Maidan and the Politics of Change: Meaning, Significance, and Other Questions

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Abstract: Responding to a regime that failed to meet the needs of society, the Maidan materialized as a genuine expression of civic resistance and democratic renewal. Placing the individual at the centre of political life not only marks the revitalization of Ukrainian civil society but also serves as a legitimate basis for the transformation of the political order. The Maidan—its values, principles and ethos—offers a framework by which Kyiv might meet the twin challenges of reform and war.

Keywords: Euromaidan, European Union, Geopolitics, Russia, Ukraine

It is frequently said that the origins of the current conflict in Ukraine are to be found in the deep-rooted dispute over Ukraine's geopolitical direction— East versus West. Between the years 2011-13, a European Union Association Agreement was meticulously negotiated between Ukraine and the EU, signalling a sea change in Ukraine's foreign policy direction. Interpreted by Russia's political leadership as a strategic effort by Western interests to pry Ukraine from Russia's orbit, pressure was applied on the then Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovych to reverse course. The pressure had its effect. EU-Ukraine negotiations, already at an advanced stage, were abandoned in favour of a Customs Union that would have brought Ukraine closer economically and politically to its neighbour in the East. The quick about-face in foreign policy points to the geopolitical dimension of the conflict. But much more was afoot. No sooner than Ukraine's reversal in foreign policy was made public, young people took to the streets and the Maidan, a Persian word for the place where people come together in community, was born. But what exactly is the Maidan? What are its origins, meaning and significance? Wherein lies its legitimacy as a political force and how does this relate to the politics of change that is

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occurring in Ukraine? Moreover, what, if any, bearing does the Maidan have with respect to the current conflict? And what are the successes and challenges that lie ahead for all that the Maidan represents?

THE ORIGINS OF THE MAIDAN

The recent crisis in Ukraine has eponymously been described as "Cold War 2.0"—a reboot of the historic East-West struggle (See, for example, Carden). It has also been said to be a civil conflict (Ishchenko). Although the potential is there for both, this does not accurately describe its essence or nature. At issue is the failure of politics during the entire period of post-communist transition and its impact on contemporary politics in Ukraine.

The expectation in the immediate post-Cold War period was that the movement toward liberal democracy was inexorable, if not inevitable and that it would prevail in Eastern Europe. Yet, the promise of democracy seemed misplaced. Indeed, the period of post-communist transition, replete with challenges, has been difficult. From 1991 onwards, power in Ukraine shifted and morphed as an emerging oligopoly used the instruments of state to accumulate and shield both wealth and influence. Although international partners encouraged Ukraine's governing elites to undertake economic, political, and judicial reforms, there was virtually no progress because there was little incentive to do so. State institutions were made purposefully weak or ineffective in order for state assets to be privately appropriated and state revenues channelled into private hands. Under these conditions, Ukrainian society became increasingly passive and incapacitated. The impotence of the 2004 Orange Revolution, when a new direction was possible, simply reinforced the public's disillusionment and dismay with politics and politicians more generally.

Ukraine was not a failed state, at least not in the conventional sense of the term, but the basic requirements and needs of society at the time were left unfulfilled. These included the lack of institutional responsiveness, economic stability, social security, and the rule of law. Still, amongst citizens of Ukraine, despite their disappointment, there was the desire and hope for normalcy. The EU, in this respect, symbolically represented what a normal society and politics might look like. To be sure, symbols are derivative and, being only a semblance of reality, often disingenuous. The point, however, for a large segment of Ukrainian society, Europe, simply put, represented a reference point—a world, comparatively speaking, that was without corruption, cronyism, and cynicism. It was, in effect, an aspiration.

Amongst the younger generation, there was a visceral reaction when the Yanukovych regime—the perceived source of widespread malfeasance and larceny in the country at the time—turned its back on the EU

Association Agreement in early November 2013. For young people, abandoning the road to Europe was seen as abandoning all hope for a possible alternative (Riabchuk). For them—connected as they were to the larger world through travel, the Internet, and various forms of social media—the contrast in the choice between Europe and Russia could not have been greater. Russia represented the *status quo.* Europe, on the other hand, represented the future. The prospect of losing a chance to go beyond the immediate had to be avoided at all costs.

