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Putin Saved Ukraine From EU Catastrophe

By Edward Lozansky

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There is hardly any serious political observer who would not agree that a couple of months ago President Vladimir Putin saved the U.S. from yet another disastrous military adventure in Syria. Now Putin has saved Europe from the huge economic, financial and perhaps even political nightmares that could have resulted had the European Union signed its proposed Association Agreement with Ukraine.

Following the uproar in the West over Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych's "anti-EU and pro-Russian demarche," the Western political elite and media pundits have had a field day, explaining the unexpected turn of events by conjuring up nefarious machinations originating in the Kremlin.

In fact, if Putin were half as manipulative as the West imagines him to be, Russia would have been glad to let Ukraine go ahead and sign this dubious agreement. Within a year or two, there would have been riots across Ukraine. Ukrainians would have quickly realized the disastrous

consequences that the EU trade pact would have had on the country's economy and society in general. Instead, Putin has saved the EU from its own folly and over-reaching.

Considering that 60 percent of its exports go to the three counties of the Customs Union — Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus — Ukraine obviously has a clear economic interest in promoting its trade relations with this bloc, not merely solely with the EU.

Therefore, one would think that a way to resolve the current crisis would be a trilateral EU-Russia-Ukraine commission to find the solutions satisfactory to all sides. If Brussels is willing to understand that both Kiev and Moscow have legitimate economic interests at stake, then such a trilateral approach may bear fruit.

But this idea was dismissed out of hand by EU leadership, and alone among European leaders only German Chancellor Angela Merkel seems to be willing to explore it further.

For all of the rhetoric about "democracy promotion" and fostering former Soviet republics' economic development, the real objectives for Brussels were entirely based on pure self-interest and further weakening Russia by backing it into geopolitical corner.

Any political or economic game to force Ukraine to break its links with Russia will fail. The sooner the West realizes this the better.

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