the separatists. And Russia is responsible for further threats. 8,000 Russian troops are massed on the border with Ukraine, acting to demoralise the people of Mariupol or Sloviansk. And Russia is responsible for undermining Ukraine sovereignty, sending in wave after wave of so-called humanitarian convoys with the agreement of Ukraine's legitimate government.

And Russia is responsible for blocking a diplomatic solution. The commitments that President Putin made under the Minsk Agreement have never been further from the reality of Russia's actions on the ground. And is that contrast between the words that are spoken at diplomatic exchanges and the activity on the ground in Eastern Ukraine that has led, sadly, to deeper levels of mistrust in Europe and in the United States about the intentions of the Russian Government. And most cynically of all, Russia denies that much of this is happening. In the face of hard evidence, whether open source, intelligence, eye witness accounts or international monitors, Russia says that it has no hand in the conflict and accuses the elected government in Kiev, instead, of being the belligerent party.

Now, with all of this in mind, it is clear that there can be no business as usual. So, how then, in those circumstances should the European Union respond? And I suggest four key elements. First, is diplomacy. We must support the current diplomatic efforts. There can be, in the end, no military solution to this crisis. President Poroshenko has been clear throughout. He wants peace, not war. So, we called all parties to engage constructively with the legitimate democratic government of Ukraine and with two objectives, to de-escalate tensions and to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis.

The United Kingdom welcomes the intensive efforts by our German and French colleagues in recent days to engage with President Putin. The UK will continue to work with our European partners to help resolve the crisis and take an active part in the diplomatic process. In addition to the debate about sanctions, on which I want to say a little more in a moment, the Prime Minister maintains his own contacts with President Poroshenko and Putin, as well as with our EU partners, including both Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande. At the G20, he made it clear to President Putin that Russia's choice was simple; fulfil what he agreed in Minsk or face further costs.

So, what might a diplomatic solution look like? I don't think it's any great secret. It will need to involve a number of elements including a ceasefire, monitored internationally, border monitoring of that key international frontier between Russia and Ukraine, prisoner exchanges, humanitarian access, local elections and the avoidance of any doubt, Ukraine remaining intact with its sovereignty and its territorial integrity respected.

Secondly, to support that diplomatic engagement, we need to keep up the pressure upon Russia. That means multilateral pressure through the UN, OSCE and other organisations, diplomatic pressure through all the channels we have and it also means economic pressure through sanctions as part of a wider political strategy. They're not an alternative to engagement. Sanctions complement and support our efforts to engage. And those sanctions are having an impact upon Russia. Growth fell last year from 2.1% to 0.2% and the Russian economy is expected to shrink this year by as much as 5%. The

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

Kremlin's own actions, such as its food imports ban, are stoking inflation and passing costs on to ordinary Russian citizens. Now, as we all know, it is the oil price which has caused much of this economic turmoil, as too has the Kremlin's decision not to reform the Russian economy, but sanctions are playing their part, as well. Standard & Poor recognised this when downgrading Russia's credit status to junk last month.

I want to stress that our hope, our intention, is not to cause long term problems for the Russian economy but it is vital that the government in Moscow understands that its illegal and destabilising actions come with a cost. I think the message to the Kremlin and Russian needs to be very clear. Sanctions can be lifted. We can, as the European Union, together with our other allies, reverse this policy. If Russia fulfils its responsibility in implementing fully the 12 points from Minsk, then we will need to look at easing sanctions but let me be clear, these sanctions can and should also be strengthened if Russia's further actions provoke this. Now, until such a choice confronts us, the EU must remain united and hold to its strategy. To do anything less would be to condone Russian action and then my fear is that we would see Russia use tried, tested and successful tactics elsewhere in the European neighbourhood. So, I think we need to continue to respond collectively but with very firm resolve.

The third pillar of our approach must be to support a successful Ukraine. Ukraine's people and government have taken a historic decision. They wish to build closer relations with the European Union and take charge of their own destiny and they seek to uphold the territorial integrity of their country. Now, there is undoubtedly much to do. The Ukrainian Government is trying and must continue to try to reach out to all Ukrainian citizen whatever the part of the country they're living, whatever language they speak, so that they feel part of a new and better Ukraine. And we, the EU member states, need to support them in that work. So, the UK strongly supports the work of the Commission Support Group for Ukraine which has identified four key areas for reform; public administration, anti-corruption, justice and energy.