THE MEANING AND NATURE OF THE MAIDAN

In Kyiv, the place to where the people naturally gravitated was the main public square, a space where individuals collect, as they often do, during moments of crisis and need. It was here that they would find comfort in numbers and where a sense of purpose appeared. And it was in this square, appropriately named the Maidan, that civic engagement would take place in response to the wretched circumstances in which the country found itself. It was where people gathered to voice their aspirations for a normal life in contrast to the reality of rampant corruption and cronyism, manipulation and censorship, intimidation and coercion.

The Maidan constituted a civic expression of the hopes and fears of those who aspired to a different world other than the one they inhabited. It represented the values associated with a functioning Europe—where rule of law prevailed, the economy worked, governance was informed by the public interest, and the rights and freedoms of citizens were recognized and respected. As a movement, it was also seen as the only way by which Ukrainians might be able to restore their society in accordance with the rule of law. Most importantly, it was a way by which to insist on the continuation of those principles that were associated with social justice, "with a perseverance and determination so intense and passionate" that, in the words of one observer, "no other outcome would be accepted" ("The Meaning of Maidan").

The Maidan has been variously interpreted to be either a historical return to the democratic traditions associated with the Cossack Sich (Sviatenko and Vinogradov) or the birth of a nation (Goble). However, by organizing in both its own defence and those interests defined by the broader needs of society, the Maidan, at its very core, signified the reclamation by citizens of their own destiny. It represented the revitalization of civil society, a process whereby citizens were prepared to make and shape their own future independently of the state and government. But for this to occur, it meant advocating and working toward establishing a new public order that focused on justice and the common

wellbeing. It also meant organizing a political response to a government and a form of politics that had eschewed political and social responsibility in favour of clientelism and patronage ("Statement of the Civic Sector of Maidan").

In many ways, the Maidan constituted a successor to those civic movements of 1989 that had contested the power and ideological structure in Eastern Europe.[1] As was in 2013, the weakness of the old system in 1989 had been revealed as societies mobilized in defence of liberty and justice. And as was in 2013, the movements' strength could be found in the verve and commitment of the tens of thousands who were prepared to risk everything. The civic movements of Eastern Europe, arguably, did not precipitate a crisis as much as they sought to end a crisis brought about by a system that had shown itself to be bankrupt. As a system that denied basic human and civil rights, it had to be resisted and ultimately defeated. The civic movements of 1989 responded by declaring that the individual, treated as an object of politics, would now be at its centre. This re-positioning of the individual proved transformational, helping to redefine political priorities while giving character and meaning to the resistance.

The Maidan was similarly informed. Mobilizing the population, the Maidan argued not simply for the removal of the *ancien regime* (although this too was important insofar as the governing clique was an impediment) but also insisted on the rehabilitation of the idea that individual rights had value—an idea that had to be defended given its centrality to the political project that lay ahead. Restoring the individual at the centre of political life while defending political rights, however, requires the full participation of civil society. It is only in this way that democracy can be supported and the critical link maintained between democracy and the individual. For this to succeed, however, democratic participation must be limitless, open and transparent. The Maidan would necessarily exhibit these qualities.

