

Part 1. Democratic politics

Ukraine opted for the democratic vector right in 1991.

Firstly, these were the requirements of the mass Rukh Movement, which was first called “for perestroika”, and then raised its political demands and became the People’s Movement of Ukraine

Secondly, the vote on the Act of Independence took place in the parliament amid a heated but civilized debate between the active democratic opposition and the confused communist majority.

One of the key roles as the argument was played by the mass actions to support of independence Ukraine. A year earlier, the political action “Chain of Unity” was united 3 million people and it spread across the whole country.

Thirdly,

On December 1, 1991, 84.18% (more than eighty-four per cent) of the population of Ukraine participated in the all-Ukrainian referendum for independence. 90, 32% (more than ninety per cent) supported the Act of Independence.

Fourthly,

the Elections in Ukraine are free and fair.

At times when the attempts to falsify elections could affect the result, Ukrainians defended their right to free choice on the Maidan (2004)

Ukraine immediately chose the pro-Western course, having agreed to get rid of nuclear weapons. The Ukrainians believed in the security guarantees of the Budapest Memorandum, provided by Britain, the USA and Russia.

However, almost three decades passed from the “partnership for peace” of 1994 to the submission of the accelerated application for accession in 2022.

This does not mean that the Ukrainians did not want to be in the Alliance, it also does mean that they were not wanted there as well.

The Western policy prioritized Russia, Ukraine remained in its shadow, in the "zone of interests" and this affected the mood of Ukrainians. For example, President Yushchenko called the 2008 refusal to accept the MAP application to the NATO humiliating.

Pro-European sentiment was strong, especially among the youth, on whom Russian propaganda had little influence

The younger generation identified themselves as Europeans, but they were locked within the borders of the country by the visa iron curtain. Керпн

Let me remind you that all these years traveling to Russia was easy and open, and Moscow, which is quite closed even for Russians, already in the 2000s simplified the conditions of stay in this city for Ukrainians, offering them preferences in work, health care and education.

As of 2013, 70% of Ukrainians have never left their region.

However, in the first 2 years of “visa-free” EU regime (2017-2019), over 42 million trips to the EU were made. It took the EU 4 years from the Revolution and the beginning of Russian aggression to make this decision.

That is, it took 4 years to ascertain the pro-European sentiments of the people who stood with the EU flag on the barricades in the center of Kyiv. Even the Revolution of 2013-2014 was called EuroMaidan, since it happened in response to the suspension of the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU.

Part 2. National identity and social cohesion

I decided to combine these two issues, since I consider them interrelated, and I will explain why.

From "proclamation" to "restoration"!!

This is how the way of national becoming of the post-Soviet nation can be characterized.

Let me remind you that in the 1991 Act of Independence, due to a compromise with the communists, the word "restoration" was deleted, being replaced with "proclamation".

No earlier than 2015, as part of decommunization, the Ukrainian parliament confirmed the continuity of the state tradition from 1917 — the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic on the ruins of the Russian Empire.

Since then, the "proclamation" practically disappears in the narrative and public communication. This belief is strongly supported by a high interest in history among Ukrainians as a result of the start and brutal development of the war with Russia.

This interest is naturally based on the desire to "know oneself and the enemy" in order to win. Until 2014, Ukrainians did not believe in Russian aggression, and until 2022 was hard to imagine genocide in the middle of Europe in the 21st century.

Was it that only the Ukrainians were that blind?

First, even with a generally low interest in the past, as is natural for the countries that are developing peacefully, in conversations about geopolitical choices, not only economic dreams, but also the issues of democracy and security were the key ones.

We saw where Russian society and the main part of the former Soviet republics were forwarding. So Ukrainian civil and political activists chose the vector of Poland and the Baltic countries.

However, the collective West did not seek to rethink Ukrainian history as well, even after the unprecedented opening of the KGB archives of 2008-2010 and the decommunization of 2015.

Unfortunately, it was not so much the efforts of Ukraine, but the new genocide, the discovery of crimes in Bucha and later Izyum, and the massive bombing of peaceful cities that forced the Western academy, media and politicians to recognize the Holodomor, which Russia committed almost a century ago, as a genocide.

The Western factors that made the decision underestimated both Russia's aggressive intentions and the Ukrainian resistance potential. This had a decisive influence on the support of Ukraine, especially when it comes to the supply of weapons.

Instead, Ukraine demonstrated an extraordinary example of strong resistance and equally strong civilian support for the army and the refugees. Namely, this is about a massive volunteer movement.

Democracy, economic freedom and national memory contribute to social cohesion, unlike the totalitarian policies of the USSR, which through fear, repression and poverty aimed to split people.

Sociology of 2022 records that 59% of the population of the West and Center of Ukraine participated in volunteering.

81% of the citizens donated money to the Armed Forces, 63% donated clothes or other items to the IDPs (Internally Dislocated Persons); 60% donated money for humanitarian needs; 54% gave shelter/assistance to the refugees.

The phenomenon of mass volunteerism is not new to Ukrainian history: the struggle for independence in the past was based on the massive support of the population. Unfortunately, in Western academia, following the theses of Russian propaganda, these periods of history are stigmatised and practically not studied.

For example, the book by Dr. Viatrovykh and Professor Lucuk with translations of Nazi and Soviet documents about the OUN and the UPA was at first recognized by the American Library Association as one of the best materials important as a source for universities.

Although a year later, after the publication of one biased article by a pro-Russian author, they deleted it from the list and even apologized. Although it was about making the sources accessible to Western scientists in an understandable language, which is especially important when trips to Kyiv archives are quite difficult due to wartime conditions.

Meanwhile, fundamental changes in the strengthening of identity are taking place in Ukraine.

Since 2014, new, non-Soviet forms of commemoration of the Second World War have been introduced.

For the first time, historical events that are key for national minorities are included in a single national narrative — through the formation of a calendar of public holidays and memorable dates. The Holocaust, the genocide of the gypsy, the deportation of the Crimean Tatars, the mass deportations of Polish, Greek and other minorities committed by both the Nazi and communist regimes have become memorable points that unite the political Ukrainian nation.

They are united in the pursuit of a free and peaceful life in respect of human rights. A distinct majority of 77% and 66%, respectively, support renaming communist and Russian names.

In addition, according to the latest survey published a few days ago, 55.4% of Ukrainians believe that Ukraine was a colony of the Russian Empire. This indicates a growing awareness of the need for decolonization as part of the reinterpretation of national history.

No matter how difficult after several centuries of Russification the language issue is, this year the Ukrainian language prevails for the first time in the Ukrainian segment of social networks. In FB, X and Instagram, the share of posts in Ukrainian is 80-90% as of September 2024.

Thank you for the great pleasure and the opportunity to share these thoughts with the honorable audience. My heartiest thanks to the American people for the military aid to Ukraine, and the Ukrainians of the USA for active cultural diplomacy. And finally, my gratitude to the Armed Forces of Ukraine for the opportunity to speak from home, the liberated town of Vorzel, which is part of the community of the city of Bucha.

З повагою,

Ярина Ясиневич