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Iryna Bekeshkina

Democratic Initiatives Foundation, Kiev, Ukraine

Year That Changed Ukraine

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The escape of president Yanukovich, the change of authorities, the annexation of Crimea by Russia, separatists' actions in the south and east of the country, military action in Donbass, establishing usurpatory The People's Republic of Doneck and The People's Republic of Lughansk, unofficial "hybrid" war against Russia, double earlier elections-presidential and parliamentary, two times lower value of hryvna, sharp decrease in the standard of life of the society, shrinking of national economy by 20%, the threat of bankruptcy- this is the year of upheaval, the year of trials the year of radical changes in Ukraine. However, what is more important is how much we, the citizens of Ukraine, have changed. The explicit answer for this question can be given by sociological research, which in an unbiased way shows where the most significant changes of the public opinion took place and can be the basis for the forecast in which direction the state will head.

The end of the "two-vector" policy. We are heading for Europe.

In fact, throughout the whole period of the Ukraine existence as an independent state, there were two vectors

coexisting in its foreign policy: pro-western and pro-Russian. They were presented in different ways at different times with different authorities, yet both of them had been inevitable in the country, where one half of the society turned towards the West, whereas the other one was inclined towards the East. The research implied that both integrations, one with the EU and one with The Customs Union, gained social support, and a significant part of the society (approx. 30%) would vote for the integration with two unions at the same time, would like "what is the best" here and there. However, given alternative (either-or) the majority went for the Customs Union. Connections with Russia turned out too common, strong and comprehensible for a big part of the society, especially the ones coming from the south and east. The western vector prevailed in public opinion of the eastern part of the country only at the end of 2013, when Maidan had already been filled with hundreds of thousands of people defending the western direction of Ukraine (table 1). However, the support for the EU membership was merely 10% higher than the support of joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan.

The events of 2014, mainly the Russian aggression, had dramatically changed the public opinion, discour-

aging a significant part of citizens from wanting to join any alliance with Russia. Previously the question whether it was desirable to integrate with the European Union or the Customs Union divided Ukraine in half, currently the eastern vector of the foreign policy course got broken. The data quoted in table 1 show that throughout a year the support for the Customs Union with Russia and its allies had decreased over two times, while the support for the pro-European option had increased by 11%. The society clearly supported the integration with the European community in all oblasts, except Donbass.

The most radical changes were among the inhabitants of the South and the East. In December 2013 when asked the question of alternative character (either – or) 57% of inhabitants of southern regions and 63% of the ones inhabiting eastern regions supported the Customs Union, while a year later, in December 2014, the support increased to 37% in the South and 30% in the East. In December 2013 the accession to Union was pointed at as a priority by 10% of respondents, in December 2014 – 22%, however the most significant changes concerned the Customs Union: in December 2013 70% respondents supported the idea of joining it, whereas after a year – 37% (the other 40% responded, “It is difficult to say”). Donbass, as well was not unanimous. The research conducted in December 2014 in two towns of Donbass (liberated from the separatists), showed that in Sloviansk the supporters of the Customs Union prevailed, while in more pro-Ukrainian Kramatorsk the EU membership was more supported¹.

Therefore one can state that currently in Ukraine there is one non-fungible vector of foreign policy, supported by the majority of the society – the course directed at the European integration, with the eventual accession to the European Union.

NATO: an enemy turning into a friend

For a long time NATO had been a kind of “a bogey”, which was used by parties supported in the South and East to activate their voters (“unless you vote for us scary NATO will enter Ukraine”). At the same time, parties supported in the western and central regions were trying to avoid the issue of NATO, fearing that they would lose some of their voters, since they were not

unanimous about this matter. Therefore the attitude towards NATO was getting more and more negative after each election campaign. In 2000, according to the data of the Sociology Institute of the State Science Academy, positive attitude towards NATO was declared by 25% of respondents, while negative by 33%, and a significant part of the society (42%), did not present any opinion. This level had been relatively stable by the elections of 2004, when the team of Yanukovych took advantage of the NATO issue in their struggle against Yushchenko. The research conducted in the spring of 2005 showed a drastic deterioration of the attitude towards NATO: 50% of respondents referred in negative way to possible accession to the Treaty, while merely 15% reacted in positive way. The next parliamentary elections in 2006 additionally worsened the attitude towards the NATO membership: such a perspective got negative opinion if 64% respondents, and positive of only 13%. Such a level was present in the following years, even in the period of “orange”, pro-European rules of Yushchenko and Tymoshenko. It was the lack of necessary level of social support that was an argument for the refusal of granting Ukraine Membership Action Plan during the Bucharest summit. In 2010, during the presidency of Yanukovych, the Supreme Council passed a bill on the rules of the internal policy and foreign policy, which included the point on the beyond-block status of Ukraine, which fully met the attitude of the majority of the Ukrainians. According to the data from April 2012, in a possible referendum on the NATO membership, almost all regions were unanimous: “NATO-no!”. In the central region 14% would vote for, like in the other parts of the country, only in the western region “for” and “against” opinions were in fact distributed equally: 40% for and 37% against.