As a grass-roots movement, the Maidan was leaderless, eschewing both established parties and old-style politicians while reproaching those who pretended to speak on their behalf, including the former Prime Minister and oppositionist Yulia Tymoshenko (for a discussion of the Maidan as a self-reliance movement, see Gabowitsch). As a participatory movement, the Maidan attracted a mix of individuals to its camp: young and old, women and men, students and teachers, workers and professionals. Meanwhile, by embracing diversity, where individuals of various ethnocultural and faith backgrounds mixed, mingled and otherwise co-operated in common cause,

[1] See "The Meaning of Maidan." Timothy Garton Ash initially explored the Eastern/Central European Revolutions of 1989 as expressions of civic resistance in his work *The Magic Lantern*.

the Maidan also proclaimed its progressive and democratic credentials. Amongst its ranks, however, could be counted the paramilitary Right Sector and UNA/UNSO—radical organizations that subscribed to a narrow ethno-nationalist program. Yet it was precisely the Maidan's insistence on inclusiveness and transparency—allowing for maximum participation—that would lead to these seeming incongruities and inconsistencies. The populist, multicultural and politically pluralist features of the Maidan account for its contradictory and at times amorphous character (Kvit). At issue, however, was humanity coming together in support of an alternative reality that was increasingly being shaped by the Maidan itself. No matter how inadequate, the term "revolution" captured the change that was developing in social and political consciousness both on the square and within the nation.

Legitimacy and Significance of the Maidan

As a political alternative to the status quo, the Maidan necessarily represented a threat to the established power structures. It pledged to bring justice to the lawless and deprive the current authority of its power. The Maidan also openly questioned the manner in which politics was being conducted not only in Kyiv, but Moscow as well. By its very nature, the Maidan could not be allowed to exist by those who deemed it a threat. As thousands gathered in the city square (tens of thousands on weekends) and as smaller civic demonstrations erupted across the country, the strength and breadth of the Maidan led the Yanukovych regime and its proxies to resort to coercive means. Rather than intimidating the population, this had the reverse effect, bolstering the numbers, as well as the determination of supporters and activists alike.

The impasse soon resulted in mass violence, reaching its apogee when in excess of 100 protestors were shot dead by sniper fire, principally by security forces that sought to disperse the protestors in an assault on the square. The killings not only galvanized the movement but also demoralized the police who defected in large numbers. The crisis had reached a critical juncture. The Maidan's rejection of a political settlement (arranged through international negotiation but without the Maidan's consent), the public's outrage over the killings, and a feckless police force compelled the disgraced president and his inner circle to flee. A new government was soon established, informed by the meaning and message of the Maidan.

The flight of the discredited president, Viktor Yanukovych, and subsequent formation of a unity government highlighted an important political question: To what degree was the new government legitimate? Legitimacy was central to the crisis then, as it is now. Today, in parts of

eastern Ukraine and to some degree elsewhere in the country, there is the perception that the government in Kyiv is putschist (a view fostered by Moscow). The degree to which the government is understood to be legitimate points to the relevance of the Maidan not only in the present circumstances but also for the way forward.

The question of legitimacy can be answered either from a constitutional perspective or from the point of view of political ethics. The collapse of executive authority, triggered by the flight of President Yanukovych, created the conditions by which parliament, constitutionally, assumed the functions of the executive. In the absence of the president, the majority in parliament exercised their constitutional prerogative by passing a law that saw a return to the 2004 constitution, re-establishing parliament as an equal partner in the political process. This meant that the provisional unity government and acting president (the speaker of the assembly at the time) were fully and legally empowered to act after having been approved by parliament—at least until new presidential elections took place. The provisional government, therefore, was legitimately authorized to carry out the normal functions of state, including defence, foreign affairs, management of the economy, public welfare, as well as maintaining public order and safety under the provisions of the law.

Legitimacy, however, is not strictly speaking a legal-constitutional affair. Political legitimacy is considered a basic condition for governing. It derives from the normative status that is conferred by a governed people upon those institutions and actions that are in accord with its beliefs, desires and expectations. In a democracy, this means the legitimacy of a government stems from the popular perception that an elected government abides by democratic principles ("A Ukrainian People's Protest Movement 'Statement of Principles'"). It also means that the government is accountable to the people, legally and morally. From this perspective, the Yanukovych government failed miserably. The interests of the nation were betrayed when the governing elite exercised power for personal, venal reasons and resorted to coercion so as to maintain power and silence its critics. In this regard, the government violated the basic premises of just and democratic rule, highlighting not only a failure in duty but also nullifying its right to rule. Most importantly, these actions also legitimized the right of a people to self-defence—a right acknowledged in international law. It is this natural right, universally recognized as both valid and legitimate under conditions of tyranny and repression, which establishes the Maidan as a source of legitimate power in Ukraine (Motyl; Andrukhovyh).