Now, we're doing our bit bilaterally. British funds and technical assistance are flowing to support economic and governance reforms. This means combating corruption and helping to attract further investment. And we're working with the Ukrainian Government to help them address the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the east and the challenge posed by very large numbers of displaced persons. We're working, too, alongside the Germans to help Ukraine's Ministry of Finance, to reform its public financial management systems.

So, these three elements – diplomacy, pressure, support to Ukraine, support from individual member states, from the European Union, from the international financial institutions – are the bedrock of our response to the Russia-Ukraine crisis. But to that I would add a fourth element. Our work won't be effective if the Ukrainian people and international publics lose faith in the path that Ukraine has chosen. So, we also need to respond to Russia's actions by countering disinformation. And, let's face it, Russia has employed multiple, well-honed tactics of disinformation in the last few years; tighter control over the domestic media, new aggressive channels to confuse and disorient international publics, purveyors of online troubles whose sole job seems to be to use fake evidence to litter social media, even at the time of MH17.

And we need to counter this disinformation campaign, not with propaganda but with the truth. And, to that end, I propose four elements that should govern the EU's response. I could perhaps term them the four As. First, is awareness. We need to make our own populations aware of the scale of Russia's disinformation and that means greater cooperation between the EU and NATO and exposing disinformation when it occurs. Second, assertiveness. We must define a proactive, positive narrative

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

for populations in the region, not just in Ukraine but in the neighbourhood as a whole. And, as member states, we should support and amplify one another's messages. Third, alternatives. The Kremlin has successfully limited free debate in Russia's media space. We need to support independent and alternative voices. A key element of this is actually to help Ukraine's own government to communicate more effectively with its own people and with the international media. Ukraine's voice needs to be heard clearly abroad. And, finally, accountability. Where Russian propaganda outlets break our laws they should be made accountable and regulators throughout the EU need to keep a watchful eye, always mindful, of course, of the importance of protecting free speech.

I want to conclude by saying this. Despite everything that I've said that has been critical of the Russian Government, my country continues to have huge respect for Russia as a nation and in just a matter of some weeks' time we will mark the 70th anniversary of the end of the War in Europe and, as part of that, the horrendous suffering and sacrifice of the people of Russia at that time. Russia is a great nation with a hugely talented people, boundless natural resources and the potential to be a powerful force for good in the global community. But at the moment, I fear, the Kremlin is squandering that potential and, in doing so, it is destabilising one of EU's neighbours; a neighbour, Ukraine, which is seeking a brighter and more prosperous future through democratic means.

This May the EU will hold an Eastern Partnership Summit in Riga and, in parallel, we're reviewing our policy towards the eastern neighbourhood. Both of these events will take place in the context of Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine and I've no doubt that that context will shape the outcome. We would far rather avoid path of confrontation with Russia but the choice lies with the Kremlin. The current path it is taking can only lead to further international isolation and deeper economic gloom; worse prospects for families throughout the Russian Federation. The Kremlin should even now reconsider a different course in the interests of people throughout Europe, in Ukraine and, not least, in Russia, itself. Thank you very much.

**JAN TECHAU:** Thank you, David. This was great. Thank you for charting the terrain for us and for also giving us an outlook on how we could deal with this, both in the short term and in the long term. And I would like to pick up on this. We don't have microphones here but I hope that all the way back there you can still hear us and understand us. Is it okay? Is it possible? Okay, good. All right, we have to shout a little bit.

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** That's all right. The House of Commons teaches you how to do that.

**JAN TECHAU:** I have a question both on the short term and on the long term. On the short term, we are still in the crisis management mode and we try to, with feverish diplomacy, to get, basically, Minsk back alive and we are sticking to it somehow. That's kind of the framework within which this crisis management exercise operates. My question to you is whether we are too naïve to stick to it? We've been burned once on it and now we still kind of try to revive it and basically build our entire effort on it and how often can we try it and is there a proper hope for progress there?

And, then, on the long term – so, beyond the crisis management – the EU has basically embraced a twofold approach; help Ukraine and be tough on Russia. On both counts the EU consensus is wobbly. Being tough on Russia means sanctions and keeping the sanctions alive and extending them in July, hopefully. But we know how difficult this is and so I would like to hear from you what you think the prospects are. And, then, secondly, on the helping Ukraine side of long term, the reform record of the Poroshenko Government isn't exactly stellar. It's not like we see a lot of really substantial progress there and, yet, we rely on them to basically carry the day because we are hinging our entire strategy on this. If they don't reform now, when can they?