2014 changed everything, without pro-NATO propaganda and agitation: Russian aggression served as the best argument to persuade the society that it was necessary to have a mighty force able to defend Ukraine. The last survey showed that the number of supporters of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty is approaching 50%.

In 2014 the support of the society towards the neutral status, which had previously united all the regions, had also decreased (table 2). Nowadays the accession to NATO is perceived by the majority of the society as the best option. The beyond-block status as well as military alliance with Russia and other members of The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), have lost over double number of supporters.

¹ <http://dif.org.ua/ua/publications/press-relizy/obshestv/raionov.htm>.

However, in this issue, concerning the way to achieving the safety of Ukraine, opinions of inhabitants of different regions vary a lot (table 3).

As it can be seen in the table, the illusion concerning the possibility of neutral status of Ukraine and the lowest support for joining NATO is prevailing only in Donbass. However, it is there where the most significant changes have taken place compared to September 2014. 17.5% of support for the accession to NATO today would have been unimaginable before the dramatic events. In a survey conducted in April 2012, NATO membership, as a means of achieving safety, was supported merely by 0.8 % of Donbass inhabitants. The hope was directed at military alliance with Russia and CIS states (50%) and the neutral status (41%). Not a long time ago, in September 2014, just 5% of Donbass inhabitants supported Ukraine membership in NATO, believing in the military alliance with Russia (46%) and the neutral status (39%). And so in just three months, when “the military alliance” with Russia had indeed come true, the number of supporters of such “an alliance” and the ones of NATO had almost equaled, which was hard to believe half of a year before.

We can be sure that the support for NATO will be increasing in Ukraine. However, it is not clear whether the referendum ought to be organized now, since it could be another dividing factor between the regions.

Russia: from a friend to an enemy

All the above mentioned radical changes of public opinion, the increase of support for the Ukrainian membership in the European Union and NATO result most of all from the change of attitude towards Russia. Over 70% of Ukrainians believe that Russia is at war with Ukraine.

As the results of the survey show, the attitude of the Ukrainians towards Russia had been very positive throughout all the years of independent Ukraine. There are many reasons: relationships between family and friends, Soviet education in which the whole history was presented from the Russian perspective, Russian culture, on which both older and younger generations had been brought up, the domination of Russian programs on the Ukrainian TV, as well as economic cooperation, which Ukrainian economy greatly depended on. Apart from that, during all the period of two-vector policy Russia acted in decent ways, only at times reminding “who rules here”.

According to the data of the Kiev International Sociology Institute, which along with the Russian Lewada Centre, did research on the attitude of the Ukrainians towards Russia and the Russians towards Ukraine, throughout almost the whole period of studies, i.e. from April 2008 to February 2014 as many as 80–90% of Ukrainians expressed positive opinions towards Russia, whereas the attitudes of Russians towards Ukraine were various, depending on political events and the way they were presented by Russian television propaganda (diagram 1) As we can see during the war against Georgia, when Ukraine supported Georgia, the positive attitudes of the Russians towards Ukraine had dropped 30%, whereas the positive attitude of the Ukrainians towards Russia did not change (90%). It was only after the annexation of Crimea that the positive attitude towards Russia had sharply decreased, while the attitude of the Russian towards Ukraine deteriorated even more. It is understandable that if the survey was conducted now, at the beginning of 2015, the signs of mutual dislike would be even stronger.

Hence, Russia has annexed Crimea, but lost Ukraine.

The Ukrainians have become more Ukrainians.

Creating a homogenous nation of the society divided by the language, history, heroes, geopolitical orientation and choices, is an exceptionally difficult task. When the time was passing regional differences, thanks to the efforts of politicians, mainly regional elites, did not decrease-on the contrary, they were increasing. Maidan, supported by one half of the country and not supported by the other, set yet another division line.

The war with Russia and other trials Ukraine is experiencing currently, have not resulted in a split, but in the reunification of inhabitants of various regions, and have become a significant step in shaping the politically single nation.

A large part of the Ukrainian society identifies itself mainly with their place of living-a city, village, and region. It had changed remarkable within a year (table 4). The identification with Ukrainian citizenship has increased from 54% to 73%, while local or regional identification has decreased from 35% to 19%.

What is important, the state identification prevails in all regions, including Donbass. In the western region the inhabitants identify mainly with the citizenship – 78%, whereas regional identification is declared by only 16%, correspondingly in the central region it is 88%

and 9%, in the south region 66% and 26%, in the east region 64% and 21%, in Donbass 50% and 30%. In Donbas 10% identify themselves with the former Soviet Union.