The claim of the right of a people to defend itself contrasts with the argument that the provisional government in Kyiv was illegitimate, having

been brought to power through insurrection and violence. According to these critics, the authority in Kyiv consisted of mutineers. This position, however, ignores the right of the nation to self-defence while simultaneously privileging a prior order that was managed by a discredited elite. In the end, legitimate authority should not be understood simply in positivist terms. Rather it rests with a people, who, under threat, were rightfully in a position not only to defend themselves collectively but also re-establish just rule.

The significance of this right cannot be understated. It says that the people's will to survive trumps all other political considerations. But it also points to the importance of political action and individual engagement in the project that lies ahead. According to the Maidan, the principle that placed the individual at the centre of society and political life was worth defending. This was enormously important on at least three accounts. First, by championing the principle, the Maidan emphasized the need for political action. The Maidan was not simply an expression of political grievances. It was an affirmation of the view that political transformation was the only way by which society and the individual might be protected and liberated. In this regard, the Maidan made clear that the way forward would involve political struggle. Second, the Maidan served as a clarion call for individual engagement. Without participation, there could be neither genuine legitimacy nor authority. On this point, the legitimacy of the Maidan rested not only on the principle of collective self-defence (a passive imperative). It also rested with those who would support this principle through personal commitment, by being actively involved and serving as witnesses to change. Third, and perhaps most importantly, the legitimate right of a people to self-defence—a right that placed society and the individual at the heart of political life—meant that change, driven by elemental concerns, was inevitable, albeit difficult.

MAIDAN, THE INDIVIDUAL, AND THE POLITICS OF CHANGE

As a symbol of legitimate power in Ukraine, the Maidan has exercised considerable influence on the course of politics. The most visible and practical expression of this occurred when candidates were announced in the proposed provisional government: they went to the Maidan—where they were vetted before the assembly on the square. Some were approved, others denounced. This vetting of candidates was an acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Maidan and all that it represented.

Importantly, in the vetting process, the Maidan established the conditions for leadership and the parameters within which rightful rule would take place. There were a number of elements to this. The personal

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record of individuals would be a determining factor as to whether they could hold public office. Additionally, if the government were to retain the confidence of the people, it would have to measure up to the values guiding the Maidan. And finally, if politicians were to earn the respect of the people, they would have to engage in the work that fulfilled the promise of the Maidan. As a matter of politics, this meant the just application of laws, a commitment to an impartial judiciary, strengthening the institutions of the state, weeding out corruption, upholding human rights, securing the economy and the borders, while assisting the poor and providing for the vulnerable.

The implications of all of this cannot be underestimated. The Maidan serves, in essence, as a catalyst for political change. Moreover, it does so by insisting on a holistic transformation of the existing political order. This, however, begins with the individual and their disposition toward the values, principles and the promise of the Maidan. From the politician to the general, from public servant to volunteer, the penultimate question is the one that relates to justice, fairness and equality: Are you prepared to support the public good on the basis of economic justice, social solidarity and the sovereign right of the people to develop its creative potential in freedom and without fear? It is a line of questioning that implicates the individual in the act of self-consciousness and forces, in this instance, a break with the prevailing hegemony.[2]

Yet was this not also true of the goals and aspirations of the 2004 Orange Revolution, which held as much promise as the Maidan for the future? When the people rose up in 2004 to win back a stolen election, there was just as much excitement and hope associated with the Orange Revolution. Therefore, are not both revolutions the same, and in the Orange defeat do we not see a similar outcome for the Maidan? This is an important argument, but it ignores the dimensional quality of the Maidan, which places a premium on individual responsibility. There is a profound difference between the Orange Revolution and the Maidan (Kvit; Marples). Whereas the Orange Revolution placed its hope and expectations in politicians and looked to change from above, the Maidan, as a movement that engaged the individual, looked to change from within. The Orange Revolution hoped that the leadership would recognize the moral imperative of change. The Maidan, on the other hand, is aware that the moral imperative rests with the individual and society; hence, the extraordinary