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Okay. If I stand up then people can hear and see me better. On your first point, are we now being naïve in sticking to Minsk? I don't think it's naïve. I think that we need to exhaust every diplomatic possibility. I think one of the problems that there is with the Kremlin and the Russian Government, the circles around President Putin, is that there is enormous suspicion, in my view completely unjustified suspicion of the West. I think there is huge mistrust, perhaps going back to the President's previous career and, therefore, I think having the Chancellor of Germany, the President of France, demonstrating by their presence and by their commitment of a huge amount of time and energy that they are serious, they want to help find a way back down from the precipice, is an important route that we must try because the alternative to diplomacy it means more deaths in Ukraine, greater risk of instability of elsewhere in Europe.

So, I think we do need to stick to that but what we should not be is naïve about what is needed. It is not enough just to have signatures on a bit of paper. We had that last year at Minsk. What we need to see is an agreement which is then delivered and delivered in full. At that point I think we can say, well, perhaps we're getting to a more stable situation and then, perhaps, the way might be open for a dialogue between Kiev and Moscow about the longer term relationship between the two countries based on mutual respect.

On the beyond crisis management, I think we've had these concerns in the media and in think tanks before every EU Council discussion about sanctions. I've been involved in a number of those discussions and, yes, 28 countries come to the table with different perspectives, different interests involved, but we've always come out of those meetings with an agreed position and we have, at each stage, been willing to ratchet up our response in terms of sanctions when Russian aggression on the ground has got worse. So, I think the record has been that we've been able to hold together and I think the continued unity of purpose and alignment between Europe and the United States remains a very key element of the pressure, as well.

When it comes to Ukraine, it's a vast task. I'm not going to pretend otherwise. And we are asking a lot of Ukraine. Ukraine doesn't even have the traditions of democracy and rule of law that the Central European countries had for a time after the First World War which were then extinguished by invasion and then Communist rule. So, it's more difficult for Ukrainians to look back to any sort of previous point of reference except perhaps earlier on in their independence after 1990/91. And there is various deep-seated corruption within Ukraine. There are inefficiencies in the economy, problems with the judicial and administrative and political systems.

I think that the Central European countries that have, themselves, gone through this period of transition are in a very strong place to both offer practical advice on how to go about reform and offer some inspiration, saying, look, it is tough but we've shown that it can be done and there are huge benefits at the end of the day. I think what we have to continue to say very clearly to the government in Ukraine is that they cannot afford to simply put off difficult decisions over reform until things, we hope, calm down in the Donbas. Yes, it is incredibly challenging to have to try and introduce reforms which would involve turbulence and disruption at the same time as you're facing this Russian aggression in the east of the country but I think in terms of showing Ukrainian public opinion that there is some fruit to the sacrifices of Euromaidan and in demonstrating to the businesses that Ukraine wants to come and put money into their country, that they're serious about reform, that they are going to tackle corruption. I don't think that those reforms can or should be put off, so we have definitely to maintain the pressure on Ukraine to stick to the course.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

**JAN TECHAU:** Let me have a quick follow up on the long term. One of the possibilities for the EU, obviously, to devise a more long term strategy is to reform its European Neighbourhood Policy, especially the Eastern Partnership which most of us here, in this town, after some reluctance, agree has failed to achieve its goals. And now we need to come up with something new. And, of course, we have all kinds of issues there, not least the institutional infighting on this here but also different ideas from the member states. Now, the High Representative has been tasked with coming up with a new idea and a new approach. How far has that gone and what, perhaps, is the British position on this?

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** We'll see the fruit of it at Riga, I think. That is the plan. I think it's too strong to say that the Eastern Partnership policy has failed. You've got three countries out of the six that are very keen to pursue closer integration with the European Union. I think that we do need to have a policy that differentiates more than it has done previously between different members of the Eastern Partnership. I think, you look at Ukraine or Moldova, they're in a completely different position from Belarus or Azerbaijan, neither of whom, at the moment, want the same sort of relationship with the EU that those other two do. I think the principle of more for more that we introduced at the time of the review of partnership policy following the Arab Spring is one that ought to be applied to Eastern Europe, as well.

