

# MYTH The West staged a coup to overthrow the Ukrainian government in 2014

Locale: en-US

## The Myth

The 2014 Maidan revolution in Ukraine that led to the ouster of then-president Viktor Yanukovich was in fact a coup orchestrated by the United States and the European Union.

## The Facts

In November 2013, thousands of Ukrainians flocked to Kyiv's Independence Square ("Maidan Nezalezhnosti") to protest then-President Victor Yanukovich's decision to suspend preparations for the signing of an association and free-trade agreement with the European Union, scheduled for the following week. Over the following months, the protests, often referred to as "Euromaidan" after the square where they took place, grew in size and drew more media attention. In February 2014, clashes between protesters and police became increasingly violent when police attempted to clear the square of protesters. According to a press release issued by Ukraine's Ministry of Health in April 2014, violence during the protests led to the deaths of more than 100 people. A June 2014 U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights report cited governmental and non-governmental organizations that reported between 14 to 20 law enforcement officers killed.

Negotiations between the Ukrainian government and the pro-European Union opposition, mediated by the foreign ministers of France, Germany, and Poland, led to an agreement signed on Feb. 21, 2014, giving more power to Ukraine's parliament and planning for a presidential election by the end of the year. However, angry protesters demanded Yanukovich's immediate resignation, and hundreds of police officers guarding government buildings abandoned their posts. Yanukovich fled the same day the agreement was signed, and protesters took control of several government buildings the next day. The Ukrainian parliament then voted 328-0 to remove Yanukovich from office and scheduled early presidential elections the following May, the BBC reported. These events, often collectively referred to as the "Maidan revolution," were extensively covered by international media organizations with correspondents in Ukraine, including the BBC, the Associated Press, and The New York Times.

Since Yanukovich's ouster, Russian state-sponsored media including RT.com and SputnikNews.com have frequently claimed that the Maidan revolution was in fact a coup d'état orchestrated by Western powers. For example, several March 2014 articles published by Russian state site RT.com claimed that the U.S. had spent \$5 billion to fund the uprising against Yanukovich. One such article, titled "Coups for

### Subject Tags

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#Maidan  
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...and the spring agencies have not been able to stop the export: US has history of supporting anti-govt upheavals,” referred to a speech in which then-U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland said that the U. S. had invested more than \$5 billion in Ukraine since Ukraine's independence in 1991. The article then quoted an obscure American anti-war activist named Daniel Patrick Welch saying, “The West spent 5 billion dollars destabilizing Ukraine. This is something that is a mess that's put on Russia's doorstep by the West.”

A March 2014 interview that aired on the RT news channel was published on RT.com under the title “US foreign aid agencies paid for Kiev street violence - ex-US agent Scott Rickard.” The RT host began the interview by telling Rickard, whom she described as a former U.S. intelligence officer, “I know that you've said the US government has been preparing the revolution in Ukraine for years; it's invested \$5 billion so far in the uprising. Where are you getting this information? Do you have proof that that's the case?”

Rickard responded, “Well, it's public information. You have the folks at the National Endowment for Democracy who have been doing this ...” He later continued, “Most of the money is coming from USAID and NGOs, and NGOs are actually funded by the government,” and then went on to say, “If you're inciting violence and the money is basically going to organizations that may incite violence against the standing government, you know, that is inciting the revolution and I think it's illegal by international laws.”

These RT articles mischaracterize a statement made by Nuland during a December 2013 speech to the U.S.-Ukraine Foundation, an NGO that promotes democracy in Ukraine. “Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, the United States has supported Ukrainians as they build democratic skills and institutions, as they promote civic participation and good governance, all of which are preconditions for Ukraine to achieve its European aspirations,” Nuland said. “We have invested over \$5 billion to assist Ukraine in these and other goals that will ensure a secure and prosperous and democratic Ukraine.”

Nicole Thompson, a State Department spokesperson, confirmed to PolitiFact in March 2014 that the \$5 billion figure mentioned by Nuland was for money invested by the U.S. to support democracy-building programs in Ukraine since 1992, shortly after the country became independent from the Soviet Union, not to provoke the uprising in 2014. “The insinuation that the United States incited the people of Ukraine to riot or rebel is patently false,” Thompson said. ForeignAssistance.gov, a U.S. government website that makes U.S. foreign assistance funding data available to the public, shows that U.S. aid to Ukraine in 2013 (the year the protests started) went to a wide variety of activities, including nuclear nonproliferation efforts, a program to reduce unwanted pregnancies by encouraging the use of contraception, and an initiative to improve standardized testing.