[2] Ilya Gerasimov argues the Maidan constituted a post-colonial revolution in that fixed identities were discarded in the process of expressing "one's own distinctive subjectivity" as a response to "the political and economic hegemony of a tyrant (foreign or domestic)." Gerasimov 29.

levels of volunteerism and sacrifice in the current conflict. The Maidan has initiated the transformation of the individual and society in Ukraine—a surprising and unprecedented development.

Maidan and the Current Conflict

Under perfect conditions, the process of political reform and strengthening rights is no easy matter. In the context of the current conflict in Ukraine, this is an especially difficult undertaking, particularly in those regions of the country that are in flux and turmoil. It is difficult for a number of reasons. The recent occupation and illegal annexation of Crimea and the war in the Donbas have set limits on what Kyiv can and cannot do for its citizens on the peninsula and the eastern provinces. Second, Ukraine is subject to a new kind of warfare, the primary purpose of which is instability. This has placed Kyiv in a difficult and vulnerable position in its best effort to introduce order whilst embarking on reform and upholding the rights of its citizens. Finally, larger geopolitical issues—the East-West conflict and Russia's neo-imperial drive—have shifted the debate on Ukraine's future away from domestic imperatives to international relations.

All of this has proved crucial in deflecting or deferring the new government's efforts at reform as well as other initiatives that are vital to Ukraine's transformation. It has also helped stoke suspicions about Kyiv, which, since independence in 1991, has governed these same regions with ambivalence or callous disregard. The sins of twenty-three years of corrupt and incompetent rule have created a political rift. This has not only divided the country—the south and east from the rest of Ukraine—but also has presented an opportunity that Russia has sought to exploit in the pursuit of a neo-imperial agenda. The current political and military situation in Ukraine is precarious. The occupation and annexation of Crimea, as well as the war in the east, have highlighted the difficult circumstances facing the government (Matviichuk et al.). The question then is what can the new government do, substantively, that can effect change, especially in the regions, given the conditions. This question, perhaps, is best answered by examining, what precisely are the conditions in the conflict zones and what might be the Maidan's role.

Both the use of hyper-nationalist propaganda and a mythologized understanding of Russia's historical past facilitated Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea. This has artificially created ethnic tensions in Crimea, affecting the rights of individuals and ethnic minorities equally. More specifically the formal retreat of Ukrainian authority from the peninsula has left the population there open to human rights abuses as loyalty is increasingly defined in ethnic terms (Gorbunova). The Mejlis Crimean Tatar

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assembly building has been shuttered and impounded by the Russian Federal Bailiffs Service. The local Tatar leadership is subject to ongoing harassment, threats and worse. In November 2014, the Human Rights Watch group reported that fifteen activists had been abducted; some murdered and the others are feared dead. Tatars, unable to show long-term residency, are also now threatened with relocation to Russia under a federal executive order. Homes, Mosques and Islamic schools are being searched and anti-extremist legislation has been introduced to silence criticism. Meanwhile, the civil rights of others on the peninsula are being violated on a massive scale: non-Russian language schools are forced to close, clerics denied access to parishes, the press silenced, freedom of assembly prohibited, property seized, and criticism of central authorities in Moscow criminalized. And then there is the pressure applied to Ukrainian citizens on the peninsula to relinquish their citizenship or face being declared foreign migrants and *persona non grata*. The situation in Crimea is indeed difficult and the government in Kyiv, practically speaking, can do little.

