UKRAINE'S THIRD ATTEMPT

BY MYKOLA RIABCHUK

For many Westerners, especially those increasingly skeptical of the European Union (EU), the mere fact that thousands of young Ukrainians went to the streets in the frosty winter of 2013 to defend an agreement with the EU that did not promise any immediate gains may look strange. Timothy Snyder, in his *New York Review of Books* blog, asks: "Would anyone anywhere in the world be willing to take a truncheon in the head for the sake of a trade agreement with the United States?" Certainly not. And Snyder of course knew the answer to his rhetorical question: it was not the agreement per se that mobilized the protesters but rather their hope for a "normal life in a normal country," which the agreement had symbolized. "If this is a revolution," he wrote, "it must be one of the most common-sense revolutions in history."

In November, after the government absconded with people's hopes for a "normal life," Ukrainians felt deceived not merely about this single case but also about their entire lives, about the country's development that had been stuck for twenty-two years in a gray zone between post-Soviet autocracies to the east and increasingly democratizing and prosperous neighbors to the west.

There had been too many hopes and too many disappointments over the past twenty-two years, beginning with national independence endorsed by 90 percent of the citizens in 1991 but eventually compromised by the predatory elite, and ending perhaps with the 2004 Orange Revolution that also failed to deliver on its high promises. Things only went from bad to worse with the 2010 election of Viktor Yanukovych as president and the dismissal of

the feckless Orange government. Within a few years, the narrow circle of the president's allies, nicknamed "the Family," usurped all power, destroyed the court system, amassed enormous resources via corruption schemes, and encroached heavily on human rights and civil liberties.

The dire results of their rule became evident not only in economic stagnation and the virtual collapse of the financial system under the burden of international and domestic debt, but also in Ukraine's dramatic downgrading in various international indices— from the rank of 89 in 2009 to 126 in 2013 on the Press Freedom Index; from 107 to 144 on the Corruption Perception Index; from 142 to 152 on the Doing Business Index; and from a "free" to a "partly free" country in the ranking by Freedom House. But probably the most damaging consequence of their misrule became the public's complete distrust in all state institutions, particularly those that ensure legality and law enforcement. By the end of 2013, only 2 percent of respondents fully trusted the Ukrainian courts (40 percent declared no trust at all), 3 percent trusted the police, the prosecutor's office, and parliament (controlled by Yanukovych's supporters), and 5 percent trusted the government. The only institutions with a positive balance in the trust/distrust equation appeared to be the church, mass media, and NGOs.

Indeed, as Michael Zantovsky argued in *World Affairs* last November, it might be a blessing in disguise that the Ukrainian government shelved the agreement and that a country with this sort of ruling elite was not brought into Europe. But the problem

is that people in the government and their oligarchic cronies have already long been in Europe—with their villas, stolen money, and diplomatic passports that make a visa-free regime for the rest of their fellow citizens unnecessary. Ironically, they have fully benefited from the rule of law and property rights in the West, while systemically undermining these very rights in their own country. It was not they who were excluded from Europe, but Ukraine and its 46 million people, whereas the ruling elite continues to enjoy la dolce vita in what they domestically call "Euro-Sodom"— a Putinesque-style nickname for the European Union.

For many Ukrainians, the association agreement was the last hope for fixing things peacefully, that is, to make their rulers abide by the law and to get the EU's support in an attempt to reestablish the rule of law in the country. Most of them had little if any illusion about the ruling clique, and the last thing they wanted was to see them in Europe. But for many the agreement had two clear meanings. On the government side, it meant a commitment not to steal, lie, and cheat so much and so unscrupulously. Whereas on the EU side, it merely meant helping Ukrainian citizens, whenever possible, to enforce this commitment not to steal, lie, and cheat.

Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign the agreement represented a moment of truth, and the mass protests in Kyiv and other cities were simply a reaction to that truth—a farewell to illusions and the recognition of reality. Maidan meant, in fact, the confrontation of two different worlds, two political systems and sets of values—so-called "Europe" embodied in the EU and so-called "Eurasia" embodied in Putinist Russia, Yanukovych's "Family," and the hired thugs that harassed protesters.