The identification of the Russian-language population is of significance since all the time the speculations of Russia can be heard that it is *russkij mir*, which means that they are its citizens who ought to be defended. As it happens among Russian population 65% identify with the Ukrainian citizenship and only 24% percent with the place of living.

2014 became the year of intense voluntary assistance, especially for the military units fighting in Donbass as well as refugees from these regions. According to the data of the survey conducted by our Foundation in September 2014, 32.5 % of population (a third of the country!) donated financial support to the Ukrainian army, 23% transferred money, goods, and food to charity foundations and volunteers organizations, 9% took part in shops' promotions buying commodities from the shopping list for the army and refugees, 7% supported the refugees financially and materially. It has happened during the period when the standard of life of the majority of the society has dramatically deteriorated (84% respondents in December 2014 confirmed the lowering of the standard of life of their families, whereas barely 1% claimed the growing of the standard).

One may conclude, then, that this hard year, the year of perturbations and hardship, has become the year of the significant progress in shaping of a single politically, yet multi-language nation.

The changes of political teams

2014 brought significant changes also in political area. It was still in December 2013 that according to sociologists Viktor Yanukovych, with the support of 30%, was the leader in the would be parliamentary elections (although he was losing the second round with the representative of the opposition), and the Party of Regions was the leader among parties with the support of 30%. As a consequence of all dramatic events, Viktor Yanukovych, the leader of the East and especially Donbass, had permanently left political stage (with no successor yet), and the Party of Regions, which had the leading position in the East and South, and even had the monopoly in Donbass (with a little participation of the Communist Party of Ukraine), had just collapsed- before the election campaign it had just 2% of support,

as a result of which it decided not to take part in the elections.

The presidential elections were won by Petro Poroshenko, who in 2013 had had merely 3% in the presidential ranking. The support for him was dramatically rising after the events in Maidan and the beginning of military conflict in Donbass. What is more, Petro Poroshenko was the first in the history of Ukraine to win in the first tour and in all oblasts of Ukraine (the truth is that to a large extent thanks to the low attendance in regions previously supporting Yanukovych).

The radical renewal had also taken place in the Supreme Council: out of the five previous parties, only one, "Batktivshchyna", has entered the present parliament. While in 2012 Yulia Tymoshenko's party gained 25% of votes, now it has barely passed 5% election threshold. The first time in the history of independent Ukraine communists have not entered the parliament- the only party represented in all the terms of the Supreme Council since 1998. The election threshold was not passed also by "Svoboda" party which two years before unexpectedly got 10% of votes. The party "Opposition Block" established on the ruins of the Party of Regions did enter the parliament, however its present result of 9.43% is far from 30% of the past.

The victory in the elections of 2014 was celebrated by the new political powers. Arseniy Yatsenyuk's party "People's Front", Petro Poroshenko's party "The Block of Petro Poroshenko", had been set up just a couple of months before the elections. "Self-help" party (10.97%) previously had existed locally with a seat in Lviv, and the Radical Party of Oleh Lyashko (7.44%) had got merely 0.6% of votes during the previous elections.

It is obvious that voters were craving for changes- thus such results. It was for the first time that a significant group of social activists entered the Supreme Council. The most popular parties had virtually organized hunting before the elections: some activists received propositions from all the parties. It may be seen as a tribute to the present war that currently there are MPs who are soldiers fighting in Donbass. Including these candidates, soldiers and activists, in elections lists was a concession towards the public opinion, which wanted these groups enter the parliament. Now these groups, especially social activists, which make slight minority, play a relatively influential part in the parliament, most of all preventing it from passing harmful bills and breaking democratic procedures.

However, what makes the present Supreme Council different from all the previous ones, is that its great ma-

jority supports the European integration, and the ones in favour of Russia make the minority. The policy of two vectors has disappeared.

Will 2015 bring radical changes?

Thus, 2014 brought numerous changes. Not only in the authorities but also in the citizens. However, these changes resulted mainly from the current events. The refusal of signing the accession agreement with the European Union by Yanukovich's government led to Maidan. The escape of Yanukovich resulted in the pre-term elections and re-formatting of political area. Russian aggression resulted in transformation of Russia from a friend into an enemy, overcoming the two vectors in foreign policy. The war in Donbass and the threat of losing independence led to the increase of national identity and activation of citizens' society.

However, the state reforms require not only reacting on events but also acting in particular directions. European integration, for which patriots in Maidan sacrificed their lives, and which actually had become the main reason for the Russian aggression, cannot be limited merely to signing documents and agreements, but requires the transformation of the state according to the European rules and values. It is this direction, submitting to the requirements of the European Union that all the states of the East Europe, which eventually became the members of the community, had undergone.