War in eastern Ukraine has also made the way forward problematic. In the Donbas, the political situation became militarized once separatists, mercenaries and Russian special operatives seized key government buildings and introduced military-style rule over seized territory. The conflict further escalated when heavily armed volunteer battalions, separatist and pro-Kyiv alike, engaged each other in the conflict zone with increasing ferocity. The central government in Kyiv sent regular military units as part of an anti-terrorist operation to counter the pro-Russian rebels in the various locales. The local population have greeted these units with pleas and admonitions not to use force. As for the Russian regular forces that have entered Ukraine, the population has also issued appeals, declaring they neither desire nor need liberation and have asked the soldiers to go home, but to no avail. As of February 2015 and the signing of the Minsk II agreement, the UN reported there were some 5,600 civilian deaths as a result of the clashes (over 9000 as of 2016). Within this increasingly dangerous and lethal environment, ethnic differences have been amplified, serving as an ominous sign of what might yet come. In the region, individuals with political allegiances one way or the other are being arrested, abducted, brutalized or killed. Lawlessness and criminality, especially in the eastern territories under rebel control, are now a way of life. It is a difficult situation and the lack of a comprehensive political solution to the conflict poses a real and seemingly intractable problem for the new government in Kyiv.

The Ukrainian government no longer controls Crimea. Nor is it in control of parts in the southeast of the country under rebel authority. The

issue of rights, a leitmotif of the Maidan, has been superseded by questions of security and interest. This naturally suggests that there is no role for the Maidan with its claim to justice. Moreover, as has been frequently asked, how wise or realistic is it to undertake reforms during the ongoing conflict? By failing to succeed, does Kyiv not invite further disaffection and disenchantment with its ability to govern? These are serious questions and issues. And yet, it underestimates the meaning of the Maidan and its importance in resolving the many difficulties.

The idea of the Maidan continues to hold purchase on the political direction of the country because it seeks to address the core problems of political fraud, economic larceny and the suppression of rights. Occurring long before Crimea's annexation and the war in the east, these problems were endemic to the country, condemning it to a marginal national existence. The problems challenged the country generally but were resented most in those regions that already had a weak connection to central authority. In these regions, the failure of Kyiv in the post-independence era was seen as the failure of the Ukrainian state. The Maidan, now, has the potential of reversing this logic. Ukraine's success is tied to the government's success as long as the principles of the Maidan are upheld and enforced. This means an adherence to the rule of law, honest stewardship of the economy, and respect for rights. The Maidan is potentially germane to solving the challenges associated with the transition and an aid to addressing the sense of disillusionment with Kyiv in the regions. To be sure, in an informational vacuum, the manner in which Russia and its proxies depict the conflict in the east has seriously undermined the value of the meaning that is the Maidan. Nevertheless, the message applies and remains valid—not in spite of the conflict but as a response to it.

Ukraine's current president, Mr. Poroshenko, has publicly declared the way to win back Crimea is through "economic and political competition." This necessarily means increasing the level of confidence in Kyiv as it seeks to create an alternative reality to the one that Crimeans currently face. This also applies to the eastern provinces and forms a clear political strategy to help resolve the conflict there. Ukraine's president has freely acknowledged that there is no military solution to the war in the Donbas. The solution lies in offering a democratic alternative to authoritarianism and chaos, providing a template for what might yet become possible there (the argument is similarly made by Symkovych). There appears to be no other way but forward, which the Maidan highlights and reaffirms.

SUCCESSES, CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OF THE MAIDAN

The Maidan is more than a historical moment of hyper-activism on a city square. It constitutes an idea and a set of values and principles that informs policy and decision-making. Described as a "revolution of dignity," the Maidan stands in contrast to the past. For those who have incorporated the idea and values into a plan of action, the challenge has been to affect change, mindful however of existing structures and past mindset. Recent history has shown that this has not been easy.

