

Poking the Russian Bear

by Roger Helmer



UKIP has criticised EU actions in Ukraine, and has immediately been branded “Apologists for Putin” by the press. We are, of course, no such thing. Russia has behaved reprehensibly and is clearly in breach of international law (though sadly there are too many precedents when the West has also intervened in third countries, on questionable grounds and with doubtful legality).

Nevertheless I do blame the EU for creating a problem where there was no need to do so. President Roosevelt’s advice was “Tread softly and carry a big stick”. In Ukraine, the EU has talked loudly and made extravagant promises and raised improbable expectations, while wielding no stick at all – so much for “influence”.

Imagine if the situation were reversed, and Russia had made generous offers implying very close links – and maybe membership of the CIS – to, say, Austria. How would the Germans feel about that? Or to Ireland? What would be the UK reaction? The Ukraine is in the Russians’ “Near Abroad”, their historic sphere of influence. For decades, Ukraine was governed from Moscow. The Crimea (bizarrely) was handed over as a gift from Russia to the Ukraine, but with the clear expectation that Ukraine, now including Crimea, would remain part of the USSR. Khrushchev would never have dreamed that Ukraine might join Western Europe, taking Crimea with it.

So I am not justifying Russia’s action. But I am condemning the EU’s approach to Ukraine, which was bound to infuriate and humiliate Moscow, and was always very likely to provoke a

hostile reaction – as indeed it did.