Feb. 20, 2014, was the deadliest day of the Euromaidan protests, resulting in the deaths of approximately 50 protesters and four police officers, most from gunshot wounds, according to reports by NBC News and The New York Times. Snipers were observed by witnesses and reporters firing from several buildings near the Maidan, but investigations by the Ukrainian government have not provided conclusive answers about who the snipers were and whose orders they were acting on. Russian state-sponsored media have made baseless claims on numerous occasions that the

state-sponsored media have made baseless claims on numerous occasions that the protesters and police who died that day were killed by snipers controlled by the coalition of Ukrainian political parties opposed to Yanukovich, for the purpose of provoking unrest.

The only evidence that Korwin-Mikke offered for these assertions was that he had overheard this claim in a conversation at the European Parliament between Estonia's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Urmas Paet, and the head of foreign affairs for the EU at the time, Catherine Ashton. The RT.com article went on to quote from a previously leaked phone conversation between Paet and Ashton, in which Paet said that a doctor who had treated shooting victims during the Maidan protests had told him that evidence indicated that both police and protesters had been attacked by the same shooters and that the coalition that replaced Yanukovich did not want to investigate the incident, leading to a "stronger and stronger understanding that behind the snipers, it was not Yanukovich, but it was somebody from the new coalition."

The doctor to whom Paet attributed the comments, Olga Bogomolets, denied having told him that police and protesters were killed in the same manner. "Myself I saw only protesters. I do not know the type of wounds suffered by military people," she told UK newspaper the Telegraph. "No one who just sees the wounds when treating the victims can make a determination about the type of weapons. I hope international experts and Ukrainian investigators will make a determination of what type of weapons, who was involved in the killings and how it was done. I have no data to prove anything."

Bogomolets contradicted Paet's statement indicating that the new coalition was behind the snipers. "I think you can only say something like this on the basis of fact," she said. Bogomolets' denial was reported in March 2014, more than a year before the RT article was published, yet the RT article never mentions it.

The GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, also carried out a disinformation campaign in the days that followed Yanukovich's flight, reframing the Maidan revolution as a coup perpetrated by armed nationalists, according to a Washington Post story based on a classified GRU report obtained by the newspaper. The Post reported that GRU operatives created fake personas made to look like ordinary Ukrainians on Facebook and the Russian social media site VKontakte. These accounts called demonstrators "fascists," "westerners," and "Nazis," and voiced fears of what protesters would do to pro-Russia Ukrainian citizens, The Washington Post reported.

The Post also reported that other fake personas made physical threats against Yanukovich's political allies and posted English-language articles claiming that they lived in Kyiv and that what had happened there was a violent coup. The authors of the GRU report concluded that their fake personas had garnered support from the real people who interacted with them on social media.

As of February 2022, Russian state-sponsored media were still referring to the Maidan revolution as a "Western-backed coup."

## **Variations of this Myth**

The United States spent \$5 billion to fund the Maidan revolution.

The coalition of Ukrainian opposition parties and Western governments were behind the snipers that killed around 50 protesters and police on the Maidan on Feb. 20, 2014.

The so-called Maidan revolution was a coup perpetrated by armed nationalists.

## Examples of this Myth

<http://rt.com/news/us-sponsored-coups-ukraine-517/>

"We've invested over 5 billion dollars to assist Ukraine in these and other goals that will ensure a secure, prosperous, and democratic Ukraine," Victoria Nuland, Assistant US Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia said in December, 2013.

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<https://www.rt.com/shows/sophieco/ukraine-revolution-usa-support-246/>

"I know that you've said the US government has been preparing the revolution in Ukraine for years; it's invested \$5 billion so far in the uprising. Where are you getting this information? Do you have a proof (sic) that that's the case?"

"Well, it's public information. You have the folks at the National Endowment for Democracy ...

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<https://www.rt.com/news/251961-ukraine-maidan-snipers-poland/>

"Korwin-Mikke, 72, a European lawmaker and leader of Poland's conservative KORWiN party, claimed this was a CIA operation. This came as a "Yes" reply to the question whether he believed the CIA was involved."

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