Fears that regional conflict in Ukraine is international

By Anna-Sofia Lesiv

?This can't be true,? says Yuliya, a young girl in Western Ukraine with her eyes glued to her iPhone as she reads the news. To her, as for many others in Ukraine, this has become ritual since the anti-terrorist operation began in Donetsk and Luhansk. They're going on with their daily lives, while simultaneously frantically checking their Twitter feeds to find out if Russia has invaded yet.

July 17 was different. Usually, she would only find updates of civilian losses or cities taken back by the Ukrainian army from the Russian-backed separatists in Eastern Ukraine, now recognized as official terrorist organizations by the Ukrainian government. This time, a passenger jet was shot down.

Flight MH17 was flying over separatist-held territory, and effectively a war zone. At 33,000 feet, it was flying just 1,000 feet above a declared no-fly zone, says Eurocontrol.

The separatists had shot down two An-26 Ukrainian military transport planes July 14 and 17. It was here that the 298 innocent passengers, 80 of them children, on flight MH17 became victims of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. The Ukrainian media and government immediately pointed fingers at the separatists, claiming that this was similar to their previous activity in the region, and later revealing they had intercepted phone calls of separatists speaking with overseers in the Kremlin, admitting their responsibility. They believed the separatists thought the airliner was another Ukrainian military plane. Russian news agencies insisted the Ukrainian army was responsible, accidentally hitting MH17 believing it to be Vladimir Putin's plane, traveling back to Moscow. The Russian government then asked why Ukrainian dispatchers even allowed a passenger plane into dangerous airspace in the first place. While the bickering went on, horrified Ukrainians placed flowers and candles before the Dutch embassy in Kyiv, expressing condolences to the 193 Dutch citizens that senselessly became the targets of a fabricated conflict in the East.

Without a thorough investigation, no government, other than Ukraine's, has officially placed the guilt of this tragedy onto the Russian-backed separatists. However, EU leaders, as well as President Obama, have begun using much harsher language in regard to President Putin after the tragedy, stating that if his aggressive actions toward Ukraine continue, he will inevitably make Russia a pariah state, as harsher sanctions are applied. As Ukrainian President Poroshenko said, the crash of the passenger plane has turned this regional conflict into an international one.

Worried Ukrainians like Yuliya, are now wondering if an international tragedy like this will force Vladimir Putin to once and for all distance himself from the separatists he supports with weapons and funds, at the risk of harsher sanctions destroying his nation's economy. According to Bloomberg, the current imposed sanctions have resulted in the 19 richest Russians losing $14.5 billion in net worth.

Now the mission of nations involved is to get the separatists to fully co-operate and let OSCE members onto the scene of the crash to investigate and collect evidence. Until now, the separatists have blocked OSCE access, ?as investigators approached, they fired their weapons into the air,? said President Obama at a July 21 briefing. Having initially removed evidence from the crash site, including MH17's black boxes or flight recorders, now transferring parts of it to Malaysian authorities in Ukraine, it is unknown whether the evidence has been tampered with or altered. However, progress has been made in recovering 272 bodies of the 298 passengers, as bodies removed unceremoniously from the crash site by the separatists are now under the care of authorities, and will soon be sent from Kharkiv to the Netherlands for further investigation.

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