

# Balkan Insight

NEWS 21 FEB 14

## Clashes in Ukraine Worry Neighbouring Romania

With no end to the crisis in Ukraine in sight, the President has expressed the alarm felt by many in the region.

Marian Chiriac | Bucharest

As fresh fighting broke out in Kiev on Thursday, and as the death toll rose, Romania's President expressed concern and called for a peaceful solution to the crisis in neighboring Ukraine.

"I am not supporting economic sanctions against Ukraine, but severe sanctions are needed against those responsible for the excessive use of force in Kiev," President Traian Basescu said on Thursday.

Basescu added that "dialogue between all involved parties" is the only solution to the situation in Ukraine, where protests erupted in November after President Viktor Yanukovich rejected a landmark association and trade deal with the EU in favour of closer ties with Russia.

Since then, protests have spread across Ukraine, with the main demand being snap presidential and parliamentary elections.

The protests turned violent early this week, with numerous fatalities reported in clashes in the capital between police and protesters.

The EU has so far refrained from imposing sanctions on Ukraine, preferring to stress dialogue and compromise. Bucharest said it would stay close to the 28-nation bloc's position.

But EU sanctions on Ukraine are likely to be discussed soon, including a possible ban on sales of equipment that could be used for internal repression.

Many ordinary people in Romania say the EU needs to involve itself more in the crisis in Ukraine.

"Now, in a corner of Europe, large crowds of people are spontaneously putting their lives on the line – literally – for freedom and the EU, under the blue flag with golden stars," Sorin Ionita, from the Romanian think tank ExpertForum, said.

Cornelia Ionescu, a 29-year-old manager, agreed. "Nobody is asking Brussels to form battalions of volunteers and intervene to defend people who ask for their rights. But something has to be done," she said.

Romania, which joined EU in 2007, has a 694km-long border with Ukraine. Relations between the two countries have not been cordial in recent years.

In 2009, the International Court of Justice ruled in favour of Romania in a long-running maritime dispute between the two countries over a tiny islet on the Black Sea, with access to potentially vast reserves of oil and gas.

<p> <a href="#"> <span>{{headerTitle}}</span> <span>{{Headline}}</span> </a> </p>	x
---	---