The resignations early on of the economy minister, Pavlo Sheremeta, and the anti-corruption crusader and leading Maidan activist, Tatiana Chornovil, from the State Anti-Corruption Committee, foreshadowed the immense difficulties. Citing frustration with the lack of progress on reforms and corruption, the resignations of both officials signalled the deep and seemingly stubborn problems that threatened to impede Ukraine's transformation. These problems include the continuing corrosive influence of money on politics, ossified institutions and agencies, legislative obstacles, regulatory chaos, and the persistence of bad habits and wayward attitudes. Still in play, the old political practices—jockeying, interference, obstructionism and manipulation—are held up as evidence that there is little room or appetite for change. Oligarchs continue to exercise influence and power. It demonstrates that the roots of the past run deep (Lasocki).

Both Mr. Poroshenko and Mr. Yatseniuk, Ukraine's prime minister, acknowledge that more could be done and insisted that the change in the complexion of Ukraine's parliament (the result of the October 2014 elections) would jump-start the process of renewal. Several months on, this may seem wishful thinking to some since it appears to ignore the comprehensive nature of the problem. Yet embedded in this belief is that political will matters. Renewal begins with a commitment to change. And as long as there is commitment, prospects are never far away—a lesson learned on the Maidan. The focus, therefore, should not be on the obstacles but on goals and the strategies as well as the effort needed to achieve these. The way forward is not a mystery. The successful examples of Georgia, Lithuania, Estonia and other countries that wrestled with post-communist transition offer important insights on what must be done. (On judicial and police reforms in Georgia and their potential application in Ukraine, see "Dosvid Hruzii u sudovii reformi"; "Reformy MVS u Hruzii.") To this end, Mr. Poroshenko has outlined a package of sixty major reforms to be undertaken if Ukraine is to accede to the EU by the target date of 2020. Whether this can be done is open to speculation. It is also, however, a matter of will.

In the meantime, there are the small victories, both positive and indicative of the change that is occurring, which highlight the continuing

influence of the Maidan on the political process. The murder of protestors on the Maidan is an important issue. It is not only a question of accountability but, more generally, of justice, without which there is little prospect of political success. A year on, the failure to bring all those responsible to trial has been a sticking point for the participants of the Maidan. Pressure, however, has led to an overhaul of the General Prosecutor's Office. New appointments suggest the possibility of movement in a way that was absent before. The re-opening of the criminal case of the murdered journalist Heorhii Gongadze is also encouraging. It underscores the importance attached to press freedoms and free speech. The national police service is in the process of renewal with new recruits scheduled to replace the existing force within months. Hromadske TV—a community of independent journalists that emerged as the voice of the Maidan—is currently a recipient of state support and now a *de facto* public broadcaster; again, an important development, ensuring greater press freedom.

On the political front, there is the recently adopted lustration law, which has come in for considerable criticism. The fear is that it would be used widely and indiscriminately against private individuals for personal gain and political revenge, undermining the public administration, economy and legal systems. The evidence, however, suggests otherwise. The numbers removed point to a measured approach. The transparency requirement, which compelled public officials both to disclose personal assets and account for asset transfers, has been especially useful in arriving at fair decisions regarding the retention or dismissal of public officials. The openness of this process has also been helpful, if only incidentally, in restoring public confidence in the system of governance. Meanwhile, the removal of judges, some 374 to date, who demonstrated a disregard for their office and the law, has been an important step in rebuilding the integrity of the courts. Finally, the recently adopted law that seeks to revoke parliamentary immunity, a provision that historically has shielded politicians from criminal prosecution, is a major development with significant implications in the long-term for the institution of parliament and the political process.

There has also been progress in improving and strengthening the capacity of government institutions, particularly with international assistance and at the urging of civil society organizations. PACE, for example, has been working with the Speaker's committee on parliamentary reform. The OSCE, which has been active in the process of electoral monitoring, including the recent presidential and parliamentary elections, is now engaged in developing an enhanced legal framework for subsequent elections. Meanwhile, a coalition of three hundred constitutional experts and activists (organized as the self-styled "Reanimation Package of Reforms"

civic association), are working on draft laws and lobbying for them in parliament.[3] More than a dozen bills have passed as a result of their efforts, including most notably a bill on state transparency. The process of public procurement, a massive source of corruption, is open to public scrutiny while the process of state purchases through secretive tender committees has been stopped. Public disclosure of the salaries and benefits of state employees is also now a requirement.

