



December 15, 2017

Euromaidan will not be the last revolution in Ukraine

Mykola Vorobiov

Austrian Marshall Plan Foundation Fellow

Center for Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins SAIS

Even after two Maidan protests in the last 13 years, Ukraine's political system has not fundamentally changed, with the old oligarchy and kleptocracy largely intact despite reform attempts. For many activists, a real revolution has yet to transpire and Ukraine will likely see major protests in the years to come.

Four years ago, right before the Euromaidan protests began, 25 percent of Ukrainians were ready to take to the streets while nowadays these numbers have ballooned to 53 percent, demonstrating a clear appetite for reform. Additionally, 14.8 percent of respondents favor armed protests.¹ The situation becomes even more explosive if one takes into account that today there are over 300,000 officially registered veterans, including those who were active during previous uprisings and are now deeply unsatisfied with the results of these attempted revolutions.

This November, Ukrainians commemorated the 4th anniversary of Euromaidan or, as it has come to be known, the Revolution of Dignity. During the day of protests in 2013 dozens of protesters, including women and young students, were brutally beaten by the riot police in the main square Maidan in Kiev. These protests were triggered when President Yanukovich refused to sign an

¹ <http://hvylya.net/analytics/politics/yuriy-romanenko-kak-ukraintsyi-vidyat-perspektivyi-sotsialnogo-vzryiva-i-diktaturyi.html>

EU association agreement with Ukraine in Vilnius. This agreement would have strengthened ties between the EU and Ukraine, opening the door to EU accession talks.

Yanukovich's main argument was that Ukraine could not afford to sacrifice trade with Russia, which was adamantly opposed to the deal with the EU. He stressed that an EU loan to Ukraine of 610 million euros was inadequate and asked for at least 20 billion euros a year to upgrade its economy to "European standards."² Shortly after rejecting the EU deal, Russian president Putin stepped in and offered \$3 billion to Ukraine with minimal interest rates and without the painful implementation of Western standards accompanied by the EU offer.

After three months of protests and the bloodiest massacres in Ukraine's recent history, Yanukovich was toppled and fled to Russia. In the days that followed Yanukovich's abdication in February, Putin annexed Crimea and militarily invaded the Donbas region. According to the OSCE monitoring mission, in the ensuing conflict over 10,000 Ukrainians were killed.³

This was the price the Ukrainian people paid for aligning with Russia and for rebuking the EU's offer.

After the Euromaidan revolution millions of hopeful eyes looked to the newly elected Ukrainian president and government for change. However, corruption has persisted at different levels of society and has been rampant in President Poroshenko's administration despite his claims of being a reformist. Ukraine is regularly ranked as one of the world's most corrupt countries, with Transparency International recently placing Ukraine at number 131 out of 176 countries.⁴

Despite claiming to fight against corruption and oligarchs, Poroshenko in turn increased his own assets. According to "Forbes-Ukraine" Poroshenko is considered the 6th richest Ukrainian, with assets estimated at upwards of \$858 million. Key oligarchs Rinat Akhmetov, Ihor Kolomoyski and Gennady

² <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25162563>

³ <http://www.osce.org/permanent-council/328961?download=true>

⁴ <https://www.transparency.org/country/UKR>

Bogolubov are also high on this list, demonstrating the continuation of the oligarchy under Poroshenko.⁵

Moreover Poroshenko violated his promise during the presidential campaign to divest all of his businesses if elected. Among his assets is TV-channel 5, which also works for the administration by promoting its agenda. Last year Poroshenko found himself in the epicenter of a scandal within the Panama Papers when it was revealed he owned multiple offshore accounts registered in the British Virgin Islands, Cyprus and Netherlands. According to the investigation, these companies were registered to avoid paying taxes and designed to conduct murky schemes such as money laundering.⁶

Needless to say, corruption has also penetrated Ukraine's defense sector where most of CEOs were appointed from the administration. According to Oksana Syroid, vice-speaker of the Ukrainian parliament, Poroshenko is one of the main beneficiaries of the defense budget, which is a clear conflict of interest for the president of a country at war. Most procurements of the defense budget are labeled as "top secret" information due to national security reasons, further obfuscating their true purpose and lending credit to rumors of Poroshenko's implicit corruption.⁷

The slow investigation proceedings against those who committed crimes related to the Euromaidan massacres in February, 2014 are also disputed. Many suspected criminals who were responsible for the shooting of protesters fled the country right after Yanukovich stepped down, but some officials remain in power across the government. Many judges, police officers and politicians who bear responsibility in different forms for murdering hundreds of protesters during the revolution are still in office. Many of them cannot be persecuted because of the weakness of Ukrainian institutions, the unreformed system of justice, as well as the corruption in Ukrainian courts.

⁵ <http://forbes.net.ua/ratings/4>

⁶ <https://www.occrp.org/en/panamapapers/ukraines-president-offshores-revisited-swiss-trust-and-millions-moved-out-of-ukraine/>

⁷ <https://www.kyivpost.com/ukraine-politics/secretcy-blankets-corruption-ukraines-defense-sector.html>

These facts show that the Ukrainian leadership has not lived up to claims of being noble reformers and instead frequently fall back on old corruption schemes inherited from Yanukovich's regime.

Therefore there is a question about whether Euromaidan was a real revolution which was supposed to change the entire system or was it just an uprising which has simply changed those in power while leaving the broken system intact?

Neither the Orange Revolution in 2004 nor the Euromaidan protests in 2013-2014 were real revolutions, since the old oligarchic system has not changed but only became more entrenched. Furthermore, the current elite now knows all of the weaknesses and mistakes which lead to the toppling of the authoritarian regime of Yanukovich and are strengthening their positions of power.

Today, everyone who protests in the streets or criticizes the government are automatically labeled "Kremlin's agents" intent on destabilizing Ukraine. War in the Donbas region serves as a constant excuse for local society and Ukraine's international partners why European reforms are being implemented so slowly and why corruption remains at the same high level as it was before Euromaidan.

After the Orange Revolution in 2004, then-elected pro-European president Viktor Yuschenko ended up with only 5.45 percent of support in the elections by the end of his tenure in 2010. As a result Yanukovich became elected president which effectively undid the gains from the Orange Revolution and attempts at EU integration, instead promoting closer ties with Russia. In over three years after presidential elections in 2014 when Poroshenko won with 54.7 percent nowadays his rating has decreased to 16.1 percent and continues to fall.⁸

The current Ukrainian leadership which came to power as a result of Euromaidan has to understand that for many activists a real revolution has yet to transpire.

8

https://lb.ua/news/2017/11/22/382673_reyting_poroshenko_161_timoshenko.html