

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The Wall Street Journal. – 02.04.2014

By Anton Troianovski (anton.troianovski@wsj.com)

Russia-Ukraine Conflict Gets Personal

Fight Over Crimea Has Spilled Into Social Media for Russian-Speaking Diaspora

*Російсько-Український конфлікт отримує особистості
Боротьба за Крим в центрі соціальних мереж російськомовної діаспори
Конфлікт навколо України та Криму, анексованого минулого місяця Москвою, створив
нові лінії розлому в глобальному російськомовному просторі пострадянської діаспори,
пише автор статті. У сім'ях і серед чужих, в соціальних ситуаціях і особливо в
соціальних мережах, росіяни й українці звинувачують один одного в невігластві і
нетерпимості. Росіяни за кордоном звинувачують росіян вдома в повторюванні
державної пропаганди. Ті ж, в свою чергу, дорікають емігрантам у втраті зв'язку з
батьківщиною.*

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304432604579475610427724306?KEYWORDS=Ukraine&mg=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2F%2FSB10001424052702304432604579475610427724306.html%3FKEYWORDS%3DUkraine>



A recent concert in Berlin by Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, a Ukrainian rock star with a broad following, drew opposing chants for Ukraine and Russia. Anton Troianovski/The Wall Street Journal

Недавній концерт в Берліні Святослава Вакарчука, відомої української рок-зірки, затьмарив інші пісні для України та Росії. Антон Трояновський / The Wall Street Journal

BERLIN—Russian-born Max Maizenberg, a network-security specialist in Toronto, recently channeled his disgust with Moscow's actions in Ukraine into a lengthy post on Facebook, FB -5.15% equating self-described Russian patriots with "congenital morons."

The post rocketed around the globe as his friends shared it with friends until his uncle, who still lives in Russia, caught wind of it and complained angrily in a call with his sister, Mr. Maizenberg's mother.

"I am really sad," Faina Maizenberg, who lives in Israel, said. Her brother, she said, has barely been on speaking terms with her since. "I did not expect this."

The conflict over Ukraine and its Crimea region—annexed last month by Moscow despite protests from Kiev and the West—has created new fault lines in a global Russian-speaking, post-Soviet diaspora that is more connected than ever.

Within families and among strangers, in social situations and especially on social media, Russians and Ukrainians accuse each other of ignorance and intolerance. Russians abroad slam Russians back home for parroting state propaganda. Russians at home tear into émigrés for losing touch with the motherland.

Alexey Sigov, a Ukrainian graduate student in Lyon, France, attends an Orthodox church where worshipers from ex-Soviet republics pray side by side. But when he told two Russians there recently that he supported the pro-Western movement in his native land, the new divisions emerged.

"But what about the violence, the barbarism, the repression of Russians?" one shocked woman responded, according to Mr. Sigov. He added: "It was clear that she was not able to calmly analyze my argument."

A concert in Berlin last month by Ukrainian rock star Svyatoslav Vakarchuk, who has a devoted following across the former Soviet Union, turned into a flag-waving rally in support of the Kiev protesters. But as the crowd chanted "Glory to Ukraine!" one person yelled out, "Glory to Russia!" and drew jeers from others.

Russian and Western media report on the Ukraine conflict so differently that every news article shared seems to reflect a point of view. Sometimes just "liking" something on Facebook or the Russian social network vkontakte.ru is enough to set off a confrontation.

Andrey Surikov, a 31-year-old Russian living in Cyprus, says he is glad that President Vladimir Putin is asserting Russian interests on the world stage.

But he tries to avoid the topic when he sees Ukrainians in person and prefaces some of his Facebook posts with something like, "I'm sorry if this offends any Ukrainian friends."

"It's a somewhat contradictory situation," Mr. Surikov says. "On the one hand, we are friends. On the other hand, our countries appear to be in conflict with each other."

Last month Pavlo Arie, a 33-year-old Ukrainian playwright living in Germany, wrote on Facebook that he was so angry at Russia that "this country, this culture, simply doesn't exist for me anymore."

A friend in Kiev, Yuliia Maslak, was among the 41 people to "like" his post. That prompted it to show up on the screen of her former colleague Elena Khatusova, an event organizer in Moscow.

"Is this not inciting interethnic hatred?" Ms. Khatusova wrote back. "And you all say that we here are brainwashed by propaganda."

Ms. Khatusova, a critic of the Kiev protests, said in an interview that she is disturbed by the anti-Putin Facebook musings of Russians she knows overseas.

"These things are shocking, of course, especially when you know the people," she said.

Some social-media users say they have been blocking or unfriending longtime friends or colleagues who take the other side. Oleksandra Revina, a 28-year-old living in Berlin who is originally from Crimea, said she is close to deactivating her Facebook profile because of the often "hateful" discourse stemming from the conflict.

Artem Rosnovsky, a 32-year-old Web designer in Vancouver, Wash., said he is toning down his Putin criticism on Facebook because of the reaction from friends but fears that for some, "there is no road back."

"There are values that for me are completely obvious," Mr. Rosnovsky said. "If I see that one of my friends is now on the other side, and doesn't see the importance of those values, then I am not sure I can associate with him in the same way as in the past."

The conflict can become all-consuming online. At one point recently, Mr. Arie, the Ukrainian playwright, reverted to old social-media instincts: He shared a photograph of a cat playing with his shoes. Then, seeing the image amid his friends' intense postings over Ukraine, he promptly deleted it.

"Facebook is this really powerful thing," Mr. Arie said. "It magnifies all of these disagreements and it drives you crazy."

Another Ukrainian living in Berlin, Maxim Osin, posted a sketch of a Russian and a Ukrainian sitting across from each other and tapping violently at their computers, each with a speech bubble saying "Fascists!" The caption: "The First Russian-Ukrainian Internet War." It got 35 likes.

Write to Anton Troianovski at anton.troianovski@wsj.com