If a country commits itself to reform and it follows it through then they should get the additional help. If they backslide well then we have to think again about that. What I don't think we can do is simply write cheques regardless of what goes on in the recipient country. I don't think that actually benefits anybody at the end of the day. But it's not just money. If I look back, some of things that made the greatest difference to Poland, the Czech Republic and so on, in the early years was the provision of technical assistance; actually showing people this is how the independent judiciary operates. This is how you have an honest gas distribution network where people's supplies are measured and that the bill is paid honestly. Those are things that I think that we can offer and which can make a practical difference. It's not just about writing large cheques.

**JAN TECHAU:** All right. I have about 25 more questions but I want to open it to the audience and I apologise already that I probably can't take everybody. I would like to collect, perhaps, two or three in the first round and then see how far we can go. This gentleman here, then Daniel and then a third finger is all the way down there. Yes, Detlef. All right, please.

**JIRÍ ŠEDIVÝ:** My name is Jiří Šedivý and I'm Czech Ambassador to NATO and thank you for mentioning Czechoslovakia and Czech Republic. The current crisis or conflict is rather different than the invasion in 1968. I'm not going into that but I fully agree with you emphasis on internal reforms because however and whatever will be the result of the situation in the east... and I'm very sceptical about that because the pro-Russia and Russia-supported separatists are now creating a new situation on the ground, extending, actually, the area; raising the stakes for negotiation. But, however this will end up, for the rest of Ukraine, the success of reforms will be absolutely crucial because they can't afford another [sound slip] that happened after the Orange Revolution ten years ago. And, indeed, the assistance or some of export of expertise and lessons learned, including those things that we did simply wrong would be of great help. My question goes to situation which we witness in most of our countries here in the EU or in the West where on the Ukrainian crisis and conflict there is a very strange galvanisation, a very strange alliance or coalition of extreme right and extreme left forces that are united by anti-liberalism, hatred against the European Union, hatred against the United States and, indeed, support for Russia and Putin as a strong leader in this situation. So, I believe, actually, that this is another... and they are very much supported through various channels of Russian, not only propaganda but also financial and so forth. And I see this as a big danger, actually, for us in the European Union; the Union, as such, and nations respectively. Your comment would be welcome.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

**DANIEL KEOHANE:** Daniel Keohane from FRIDE, a foreign policy think tank. Minister, I was struck by your comments that this is not a Ukraine crisis but a Russia crisis. Is there a consensus in London, one year into this crisis, on what President Putin's intentions in Ukraine really are and, if so, what is it? And, secondly, I'm sure you sure over the weekend the FT editorial on UK foreign policy and the lack of direction at the moment that they claim and the perception that the UK has not been a major player on the Ukraine crisis. For example, why hasn't David Cameron joined in in the direct negotiations with President Hollande and Chancellor Merkel? Can you give us some response on those criticisms?

**JAN TECHAU:** Those were the easy ones, Minister, and then Detlef, back there.

**DETLEF PUHL:** I'm Detlef Puhl. I'm working for NATO. I have just two small questions. Over the weekend the questions of arms deliveries to Ukraine has been a big issue. In your judgement, would that be a dividing factor between European partners and the US? And, secondly, do have any knowledge or do you have any way of judging whether or not there is already covert delivery taking place?

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Right. Let's run through those three. On the ambassador's point. Yes, the focus on the internal reforms, absolutely right. And I can remember a meeting I had with British businesses that were trading or invested in Ukraine and their biggest complaint was about corruption. I remember one company saying me, look, we're actually planning to pull out now because... and this was before Maidan and this was in Yanukovych's time. They said we face a situation where we can never be certain that a permit that we're granted will not be revoked because the sister of some minister would rather like the profits from this herself. And I think we just need to get the message home to people in Ukraine – for that matter, in Moldova and Georgia too – that if you want inward investment, having a system of independent courts where investment is properly protected by the rule of law is the best way in which to do it. If you have a reputation of corruption, there's lots of other countries round the world where people could go and put their money instead.

I agree with you about, if you like, the way in which Russia is using various soft power instruments. I described in my opening remarks a number of examples of Russian actions taken in not just Ukraine, look at Estonia. You could point to the way in which energy has been used as a weapon; the switch off of supplies briefly to Poland, Czech Republic and Slovakia and supposedly for technical reasons but I don't think anybody really believed that. You look at the use of strategic investments in parts of the Balkans, talks with the previous Bulgarian Government that the Russians were talking about in energy deals, certainly, the rather murky channels of support to both far left and far right parties in different countries around Europe. We need to be alive to this. This is all about trying to reassert Russia as a great power but through subverting various other states.

