

Message from the IEECA Board



2014 marked a watershed for countries covered by the Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research. The past year witnessed mass demonstrations in Ukraine in favor of the EU Partnership program; the sudden toppling of President **Viktor Yanukovich**; **Russia's seizure of Crimea and instigation of conflict** in Eastern Ukraine; and several rounds of U.S. and European sanctions against Russia which, coupled with the precipitous decline in the world oil price, sent the Russian economy into a tailspin.

These developments have brought Ukraine and relations with Russia to center stage in global affairs. They have also created a double threat to other countries bordering Russia. First, fears are growing that Russian pressure could take new forms as Moscow lays claim to “privileged interests” in the former republics of the Soviet Union. Second, the sharp downturn in the Russian economy has had a negative impact on many neighboring states. Add to this the sharp rise in the value of the U.S. dollar during 2014 and problematic economic trends are only compounded.

As 2015 gets underway, signs are mixed regarding the depth of Western solidarity against Russia's aggression and the prospects for adequate Western economic support for Ukraine. Russia clearly has violated the 1994 Budapest Memorandum under which Ukraine gave up all nuclear weapons on its soil in exchange for assurances of its security and territorial integrity. Western credibility is now on the line as Russia continues to flaunt this accord to which it was a signatory.

Beyond the crisis in Ukraine, events last year at the other end of the Eurasian landmass carried with them important implications for Europe and Central Asia as well. In November, China announced an array of new programs on infrastructure investment and finance that focused not only on Asia, but also on Central Asia and beyond. Xi Jinping's plans for a New Silk Road Project and a Maritime Silk Road have been presented to the Chinese people as essential pillars of the “China Dream” of a prosperous society by 2049, the 100th anniversary of the PRC.

Despite U.S. pressure to the contrary, major European countries – among them Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and France – **have announced that they will participate in China's newly-created Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank**. Meanwhile, Russia is a key partner in ambitious Chinese plans for high-speed rail and other transportation links across Eurasia. Once again, such projects have the potential to influence the economics and geopolitics of countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

At the heart of the events that shook 2014 lies the region to which this journal devotes its analytical and scholarly attention. How the confrontation with Russia plays out will reverberate through Eastern Europe and Central Asia for years to come. And as this drama unfolds, it will be more important than ever to produce accurate assessments of emerging trends. The Journal of Eastern European and Central Asian Research remains committed to providing a platform for international scholars and practitioners to participate in this effort. We look forward to an active collaboration with our authors and readers in addressing the challenges that lie before us.

Thomas Hanson,
IEECA Director

Diplomat in Residence, Alworth Institute for International Studies, University of Minnesota - Duluth