In the area of economic reform, there has been notable progress. Western financial authorities are working with Ukrainian ministry officials on identifying the sources of corruption in the economy and in the recovery of stolen state funds. International and criminal proceedings against a number of individuals are underway although this will require the co-operation and will of the General Prosecutor's Office. External pressure, notably from the IMF, has been brought to bear on creating the conditions for economic, social and political stability, ensuring that reforms addressing the problems of crony capitalism, pervasive corruption, and poor governance will be implemented. The release of a $1.7 billion tranche in the IMF emergency loan is tied to a package of reforms that have been carefully negotiated with Ukraine's newly appointed and respected expat finance minister, Ms. Natalia Jaresko.

Much of this was described in a major policy speech delivered December 9, 2014 by Mr. Yatseniuk, the prime minister, who outlined his government's reform objectives for the short and mid-term. Among the initiatives, a much-needed public registry identifying the beneficiary owners of all property and enterprises in the country is to be created. The tax code is to be simplified, loopholes closed, and the authority of the notorious tax police limited. Administrative deficiencies are to be addressed through downsizing, reducing the heavy, fiscal burden associated with a bloated and ineffective public administration—the target being a 20% reduction in the state budget during the period 2015-16. The regulation of energy prices is to be eliminated as a key source of corruption, offset by social welfare assistance to the poor. Meanwhile, new laws governing an open and transparent agricultural land market are to be introduced. As for state enterprises, these are to be subject to international audits and the labour market is to be liberalized but with enhanced legal protection for workers and unions (some of the economic reforms are described by Åslund).

[3] A civic platform that brings together and coordinates NGOs and experts dedicated to developing and implementing key reforms, the efforts of the Reanimation Package of Reforms association are documented at <http://www.rpr.org.ua/ua/groups-rpr>.

The reforms, it would seem, should be universally welcome. Yet, there has been deserved criticism ("Derzhavni rishennia"; Ianitskyi). Others simply describe the government effort as hopelessly naïve given the situation. As long as the nation's attention is consumed by the war, unscrupulous behaviour will continue unabated. Moreover, at a time when the nation is struggling to survive, political reform is seen as the height of folly; bringing notice to the shortcomings of the state only serves to undermine public confidence in the government. This position resonates in government pronouncements. "It's difficult to switch to contemplating reforms when I've spent the whole day poring over maps of war," President Poroshenko was reported to have said in a meeting with the National Council of Reforms (see Hofmann). The argument is that the war takes precedence. But the truth of the matter is that the current government has few options.[4] Government legitimacy is contingent on acting within the spirit of the Maidan. This accounts for its efforts at reform within the thicket of challenges. This, however, is a less than charitable view of government motives.

Although the reforms, both undertaken and proposed, appear miniscule and insignificant in light of the daunting and insurmountable challenges (giving rise to disillusionment and cynicism), a year ago, none of this would have been possible. Frankly speaking, the prospect of any meaningful attempt at reform was unimaginable. As present-day undertakings, they are indicative of the change that has been brought about as a result of the Maidan. Despite the odds, it speaks to the deep meaning of the Maidan and its continuing hold on the political process. The Maidan represents, as it did at the moment of its inception, the aspirations of a people in search of a future both tied to Europe—an act of faith—and the fate of the individual as a political idea (see Iermolenko). Whether Ukraine succeeds in this quest is an altogether different matter. But the source of that success is clear.

[4] In *Ukraine: What Went Wrong and How to Fix It*, Anders Åslund argues that without radical reform Ukraine faces total financial collapse. See also Kononczuk. Arkady Moshes claims that the war may very well drive Ukraine's transformation as the conflict strengthens both national consolidation and the view that only a reformed Ukraine may hope to endure.

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