

### *Chapter 3*

## **Can Ukraine Change Russia?**

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Since late 2004, when the Orange Revolution unfolded in Kyiv after a rigged presidential election, many free-minded Russians considered Ukraine's embrace of democracy and Western values as a powerful tool to transform Russia itself and to liberate it from the authoritarianism that had become increasingly evident in Russian President Putin's policies. The fight to get rid of Moscow's dictate was widely anticipated as the battle for "their and our freedom"<sup>1</sup> and a Westernized, prosperous, and democratic Ukraine that could be a beacon for a still-imperial Russia.

Quite soon thereafter, however, it appeared that the Ukrainian political class was so busy safeguarding its commercial interests that the pre-2004 elites regained their powers and secured them until the Euromaidan—this time bloody and cruel—overthrew them in early 2014.

A new revolution cost Ukraine more than a hundred dead and was followed by full-scale Russian aggression, resulting in the occupation of both Crimea and the eastern part of Donbass. But it again generated a feeling that Ukraine might turn into a genuine democracy that would fight corruption, investigate the wrongdoings of previous authorities, bring new people to the top, and sooner or later be admitted to the European Union. Kyiv once again became a sign of hope for many in an already authoritarian Russia.

Three years after the Euromaidan, everything looks entirely different. It seems that Ukraine, stripped of some of its territories, plagued by war and internal problems, unwelcome in the European Union, economically poor and disoriented, is now an example of what Russia must by every means avoid, rather than what it should consider as its best option. Therefore, although I have been for years a strong supporter of Ukraine's cause, if asked whether Ukraine can now, or in the future, change Russia for the better, I would respond no, it definitely cannot—for three reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> See Vladislav Inozemtsev, "For yours and our freedom [A foreword to the interview with Viktor Yushchenko]" in *Svobodnaya Mysl'*-XXI, 2004, № 10, pp. 3–4 [in Russian].

## Changes in Ukraine and its Neighborhood

The first reason has to do with the most crucial question of whether Ukraine might actually be able to transform itself into a more modern, prosperous, law-abiding, democratic, and, most crucially, more European country in the sense of belonging formally to EU structures. For this to happen, Ukraine should be integrated rapidly into the Atlantic community in both economic and political terms, and it should start to change its political system and its methods of governance. Yet none of this is to be seen.

Unfortunately, the Euromaidan and related developments came at a time when the European Union was tired of its new eastern members, obsessed first by the Greek financial meltdown, then by the migration crisis, and finally by the dismal results of the UK referendum. The Europeans had the opportunity to take some very bold decisions vis-à-vis Ukraine, but nothing was actually done. Ukraine offered Europe many unique options that simply were not used.

If the Europeans were bolder, they might consider offering Kyiv EU candidate status immediately, imposing the EU *acquis* and using Ukraine as a major base for relocating their industrial production to the east in a move that could generate additional competitive advantages for Europe. Ukraine is unlikely to become a developed country if it continues to rely on “life support” from international donors. The prospect of EU membership, on the other hand, would be likely to spark a massive inflow of private investment and therefore lower the need for the government-secured loans that Western governments currently need to provide to Kyiv.<sup>2</sup> If admitted to the EU (or even if the EU would drop some restrictions for Ukrainian workers), Ukraine is likely to produce a huge wave of young, competent and Christian migrants seeking to advance their careers in Europe and integrate into European societies, and not because of generous European welfare provisions. They would offer a stark contrast to incoming Muslim migrants, whom the Europeans mistakenly consider to be refugees. Finally, after Brexit, when (or rather if) the UK gets a status similar to that of Norway and Switzerland, who pay the EU for access to its common market, the same relationship could be to be “sold” to Ukraine on the condition that Kyiv pays the EU for access, not vice versa.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Vladislav Inozemtsev, “Ukraine chose Europe. What is to be done next” [in Russian] in: *RBC-Daily*, June 30, 2014, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> See Vladislav Inozemtsev, “Ukraine’s next EU moves,” July 19, 2016, <http://www.kyivpost.com/>

All of these measures are conceivable and could push Ukraine's growth up and secure its European future. Little has been done, with the exception that as of June 11, 2017, the EU agreed that Ukrainian citizens holding biometric passports can travel to the Schengen Zone without a visa for a period of 90 days within any 180-day period for purposes other than working.

