

“THE WHY” CONCERNING RT XXV

Good morning and welcome to the 25th annual running (or more precisely, 25th anniversary gathering) of the UA's Quest for Mature Nation Statehood Roundtable Series. My name is Walter Zaryckyj. Over the last three months I have had the privilege of being the Event's Program Coordinator. Today, I will have the distinct honor to be its host moderator.

As tradition has shaped the now venerable forum, I will, before turning to the opening remarks session with our two distinguished guests, touch very, very shortly on two matters. We have come to call them “the Why” and “the How” of the gathering – or, simply, “the context of our discussion” and “the rules of our discussion”.

OK...right over to the Why – especially done for those who may be joining us for the first time. [ADD: Also done to underline the nature/import of the anniversary being highlighted.] Twenty five years ago (in the millennial 1999-2000 period), the core sponsoring organizations of today's forum (call them the American Friends of Ukraine) witnessed a crucial geo-political paradigm shift. For one, Ukraine (while still recovering from its Soviet past) signaled, both through its executive branch and its legislature, its intention to head ‘West’ or, more precisely, to ultimately become a paid up member of the Euro-Atlantic Community - with ever stronger bilateral ties to the United States (and, similarly, to its North American neighbor Canada) as well as eventual membership in EU and NATO as the final outcome. Equally critical to the equation, the policy makers and shapers in the United States, in bi-partisan fashion, responded to the initiative in a very positive way, quickly embracing the notion of a ‘burgeoning strategic partnership between the two nations’.

Delighted by the development, those self-same American Friends of Ukraine decided to put together a forum to study the phenomenon more closely; they aptly named it: “Ukraine's Quest for Mature Nation Statehood – A Roundtable”. Two days of intense discussion --- headlined by iconic figures like Zbig B, Paul W, Sen. Mitch McC, Rep. Sandy Levin, FM Min Borys Tarasyuk, PM C-of-S Oleh Rybachuk, Amb. Dan Fried & Amb. Bill Taylor ---- established that the perceived paradigm shift was desired by all parties involved.

As a result, the organizers decided to repeat the event annually and use the said gatherings (done as trilogies) to monitor the progress of Ukraine's “western vector” efforts – to explore what 'overarching' standards had to be met and what paths had to be chosen in order to achieve the desired 'Euro-Atlantic' end result. [Example trilogy: RTs 7-9 touched on relations with multilateral western or pro-western entities like EU, NATO and GUAM.] The 'situational' (elections, various purported scandals, ever shifting political alliances, protests, provocations) was essentially ignored.

For the first few years, and especially after the successful Orange Revolution, matters seem to accelerate the stated paradigmatic shift. With that, the Quest RT series, in addition to its

own ongoings, generated breakaway gatherings – energy dialogues, security dialogues, business networking forums and historical encounters events meant to feed the perceived acceleration. And the 'Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic Future' theme hit the road internationally, with forums in Ottawa, Brussels, London, Warsaw, Berlin and Paris.

Starting in 2011, however, the described process hit a serious hiccup; at some point the very 'raison d'être' of the Quest RT series seemed in question; the various spin-offs seemed threatened as well. As the Yanukovich presidency (regime) began to reveal its darker side in both foreign policy and in domestic policy, the 'situational' increasingly impinged upon the 'overarching'. In fact, the 'overarching' – Ukraine's chosen path West – no longer seemed so 'overarching'. Fear grew that the 'path West' was not an irrevocable or a "done" deal – that, in fact, the opposite tendencies were appearing.

During that period, the Quest RT Series, rather than surrendering to the named fear, took a different tact. For three years, the organizers took to measuring how badly or how quickly the regression into the dark (read: Soviet style) past was occurring. They began running what amounted to an Annual Report Card based on six criteria (measuring levels of democracy, economic well being, general security, energy security, social cohesion and national identity).

2014, with its Euro-Maidan Revolution and the ouster of Yanukovich, clearly realigned Ukraine's stars to face West again – and this time more decisively; just note the name.

At the same time, however, the Kremlin decided to punish Ukraine for its choice by invading Crimea and creating a previously undetectable 'conflict zone' in Donbas. Recognizing that any conflict, or more bluntly put, war, could still do damage to Ukraine's dream of a Euro-Atlantic life, the UA Quest RT organizers decided to split the difference. Two sets of gatherings were initiated.

The UA Quest RT Series (still based in Oct) would go back to exploring 'overarching' issues – looking for ways to effectuate the long desired move to a Euro-Atlantic future – and its various spinoffs would actively re-engage in their particular fields of interest. Meanwhile, the report card forum format would remain and be used in June of every year to measure any harm that the Yanu era hangovers or Donbas conflict/war might be having on the Ukrainian state.

From that point on (2015), nine more RTs (or three more trilogies) have occurred. In the last three, a new dimension of ostensibly the highest importance has been added: the RU-UA War. While initially threatening to be the ultimate disrupter of an 'Westward-ho' march by Ukraine (in fact, Vlad the Bad probably thought it would be), the conflict has ironically prompted Ukraine to ever more emphatically insist on its "Euro-Atlantic Future". In this regard, please simply note the "victory plan" that President Z unveiled in his recent visits to DC and the Ramstein NATO summit as well as his powerful address to the United

Nations.....meant to dissuade all players asking Ukraine to revisit any part of its terrifying colonial past.

This year's RT will have two aspects to it; in fact the forum (as advertised) is designed to feature what amounts to two events. The morning sessions are tasked to look back and evaluate the overall results of the 'Western vector' pledge (stronger bilateral ties with US & Canada and eventual membership in EU and NATO) [which the Ukrainian leadership took in 1999-2000 and which the US leadership in bipartisan manner supported]. The afternoon sessions are tasked to begin a new QUEST RT trilogy (XXV, XXVI, XXVII) dedicated to exploring the optimal path to postwar recovery....recognizing that a "less than a solid recovery" from the damage done by the RU-UA war could end up being the ultimate block to Ukraine eventually becoming a paid up member of the Euro-Atlantic community; this year's discussions will concentrate on discovering the most suitable sources for financing the rebuilding process.