

Urgent prayer request for the Ukraine,

(February 22, 2014)

As developments still unfold by the hour, the Ukraine, its people, our friends, brothers and sisters in faith, need our prayers at this very moment more than ever.

Please take note of this, and lift this situation up in prayer.

After months of demonstrations in many cities in the Ukraine, and occupation of parts of the capital, were resulting in intense and deadly fighting in the streets of Kiev the past couple of days, (sparked overnight by Russia transferring a billions of Dollars loan on Monday), ensnaring the president (favored by Russia) even more in Russian dependency, a fragile truce seems to appear since last night. Masses/funeral services for the fatally shot victims are held in open air at the independence-square. Among the crowds are Christians including Baptists showing support or caught up between the battle lines. As I'm asking specific prayers for some of those further down in this prayer letter.

Only a couple of generations ago, a Western section of the Ukraine ("Trans-Carpathia"), was part of Czechoslovakia (between WWI and WWII). So this is close to our doorstep. The Ukrainian language (dominant in the West) resembles the Polish language more than the Russian language (dominant in the East). The Ukraine is near: Yesterday a person with a Ukrainian flag-pin sat across from me while riding public transport in Prague, in the house next door to ours, live Ukrainian families, and at IBTS are/ were often Ukrainian students or volunteers, and we have Ukrainian individuals and families in our church. It is the largest country in Europe (after Russia).

Since the break-up of the former Soviet Union the 'Russian' orthodox and the 'Ukrainian' orthodox churches pick at each other, resulting in the Baptists having free space to grow unhindered. The Ukraine has comparatively the highest number of Baptists, and Baptist churches in Europe. The book *Operation World* lists about a half million Baptists & affiliates. Also, the listing of 3.8 % Bible Believing/ 'Evangelical' Christians is well above the European average. Baptists are active in all walks of life including politics. For decades until last year, the Baptist office for all of the Ukraine, used to be at a stone-throw distance from the square (5 minute walk, which I walked several times over the years).

While praying, and calling for prayer in different circles of friends these days, I tried to receive first hand information from the front lines to share with you. One of my Ukrainian friends (a pastor in the South of the Ukraine) wrote me a few lines last night:

"We all are deeply affected by this extraordinary situation in Ukraine. On the one hand, we are proud of our heroic compatriots who stood up against prevailing forces of armed police and camouflaged criminals showing to both the lawless Ukrainian government backed by Russia and the lingering West that Ukrainians are the people ready to die for human dignity and better future for their fatherland. On the other hand, the level of hatred caused by pain and injustice is peaking. And hatred is never constructive.

Some of my Christian friends are on the Kiev's main square now. One of them is in prison in Kharkov. They won't let his wife and 3-year old daughter see him. He is to spend 15 days in prison "for violent resistance to the policemen on duty" before they start a full-blown criminal case against him. He was arrested for merely taking pictures of the task force soldiers getting underway from Kharkov to Kiev to fight the protesters on the main square. Needless to say, he offered no resistance at his arrest. His name is Dennis. Please pray for him and his family.

This government must go. Please pray for new worthy leaders who will put an end to this horrible turmoil and build a better foundation on which to build.

May God bless you,"

Let me note that Kharkov (mentioned in his note), is the president's home town and as result probably the most hard-line Russian-cause supportive area. I talked a couple of weeks ago with a volunteer at IBTS from near that area, and he mentioned how the police (bound to law-defined procedures), often 'hire' heavy weight 'thugs' (not limited by law-defined procedures) to back them up and beat protesters or dissidents as fierce and brutal as possible without legal consequences for the police. If something happens to you in Kharkov, while questioning the authorities' response to the pro-western/ democracy demonstrations, you have the least chance for some grace. (The opposite is in Lviv, one of the most western leaning cities in the country, where the police openly sided with the demonstrators).

Western governments have not been keen on supplying financial aid to the corruption riddled government, and they may underestimate the biggest looming threat, of Russia by all (!?!?) means avoiding to loose influence in this 'buffer country' to the West. Even when President Yanukovich resigns and early elections are being held, the country and its people still seriously need our prayers for strengthening peace and stability in this insecure, fragile and tense situation (1.Tim.2:2).

According to many commentators, the country is moving from demonstrations to rebellion, and is at the verge of civil war. Most of the presidents party-members deserted him, and yesterday's signed agreement brokered with help of several western foreign ministers (and the Russian one, who abstained signing the agreement), do not seem sufficient. Especially since the excessive and severely deadly violence yesterday, the protestors only seem to be willing to give up, when the president resigns (with immediate effect), and that he will be criminally indicted. It remains for the moment extremely tense, fragile and pivotal for the future of the citizens of the Ukraine. Please pray for a good future of the Ukraine, for Dennis, who is in prison, for fellow Christians, and others caught up in this violence.

For more information see this link (contains disturbing images, not for children):

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26286720>

Greetings from Prague,
May The Lord Bless You,

Pieter & Nora Kalkman.