

UKRAINE

On the Brink of Civil War

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The situation in Ukraine is unfolding unpredictably, and fast. The dictatorial laws that the authorities "approved" – according to the government's official version – to scare people away from protests created the radical opposite effect: Ukrainians burst into the streets, seething with indignation. Though opposition leaders had a chance to channel this negative energy into something more constructive, such as an organized resistance to the Yanukovich regime, none of the three opposition leaders understood the mood of the protesters, who were effectively turned into criminals by the new legislation. As a result, some people ignored the opposition and started acting on their own, launching an attack on the "riot police," and organizing into municipal self-defense squads.

In their disregard for the escalation of the conflict, and its spread to other Ukrainian cities, the authorities have been unprepared for real concessions; instead, they continue to stall for time. President Viktor Yanukovich has invited representatives of Maidan and the opposition for negotiations, yet he behaves crudely and arrogantly. He is accompanied by the very same officials alleged to be responsible for the cruel suppression of the peaceful protests in December, and for the abovementioned laws. Nor has he accepted a meaningful dismissal of the Cabinet, or early presidential elections. Over the last two months, in fact, the president has focused on organizing and concentrating police forces, so he may renew attacks on the demonstrators. In other words, no one believes anything Yanukovich says – people treat his promises as bluffs >>>