The list of problems that Ukraine is facing is indeed long. Hope for positive changes can be founded on two factors.

Firstly, it is social activity. Throughout the last year citizens' society activated, which is ready to cooperate with the new authorities, and when it is necessary put pressure on them. Some social activists entered the parliament and there they are making attempts to establish new "rules of the game".

Secondly, there is an external factor. Ukraine experiences a serious economic crisis and badly needs western loans. International financial institutions made loans dependent on necessary reforms. What is most important, without the assistance of the western world Ukraine will not be able to oppose the aggression of Russia, like it will not be able to survive without necessary transformations.

Will 2015 be decisive for the Ukrainian to be or not to be? "To be" for Ukraine means only as the state integrated with the European community, the alternative

being the loss of independence and transformation into a territory ruled by Russia.

Losing Ukraine would also mean the new world order for Europe, which would be based not on the usual European values but on the rules of "a bear – the host of taiga" (a term taken from the W. Putin's speech at the meeting of the discussion club "Waldaj" on the 24th October 2014 – "the bear won't ask anyone for permission"²).

Is therefore 2015 the year of making choice also for Europe: values or realpolitik?

Table 1. Joining which union is in your opinion the priority of Ukraine?³

	09.2007	12.2009	06.2010	12.2011	10.2012	12.2013	12.2014
To the European Union	37.4	29.9	37.5	35.4	37.9	46.8	57.3
To the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan	46.2	49.4	45.5	35.3	45.8	36.0	16.3
It's hard to state	16.5	20.7	16.7	29.3	16.4	16.4	26.5

Table 2. Which option of safety would be best for Ukraine in your opinion?

	04.2012	09.2014	12.2014
Joining NATO	13.0	43.6	46.4
Military alliance with Russia and other members of CIS	26.2	14.8	10.1
Beyond-block status of Ukraine	42.2	22.2	20.9
Others	0.9	0.4	1.0
It's hard to state	17.8	19.0	21.7

² <http://itar-tass.com/politika/1530878>.

³ The research the result of which was presented in tables 1 and 2 were conducted by the Foundation of Democratic Initiatives of Ilek Kucheriv. In each case approximately 2000 respondents from representative sample of adult inhabitants of Ukraine (above the age of 18) took part in the research. The research from 2014 does not include Crimea.

Table 3. The opinions of inhabitants of different regions of Ukraine concerning the best options of providing safety for Ukraine (December 2014)

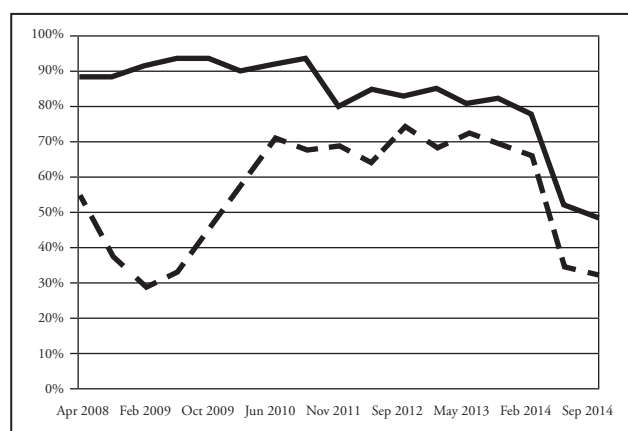
	West	Centre	South	East	Donbas	Ukraine as a whole
Joining NATO	77.0	55.6	25.6	31.2	17.5	46.4
Military alliance with Russia and other members of CIS	0.7	3.5	20.9	17.9	20.4	10.1
Beyond-block status of Ukraine	8.5	16.3	24.9	27.5	36.6	20.9
Others	0.4	0.7	1.9	1.4	1.2	1.0
It's hard to state	13.3	23.8	27.5	21.5	24.3	21.7

Table 4. The basic self-identification of the Ukraine inhabitants. The answer to the question: "Who do you feel as most of all?" (one option)

	12.2013	12.2014
An inhabitant of a village, area or city, in which I live	24.3	12.3
An inhabitant of a region (oblast or several oblasts), in which I live	11.0	6.8
A citizen of Ukraine	54.2	73.2
A representative of my ethnic group, a nation	2.0	1.3
A citizen of Russia	--	0.1
A citizen of the former Soviet Union	3.2	2.9
A citizen of Europe	2.5	0.9

Irina Bekeshkina – Ukrainian sociologist, specializing in political and election sociology; head of the Foundation of Democratic Initiative of I. Kucheriv in Kiev, Ukraine.

Graph 1. The dynamics of a positive attitude of inhabitants of Ukraine towards Russia (continuous line) and inhabitants of Russia towards Ukraine (broken line) throughout the last years⁴.



⁴ <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=404&page=4>.