Political and military integration has been an even less impressive story. None of the great powers intervened on Ukraine's side to defend its territorial integrity, as had been presupposed by the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. No invitation was issued to Kyiv to join NATO, even though this was the only plausible means to try to stop Russian aggression. Not only did Western powers reject the option of sending troops to Ukraine (even though they have sent troops on other occasions to oppose aggression, for instance in the Persian Gulf in 1990, when they responded to Saddam Hussein's occupation of Kuwait), they also refused to supply the Ukrainian army with modern weapons and munition, thus allowing Russia to keep the current low-intensity conflict in place as a lever to erode Ukraine's will to protect and reform itself. I am convinced that the Kremlin is not prepared to engage into a full-scale conflict with NATO member states, since Putin, while bold, is not prone to suicide. But the West was too cautious in this case, choosing to embark on a pacification strategy resembling the one used in Munich in 1938.

Instead of confronting Putin's Russia, Europe and the United States decided to leave Ukraine face-to-face with Russia, dooming the country to a protracted low-intensity war without any chance of success. This means that Ukraine will not only be deprived of the benefits of EU membership, it will remain the space for Russian-Western confrontation for years. Its government will be preoccupied less with the country's much-needed economic development or administrative reforms and more with the war against its closest and impressively strong neighbor. This simply opens the door to endless corruption and internal quarrels. It not only wastes the resources Ukraine critically needs, it produces more corruption and more nationalism than it can digest. No one should believe that a nation in the middle of a war that threatens its own existence will assign high priority to democratic procedures and the creation of a liberal economy. And there is no sign thus far that the major Western powers are

willing to embrace Ukraine and include it in an effective defense community, which has existed in the Euro-Atlantic area for decades.

Furthermore—and this is the most crucial point—Ukraine does not seem to be willing to change itself from within. The ruling elite has not changed; the “new” people who have emerged on the top came from the same Yushchenko government that proved to be incapable of promoting reforms. Those who enriched themselves under the Yanukovich regime were not prosecuted, their fortunes were not confiscated, and the Ukrainian prosecutor office advanced no claims to stolen assets hidden abroad. The easiest solution would have been to adopt and enforce legislation to reclaim stolen property, and then to hire international private detective firms, which for a fraction of the recovered funds would have initiated a worldwide intelligence operation.<sup>4</sup> Was something like this done? No.

The Ukrainian authorities are still unable to complete the criminal case against those who massacred people in the Euromaidan in February 2014. The economic reforms are progressing very slowly. Instead of becoming the freest economy in Europe (and this actually should be the case, if the country wants to go forward), Ukraine still has one of the highest tax burdens in the world when compared to nations with similar per capita GDP. Mikheil Saakashvili succeeded in turning his Georgia into an orderly and business-friendly country in less than five years; he was unable to do anything of the sort in the Odessa region before he was ousted. The later story of Ukrainian President Poroshenko stripping him of Ukrainian citizenship and the government’s efforts to ban him from returning home as he tried to cross the Polish-Ukrainian border<sup>5</sup> is emblematic of the Russian-style behavior of the political elites.

Appealing to Western governments to strengthen trade sanctions against Russia, Kyiv proclaimed the occupied Crimea a ‘special economic zone’ and engaged in profitable trade with the Russians there—until civil activists blocked the border in October 2015, forcing the government to change its smuggler-friendly policies.<sup>6</sup> After initial rumors that a massive team of Western-educated reformers would take over the government,

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<sup>4</sup> See Alexander Lebedev and Vladislav Inozemtsev, “The West is wrong to write off Ukraine’s debts,” *The Guardian*, April 14, 2015, p. 19.