Maidan, indeed, was neither a "nationalistic mutiny" nor an "election technology" applied by the opposition, as Viktor Yanukovych and his Kremlin patrons claimed. Rather, it was a classical social revolution, an attempt to complete the unfinished business of the 1989 East European antiauthoritarian and anticolonial uprisings. As Anatoly Halchynsky, a renowned Ukrainian economist, argued in *Dzerkalo tyzhnia* (January 17, 2014), "the goals of 1991, of Maidan-2004, and of Euro-Maidan are the same. They are of the same origin, related not only to the assertion of Ukraine's national sovereignty but also to putting an end to the Soviet era and freeing Ukraine's mentality from the remnants of totalitarianism. European integration is merely an indicator of these changes."

Halchynsky praises Maidan's non-mercantile character, which, in his view, is fully in line with global trends moving from economic determinism to moral and spiritual values. Importantly, he contends, it is not a Bolshevik-style revolution of the *lumpenproletariat*. On the contrary, it is being carried out primarily by educated people, the middle class, students, professionals, and businessmen (according to the Democratic Initiative Fund's sociological surveys, nearly two-thirds of Maidan protesters have a higher education). Maidan resembles, in a number of ways, the 1968 democratic revolutions that spread across Europe and the globe, introducing a radically new, nonmaterialist agenda.

If these observations are correct and a gradual shift from materialist to post-materialist values is taking place in Ukraine, any attempt to install a full-fledged authoritarian regime in Ukraine is doomed from the start. To the extent that Ukrainian society is becoming a "knowledge society," and new generations grow up taking survival for granted, an increase in demands for participation in decision making in the economic and political life is inevitable.

One may refer here to the analysis by Ronald Inglehart and Christian Welzel of the cultural links between modernization and democracy and, in particular, their two-dimensional map of cross-cultural variations that reflects correlations of a large number of basic values drawn from the extensive data of the World Value Surveys. (Ukraine was the object of these surveys in 1995, 2000, and 2006.)[2]

The WVS Cultural Map positions each country according to its citizens' values. One dimension reflects the predominance of Secular-Rational values versus Traditional values; another represents the shift by different countries from Survival values to Self-Expression. The former shift coincides primarily with the process of modernization and industrialization; the latter is typical primarily for postindustrial development. This is reflected also, as Welzel and Inglehart posit in a June 2010 article for *Perspectives on Politics*, in a substantial

National Ukrainian Survey 2013[1]

	Education		Ethnicity		Age	
	Basic	Higher	Russian	Ukrainian	60+	18–29
Does Ukraine need more democracy or a "strong hand"? (%)	9/75	32/55	14/66	28/58	19/67	32/52
Does Ukraine need more freedom of speech or more censorship? (%)	31/27	47/25	21/40	47/24	36/31	49/22
Should Ukraine develop market relations or return to a planned economy? (%)	23/46	58/25	32/44	54/28	35/43	61/19
Do you regret the loss of the Soviet Union? (yes/no)	62/20	31/57	55/31	38/47	61/27	20/60

difference in both dimensions between less-educated and university-educated members of the same society.

Yaroslav Hrytsak, a prominent Ukrainian historian, argues in *Zbruc* (December 26, 2013) that Ukraine does not support Welzel and Inglehart's pessimistic conclusion that the peculiar set of values entrenched in the mentality of the post-Soviet people renders all these countries very unlikely to achieve a trajectory of sustainable development in the foreseeable future. He refers to the noticeable shift in values in the Survival/Self-Expression dimension that occurred in Ukraine in the past decade—in sharp contrast to the virtual stagnation of the 1990s.