On Daniel's points, actually, we come along rather neatly from that. What do we think Putin's objectives are? I think our fear in London is that what his strategic objective is to keep Ukraine weak, corrupt, divided and dependent on the Kremlin. I would hope, still, that Russia can be dissuaded or deterred from following that course but I think you look at that along with the present conflicts in Georgia, the situation in Transnistria that is within Russia's power to resolve. You look at the public doubt cast on the status of Kazakhstan in a speech President Putin gave. It does add up to a troubling picture and this is a president who said publicly he regards the breakup of the Soviet Union as the greatest catastrophe in international relations in his lifetime who no doubt want to reassert Russia's status in the world after what were some pretty humiliating experiences of loss of power and of living standards in the 90s.

## *Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

We can argue about the reasons for that but he wants to reassert Russia's greatness and that is by no means an illegitimate policy objective but I'd say the way you do that is to reform the economy so that you are actually generating wealth that you can distribute to your people and help you win influence globally. The irony of all this is a prosperous, politically stable Ukraine could benefit Russia in the way the prosperous, politically stable free Poland has done; much bigger trading partner than was the case 25 years ago, a bigger recipient of Russian trade and a source of investment into Russia, itself.

On the FT, the British press, I think what happened was that in the margins of the Normandy ceremonies last summer there was a decision taken that... the French President was host at Normandy and, let's face it, Chancellor Merkel has got a channel to Putin that is probably better than the channel anybody else has and other European leaders do. Putin is more willing to talk to her than to other European leaders; the fact they speak each other's languages; that President Putin lived in Germany as a KGB officer and so. There is a relationship there that is of particular value and we shouldn't be worked up about that as though somehow that's to a national discredit. God knows, the FT normally lectures the British Government about not being European enough and we're actually saying here, look, we support this European endeavour that Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande are leading. If we were saying, oh yes, well, the British Prime Minister has got to come, as well; the Polish and Italian Prime Minister, well, in that case, we need to be there. You'd end up with this delegation of six, ten...oh, have to have a rotating presidency; it's 28. That would be ridiculous. We've got a channel that works, so I think the thing is to make that work and not get het up about who is there or not there for any one meeting.

Arms to Ukraine. The blunt truth is that the Ukraine army could not beat the Russian army in battle even if she was supplied with lots of weapons. I don't think that the European and American positions are far apart. There's nuances in the approach. Our position in Britain is that we've supplied and will continue to supply non-lethal equipment, including things like body armour, to the Ukrainians. We've not taken any decision to supply lethal materials. Clearly, if the situation on the ground warranted then we might need to review that but we're not at that stage now. But I think we wouldn't want to just stand by and let the Ukrainian forces completely collapse. So, we just have to keep watching that one but it's not a step that we would wish to feel we were being forced to take.

**JAN TECHAU:** I think we are, like, one minute before our exhaustion time but I have one further question for you and that is on US-European unity on this. In the run up to the Vilnius Summit – and I'm talking about years before the Vilnius Summit – it didn't look like either the Americans, nor the Europeans, were particularly interested in the eastern neighbourhood and then all of a sudden the stuff happened that we know happened and now we're on it and now, of course, one of the keys to success is to keep the two sides united. How can we achieve this best, especially given some of the grumblings and rumblings, some of the Americans who say the Europeans are not doing enough and Europe should finally wake up to its strategic reality and so on and so forth. So, how do we keep that Western unity, if there is such a thing?

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Constant consultation and contact. It's perhaps saying the obvious. Actually, coming back to one of the earlier questions, that's one of the things my prime minister has been extremely active in trying to make sure that the bridge between Brussels and Washington is kept in good repair. We need to be talking to each other the whole time and try to coordinate. Obama wants to coordinate policy. He doesn't want to see a breach between the European and United States positions but it means accepting the reality of what we're seeing on the ground; judging Russia but what they do rather than simply by words.

*Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery*

**JAN TECHAU:** Thank you very much, Mr Minister. I know that you've got to run. Thank you very much for your time.

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** Yes, sorry, Eurostar beckons.

**JAN TECHAU:** Please come back very soon.

**DAVID LIDINGTON:** I look forward to it. That would be great. Thank you very much, indeed.

**JAN TECHAU:** Thank you.