

Cash Cut To Ukraine In Rebel Areas Risky

BY PETER LEONARD AND BALINT SZLANKO
Associated Press

DONETSK, Ukraine — For hours, small crowds in Donetsk huddle hopefully in the cold around cash machines that never get filled, as artillery rumbles in the distance.

Money is running short in the rebel heartland since the government announced this month that it will suspend banking services as it piles on the pressure. Almost all ATMs have stopped working and the remainder are expected to stop operating over the next two weeks.

The move is part of Ukraine's plan to suffocate its separatist foe, now that its costly military campaign has foundered. Authorities say they are also withdrawing all state services from rebel areas, although hospital and school workers in the rebel stronghold of Donetsk say it has been a while since they last saw funding anyhow.

Yet if the government of President Petro Poroshenko hopes to turn people in eastern Ukraine against separatist leadership, the evidence on the ground suggests the strategy may only be hardening their resolve.

"What Poroshenko is saying to us is: 'You are no longer Ukrainians. You won't get pensions, you won't get social payments. When you croak, then we'll stop this war against you,'" said Donetsk retiree Georgy Sharov. "But I don't want to go to Ukraine and beg for their mercy."

The lines have typically formed in front of cash machines belonging to state savings bank Oshchadbank, which handles pensions and social support payments.

"Even they don't always have money," said Donetsk resident Sergei Smotovsky, standing outside a branch of the bank. "The worst thing is that not only can you not get social payments. You can't even withdraw money that you earned, your salary."

Even though cash machines don't work, account-holders wait from early morning until lunchtime in the hope that bank workers will top them up, but the doors to the banks often remain firmly shut.

Despite the unremitting fighting taking place across Donetsk and Luhansk, the two regions affected by the armed separatist conflict, large supermarkets are still reasonably stocked.

Supplies come from other parts of Ukraine and customers often use bank cards to pay for shopping. Ukraine's government is now about to block bank cards, cutting off another means of sustenance.

Hard-pressed recipients of state benefits have for months turned expectantly to the rebel government for cash. Crowds of pensioners and single mothers assemble daily before the separatist headquarters. When anybody in the crowd becomes especially vocal, one of the gunmen guarding the building rushes to bundle them away, accusing them of being "provocateurs."

Lights

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able to set up a stand for free.

"Usually people have to pay a fee to be a vendor," Fuller said. "Whether the vendors just want to hand out information about their

business or if they want to sell their products or gift cards — it's free. Any vendor can come and set up their wares. That way, they can get exposure. It's a free way to get your name out there for the holidays."

Carolers from the University of South Dakota Music Department will be another new addition to the event to set the Christmas vibe.

TIFs

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owners."

TIFs came about in the 1940s as tools to aid in urban renewal. During the last 25 years, TIFs have become more popular as tools in rural areas to help encourage economic development.

In 2002, Swenson conducted a study on TIFs in which he concluded "the law has now become a de facto entitlement for new industry and housing development in much of (Iowa) with little to no evidence of overall public benefit or meaningful discussion of the mean costs of the practice."

Swenson said this conclusion didn't sit well with some people.

"I did not make any friends with that statement," he said. "Cities got mad."

He added that in the study, he looked at a number of areas — including assessed residential valuation, taxable commercial/industrial valuation, jobs, population, earnings and retail trade shares — that TIFs are supposed to help and concluded there was

little, if any, growth in these areas.

"What I wanted to know was, for every jurisdiction that was using TIFs, the change in their effort over this period of time that I measured should correlate with positive things because if I'm TIFing, my justification is that I'm creating economic activity," he said. "And I crunched those numbers and crunched those numbers, and I got correlations that were mostly close to zero. Two were minor. Roughly 7 percent of the growth in manufacturing was explained by the TIF effort — which is primarily what we were using TIFs for back then. That means 93 percent of the growth was explained by something else."

Swenson said much confusion surrounds TIFs in Iowa and in South Dakota.

"Most state lawmakers do not have a good sense of how TIF activities are actually carried out," he said. "There's a lot of confusion about what is allowable in Iowa's TIF laws. I assume the same is true for South Dakota. I've read some of the news reports on this and it was mostly consistent with what I thought was going on (there)."

Swenson said cities have

other remedies available to them for economic development, but that they come with some difficulty of their own.

"Cities in Iowa, and increasingly our counties, argue that TIF authority is the most potent and flexible mechanism that they have for economic development," he said. "I'm arguing that's misleading. Cities have lots of abilities to do lots of things. Some of them are hard, like asking for approval for bonding. Our cities can actually create a sinking fund for economic development using property tax dollars to create a pool of money for matching, but they loathe doing that because taxpayers say, 'Why do you have this pool of money here that you're not using?'"

Swenson recommended that governing bodies should look to the voters for approval for TIFs unless an urgent need arises (blight, disaster or other economic devastation).

Swenson was also scheduled to speak in Tyndall Tuesday night.

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Bully

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to put a stop to it."

Ryken said that on both occasions, the students addressed the situation by informing the person who was bullying another student that their behaviors were not acceptable.

"Many times — most times — when a person bullying another is confronted they will say, 'I was just kidding,' or, 'I was just teasing.' What our students recognize is that it is not acceptable and it has consequences. I am so proud of the stand our students are taking."

Ryken said that the school has identified four anti-bullying rules that the students have memorized.

1. We will not bully others.
2. We will be allies and help students who are bullied.
3. We will include students who are left out.
4. If we know that someone is being bullied, we will tell and adult at school and an adult at home.

"I just feel more passionate every year about emphasizing to the students that they need to stand up to bullying wherever they might be," she said. "We feel that the more we emphasize and teach our students about bullying, the more they will try to eliminate it and teach others what is right."

The program the school has adopted teaches the students to be allies for others, a stance the students have taken to heart. This year's theme — "What's Your Superpower?" — allows the students to take their favorite superheroes and use them to

fight bullying.

During the program, many students participated, and all understood that the characteristics of a good person — trustworthiness, respect, fairness, responsibility and caring — will help remove bullying from their life.

Yankton mayor Dave Carda told the students that what they are doing at Webster is something to be proud of, and it is something that should be shared not only at the school but across the community. Because of that belief, Carda and the city commission proclaimed Yankton a bully free community.

He called upon citizens to recognize bullying for the societal problem that it is and to make a difference by taking the time to get involved.

However, for the students, the highlight of the program was the video produced by the school showing the students superheroes.

"This was the first time the students got to see the finished video," Ryken said. "We will post it live on the website and they will go back and watch it over again both at school and at home and they will make it part of their lives. Last year's video had more than 7,500 hits. Every time they go watch the video, it just reinforces the message to fight bullying."

To view Webster's anti-bullying video, go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pw6Zs5kffg> (just a hint, watch everything, including the credits.)

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