Indeed, even though the most recent WVS figures date from 2006, the latest Ukrainian surveys confirm that the country's shift in values, however slow and at times incoherent, is persistent and probably irreversible. First of all, it is most noticeable in the attitudes of different age groups to various value-charged issues. Last year's national survey reveals a strong correlation between the respondent's age and attitude toward some fundamental issue, such as "democracy vs. 'strong hand,'" "freedom of speech vs. censorship," "planned economy vs. free market," and, the most general, "regret/no regret for the Soviet Union." But one may also discern a significant correlation between all those issues and people's ethnicity as well as education (In the table to the left only "yes/no" answers are shown, whereas "difficult to say/no answer" is omitted. In addition, only the youngest and oldest age groups are shown. The middle groups are omitted and the middle group of Russophone Ukrainians—those that fall between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, and all the middle groups between those with higher and basic education).

This clearly demonstrates that Ukraine is divided, but certainly not split. The conspicuous differences between the proverbial West and East are mitigated by (a) the vast intermediate regions of Central Ukraine and (b) the heterogeneity of any sociologically significant group that makes intra-group

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differences and cross-group similarities nearly as important as inter-group differences and dissimilarities. For example, as we see from the data above, ethnic Russians are much more prone to regret the loss of the Soviet Union than ethnic Ukrainians. But this represents merely a statistically significant correlation and not ironclad dependence and determinism. Whereas 47 percent of Ukrainians express no regret for the Soviet Union, 38 percent express it to various degrees; whereas 55 percent of Russians (in Ukraine) regret the loss of the Soviet Union, 31 percent do not. Both groups are as divided internally as they are externally among themselves. The same intra-group divisions can be discerned in people's attitudes toward other political options.

Ethnic Russians and/or Russian speakers are more likely to support a "strong hand" vs. democracy, censorship vs. freedom of speech, or planned economy vs. free market. But this is only likelihood, not determinism. The reason is simple: it was much easier for Russians and Russophones to internalize Soviet ideology as "ours" than for Ukrainophones, who strove to preserve their cultural identity under the pressure of Russification and therefore had more reason to distance themselves, to various degrees, from Soviet officialdom.

Many other important differences cross regional, ethnic, or ethnocultural divides. Higher education is one crucial factor: in all groups and regions it strongly correlates with a pro-Western, pro-democratic orientation and increased civic behavior. The same correlation also holds with age: the younger the respondent the more likely she or he is to support Ukraine's European integration and everything it entails.

Photo by Vitalii Liamichev

Nicu Popescu, a senior analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies in Paris, aptly recognized the complexity of Ukrainian divides when he contended at the very beginning of the Maidan uprising that "the fault line runs not just between east and west but also within the Yanukovych support groups. Some of them will continue supporting him, and some of them are disappointed by the way he misgoverned Ukraine over the last, almost four years." Indeed, even though Ukrainians are still divided about geopolitical orientation, there is something approaching a national consensus about ousting Yanukovych. (In a recent poll by the GfK Group, 94 percent supported it in the west and 70 percent in the south and east; by the same token, 91 percent of Westerners and 70 percent of Easterners condemned the Russian invasion of Crimea.)

This might be a good time to rid ourselves of propagandistic stereotypes and to reconceptualize Ukrainian cleavages as primarily ideological rather than ethnic or regional. "There are two political nations, with different values and development vectors, that cohabitate in Ukraine," Vitaly Portnikov, a renowned Jewish-Ukrainian journalist, argues in Gazeta.ua. These two overlapping nations—the Soviet and anti-Soviet, Eurasian and European, the nation of paternalistic subjects and of emancipated citizens—bear the same name but are fundamentally divided by the very idea of what Ukraine is and should be. All this makes the reconciliation of "two Ukraines" highly problematic. For two decades, as another Ukrainian author, Yevhen Zolotariov, comments, two social realities, Soviet and non-Soviet, had coexisted in one country side by side, in parallel worlds, encountering each other only during elections. Non-Soviet Ukraine won a minimal but never decided victory over its Soviet rival every time. President Yanukovych managed within a few years to reestablish most Soviet practices and symbols. The problem, however, is that Soviet Ukraine has no raison d'être nor resources to exist beyond the USSR or some sort of substitute.

