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Gorbachev Calls for Ukraine Unity

By The Moscow Times

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Gorbachev speaking on Monday. **Al Moutasim Al Maskery**

SHARJAH, United Arab Emirates — The political turmoil in Ukraine looks like "a real mess" but it is important that the country hold together in the battle for influence between Russia and the West, former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev said Monday.

The 82-year-old Gorbachev made the comments during an interview in the United Arab Emirates city of Sharjah.

He emphasized the need for outside mediation to ease tensions in Ukraine, which became an independent country following the 1991 dissolution of the Soviet Union that he once led.

Ukraine today is deeply divided between largely pro-Russian eastern regions and western areas that long for closer ties with the European Union.

"No one wants it to come apart. I think that today it is important not to tear it apart," Gorbachev said of Ukraine. "I recently appealed to the leaders of the U.S. and Russia to act

perhaps as mediators. And that would also include the EU."

The mediators, he continued, could play a role in ensuring "that the crisis we see in Ukraine does not result in this kind of dramatic breakup. Let us give the people a chance to agree on something."

Gorbachev was in the Emirates to address the International Government Communication Forum in Sharjah, which sits along the Persian Gulf coast just north of Dubai.

In his speech Sunday, he said the political tumult in Ukraine was ultimately the result of the government's failure to act democratically, engage in dialogue and fight corruption.

Demonstrators first began protesting late last year after now ousted leader Viktor Yanukovych abandoned an agreement that would have strengthened his country's ties with the EU in favor of seeking closer cooperation with Moscow.

"It looks like there is a real mess there and that the leaders of Ukraine proved unable to reach a kind of consensus in the country, in Ukrainian society. And that is why those issues became so acute," Gorbachev said. "There is a new Ukraine and it should find its own niche."

Ukraine's acting government is seeking the arrest of Yanukovych, whose whereabouts are uncertain, over accusations of mass crimes against protesters. Snipers fired on demonstrators last week during the bloodiest violence in Ukraine's post-Soviet history.

Gorbachev suggested Monday that no single outside power could dominate Ukraine's future.

"If the EU wants to have things its own way, the U.S. wants to have things their own way, and Russia wants to have things its own way, I think that would be wrong," he said.

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