



Ukraine's revolution of dignity: The dynamics of Euromaidan



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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the civil revolution in Ukraine, which is also known as the Euromaidan Revolution. It is regarded as the Revolution of Dignity by Ukrainian citizens. In this respect, this paper focuses on a clarification of the dynamics of the Ukrainian civil revolution. The authors will try to trace the essential causes, processes, and historical implications of the Euromaidan Revolution. In addition, we plan to assess the nature of civil revolution. This study not only was based on the primary sources in Ukrainian language but also was described from the perspective of the participants of the revolution.

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1. Introduction: the reasons for the revolutionary movement in Ukraine

Euromaidan, the protest movement, occurred in Ukraine on November 21, 2013, transpired when President Yanukovich unilaterally delayed the signing of the European Union Association Agreement. Thus, it was the abrupt policy shift from Pro-European to Pro-Russian by the second Azarov government that propelled the thousands of demonstrators (predominantly young students) to go out onto the streets. After Berkut, the Ukraine Special Force, had brutally beaten the peaceful protesters on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (translated as "Independence Square"), the student protest quickly evolved into a mass action of a national scope against the existing power.

The rapid and dramatic expansion of the civil resistance was due to the extremely critical attitude of the people about the policies that were being implemented by those in power, as well as the authoritarian use of power.

Ukraine ranked last among European countries, according to the index of confidence concerning governments, as evaluated by the people in their respective countries. The confidence in the Parliament was 1.99 on a 10-point scale (last place), the level of dissatisfaction with the government was 2.25, the confidence in the judicial system was 2.26 (last place), and the confidence in the police was 2.50 (the last place). Moreover, according to the results of the research, the confidence in Yanukovich regime was at all-time low since the establishment of independent Ukraine.¹ These polling results tell us that, in fact, the current Ukrainian powers that he had lost its legitimacy.

All those factors were reasons that caused the Ukrainian people to resist against the then current power elites and institutions. However, a deterioration of the social and economic situation and crippling of civil rights and liberties are not sufficient reasons for social revolution. There are countries that are evaluated to have worse indicators but without any sign of revolution. Social revolutions start when people

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¹ Україна пасе задніх за рівнем довіри до органів влади // Українська правда.-2 листопада 2013.// <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/02/11/6983262>.

are utterly disappointed by the ability of the government to improve their life (the so-called second famine effect).

The estimation of “the governmental efficiency” by international experts has rated Ukraine on par with Ghana, the Philippines, and Peru, and inferior to countries such as Mali, Namibia, Lesotho, Papua New Guinea, and Mongolia. According to the same experts the Ukrainian government was more efficient than the governments of countries such as Honduras, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Zambia, and Malawi.²

An important factor for the spreading of a revolutionary mood is discrimination among the population, albeit not formally acknowledged. Nationalistic or religious leaders with anti-government sentiment often advocate the necessity of revolutionary actions. In their eyes, the government does not possess full legitimacy. Indicative in this respect is the fact that the bulk of the protesters are mainly the Ukrainian speakers from Western Ukraine and Greek Roman Catholics of that religious affiliation. Solidarity with the protesters was expressed by the Crimean Tatar population of Crimea and almost all other major religious denominations, except for the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC).

The protests by many entrepreneurs against the current tax policy (the so-called Tax Maidan), by students against the policy in education, and the demonstrations against the arbitrary police actions in Vrdiyivka (e.g., arrests and detentions), were only the forerunners of the nationwide civil resistance.

However, the most salient reason for the revolution is the failure of the new (post-Soviet) political elites in reforming Ukraine and building up a new statehood. Despite its newly earned independence, Ukraine has remained as an inefficient hybrid of the old (Soviet) and new (oligarchic) in its management and leadership. That is, the current political crisis in Ukraine is simply the external manifestation of a systemic crisis: the political elite's lack of will to reform and their inefficiency in policymaking since the 1990s.

In addition, rampant corruption among the elites accelerated the social and economic deterioration. The following statistics allude to this fact. First, according to the data of the International Transparency Organization, Ukraine ranked in 144th place, along with Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Iran, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic, which was three points less than the previous year (2011). Second, according to the Corruption Perception Index, which is determined by a 100 point scale, Russia ranked 127th place with 28 points, Kazakhstan ranked 140th with 26 points, whereas Ukraine ranked 144th with 25 points. The former Soviet Union countries, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, were ranked in 168th place with 17 points. By the standard of International Transparency Organization, scoring less than 30 points is a “disgrace to the nation.”³

The process of European integration for many Ukrainians outlined not only the geo-strategic vector of its development but also the hope for a change in the “rules

of game,” which would bring about the modernization of economic and political life.⁴ The retreat from the European integration process meant the collapse of that hope, which served as the spark that ignited the flame of Ukrainian revolution.

2. Impetus for the revolution

The material that fueled the Revolution of Dignity was the youth, more specifically, the students. These are the participants who were ready to take part in the revolutionary activities despite its apparent risks. The chaos in the transition of economic system caused a number of social problems. One of which was the devaluation of education because of the severe job market. This inevitably led the disgruntled students to the streets.

In Ukraine, according to official reports, on September 1, 2013, the number of registered unemployed was 435.4 thousand people, of which young people (from the ages of 14–35 years) were 183.3 thousand persons or 42.1%. In 2012, those registered at the State Employment Service were 887.9 thousand unemployed people under the age 35, or 48.6% of the total number of persons who were registered; 52.9 thousand of them were college graduates, 33.5 thousand completed vocational schools, and 6.3 thousand secondary school graduates. Among young people in the age group of 24–29 years, the unemployment rate increased, as compared with the year 2011, to 9.5% from 9.2%. Almost one-third of the total number of unemployed young Ukrainians were in labor exchange for more than a year since their release.⁵

This new generation, who has not smelled the gunpowder and has not participated in the previous revolutionary events, was the most active protesters this time around. The Ukrainian youth, de facto, declared a “new policy” qualitatively different from the previous one, not only by its name, but also in its form and content. This attempt is in the same vein with the revolutionary sentiment of 1968 in Western Europe, which was also against conservative society and its legacy of political and unethical values. It was a struggle of generations, parents, and children. In this context, the ideal of the Ukrainian youth and the impetus for the revolution lie in the hope of changing Ukrainian society and pursuing salutary European values.

3. Euromaidan as a socio-political phenomenon

Euromaidan as a dynamic process and socio-political phenomenon can be dissected into the following three stages.

- Stage 1. Student's Euromaidan
- Stage 2. Maidan-Camp
- Stage 3. Maidan-Sich (Struggle)

² Україна втрачає позиції у рейтингу демократії // Українська правда.- 19 березня 2013.// <http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/03/19/6985839/>.

³ Україна через системну бездіяльність влади остаточно отаборилася в клубі найкорумпованіших держав світу: Прес реліз Transparency International в Україні від 05 грудня 2012.// <http://ti-ukraine.org/cpi>.

⁴ Yuriy Shveda, “The Revolution of Dignity in the Context of Social Theory of Revolutions,” *RSEW* 5–6/2014, vol. 42, p. 21.

⁵ Гетьман Є. Молодіжне безробіття: втрачене покоління? // Українська правда. Економічна правда.- 2 жовтня 2013.// <http://www.epravda.com.ua/publications/2013/10/2/397038/>.

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