American journalist James Brooke employed the same metaphor of "two Ukraines" with a remarkable parallel to the U.S. conflict between the abolitionists and slave owners (even though he ascribed, contrary to Zolotariov, some reconciliatory intentions to the Ukrainian ruler): "For three years as president, Viktor Yanukovych has tried to balance the two sides, roughly comparable to the way pre–Civil War U.S. presidents tried to keep America's house together by waffling on slavery… Time will tell if President Yanukovych can keep Ukraine's two nations under one roof," he wrote in *Voice of America* last December.

Vitaly Nakhmanovych, a Ukrainian historian and Jewish-Ukrainian activist, argues in the January 2014 issue of *Kritika* that the reconciliation between these "two nations" is barely possible in the foreseeable future, because the shift in values will take place slowly if at all. Instead, he contends, Ukrainian politicians should think about accommodation. It might be possible if one group manages to guarantee some autonomy for the other group, with due respect to its values. It is very unlikely that authoritarian Ukraine can provide such autonomy for democratically minded Europe-oriented citizens. But it is quite possible that democratic Ukraine could find a way to accommodate its paternalistic, Sovietophile, and Russia-oriented fellow countrymen. This is actually what both Latvia and Estonia have accomplished rather successfully for their Sovietophile/Pan-Slavonic fellow residents.

In a value-based context, all the arguments that Maidan and the post-Maidan

Photos from the Euromaidan by Vitalii Liamichev (left and right) and Sofia Riabchuk (center)

Photo by Sofia Riabchuk

government do not represent Ukrainian society as a whole and instead deepen Ukraine's ideological divide and political polarization, make little sense. Fundamental issues like human rights, civil liberties, and rule of law—everything we subsume under the catchall rubric of "European values"— cannot be solved by a simple majority vote. To be blunt, no majority can legitimize slavery, and no split in society can justify the preservation of totalitarian values.

"The real political divide in the country is not that which supposedly separates Ukraine's western and eastern regions," contends Russian political analyst Igor Torbakov. Instead, Torbakov sees a fault line, on one side of which we find a number of new and assertive identities (for example, liberals, champions of a Ukrainian civic nation, nationalists both radical and less radical) and on the other side those who cling to a post-Soviet identity, which extends unevenly across Ukraine, but is concentrated primarily, but not entirely, in the east and south.

Torbakov believes that the best framework for analyzing Ukrainian developments is not a West vs. East, or Ukrainophones vs. Russophones paradigm, but a withering away of the post-Soviet foundation upon which a peculiar system of authoritarian political practices and crony capitalism rests. He defines this as "Putinism" because it was Putin who perfected the system and made it not just exemplary, but also

mandatory for all post-Soviet authoritarians. Ukraine's break with the system poses an existential threat for the Kremlin and Putin himself. Hence the hysterical reaction of the Russian media and the Russian military's brutal invasion of Ukrainian territory. "The toppling of the Yanukovych regime," Torbakov argues, "created an opportunity for a bold political experiment, one largely aimed at accommodating Ukraine's multiple identities and opening up political and economic possibilities to a much broader slice of society. This desire to open up society is what strikes at the very heart of Putinism, a philosophy that needs a tight lid to be kept on political expression and economic opportunity."

Russian aggressive actions may seriously frustrate Ukraine's current attempt at de-Sovietization and the implementation of profound reforms. But the very persistence with which Ukrainians, time and again, attempt to complete the unfinished business of the 1989 East European revolutions implies that Ukraine's westward drift is all but irreversible, and the best thing Russia can do is to follow the move rather than try to obstruct it. □

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[1] Source: Кілька тез про ціннісні орієнтації українців. Соціологічна група «Рейтинг», Травень 2013, p. 8, 11, 14, 18; http://ratinggroup.com.ua/upload/files/RG _Orientyry_052013.pdf.

[2] The WVS Cultural Map of the World, http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/wvs/articles/folder _published/article_base_54.

[3] As quoted in Robert Coalson, "Yanukovych's Base Eroding In Ukraine's Russophone East," RFE/RL Newsline, 3 December 2013; http://www.rferl.org/content/yanukovych -east/25188519.html.

[4] Євген Золотарьов, Формула революції 2014 – від протесту до спротиву, 17 січня 2014, http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles /2014/01/17/7009810/.

[5] http://eurasianet.org/node/68102.