<sup>5</sup> See “Saakashvili’s breakthrough into Ukraine: the comedy of the century, real-time” [in Russian] at: <https://ria.ru/analytics/20170911/1502225720.html> (website retrieved on Sept. 12, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> See “The blockade of Crimea: is it working?” [in Russian] at: <http://voxukraine.org/2015/11/11/the-blockade-of-crimea-is-it-working/> (website retrieved on Sept. 2, 2017).

those technocrats were deprived of real decision-making authority, and when a decisive moment came, they were thrown out without hesitation. All of these issues came to a head when President Poroshenko appointed a Prime Minister from his home town, thus reviving traditions associated with Kuchma and Yanukovich, and forced the Rada to approve a Prosecutor General without a college degree, contradicting current Ukrainian laws.<sup>7</sup> Poroshenko, who under current law must sell all his assets and hold his money in a special trust fund, is now obsessed with purchasing new television channels and other mass media assets.

Agrarian reform is another example of failure. A moratorium on the free trade of agricultural lands, which has been extended every two years since 2001, was extended once again by the new government in 2016 and might be extended again.<sup>8</sup>

In sum, the current Ukrainian leadership is building a system that is as corrupt as the previous one—but this time it is being built by people who were lifted to the top at a heavy human price, and they have shown that they have no respect for the citizens of their country when it comes to money and wealth. Ukrainian politics corrupts even outstanding reformers; Saakashvili now stands together with Yulia Tymoshenko, who did her best in earlier times to plunder Ukraine with the help of pro-Russian business-people.

The record of Ukraine's achievements is short and unimpressive. In 1990, the Ukrainian Soviet Republic's per capita GDP stood at par with that of Poland. By 2015, it was three times smaller.<sup>9</sup> The overall population dropped from 51.9 million in 1991 to 45.0 million people in 2016, including temporarily occupied Crimea. More than 5 million Ukrainians are now living and working outside the country,<sup>10</sup> and most of them do not want

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<sup>7</sup> See "How Yury Lutsenko became a Prosecutor-General" [in Russian] at: [http://novosti-ua.org/news/286771-kak\\_yrij\\_lutsenko\\_genprokurorom\\_stal](http://novosti-ua.org/news/286771-kak_yrij_lutsenko_genprokurorom_stal) (website retrieved on Sept. 2, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> See "The authorities decided about the timing of lifting the ban for arable land sale" [in Russian] at: <https://ru.tsn.ua/groshi/vlast-opredelilas-so-srokom-otmeny-moratoriya-na-prodazhu-zemli-835903.html> (website retrieved on Sept. 12, 2017).

<sup>9</sup> See Jeffrey Sachs. "Poland's return to Europe: lessons for Ukraine, Russia, and the West" at: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-sachs/poland-europe-democracy-anniversary\\_b\\_5453823.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-sachs/poland-europe-democracy-anniversary_b_5453823.html) (website retrieved on Sept. 4, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> See "At least 5 million Ukrainians have left to live abroad: Ukraine's Foreign Ministry" at: <http://112.international/ukraine-top-news/at-least-5-million-ukrainians-left-to-live-abroad-ukraines-foreign-ministry-5834.html> (website retrieved on Sept. 4, 2017).

to return to their homeland.<sup>11</sup> Industrial production remains 30% below late Soviet levels. After about thirty years, the Antonov company finally succeeded in teaming up with the Chinese to finish and put into commercial use the second iteration of the world's biggest transport aircraft, *Mriya*, which was built in 1988 in just one prototype.<sup>12</sup> But at the same time Rinat Akhmedov, a Ukrainian, appeared to be the wealthiest person in central and eastern Europe, becoming richer than any of the Russian oligarchs in 2008 with an incredible fortune of \$31.1 billion.<sup>13</sup> Public officials are among most corrupted in the world: some estimates put the share of national wealth redistributed through bribes at around 14% of GDP in 2012,<sup>14</sup> or about 60% of state budget revenues. Economic growth actually stalled after 2008, and later reversed—so today the country's GDP is smaller than it was when the Orange Revolution erupted in late 2004. The 2016 inflation rate of 12.4%<sup>15</sup> is relatively low by Ukrainian standards, but it was largely caused by very low personal disposable incomes preventing citizens from expanding their consumption. Sovereign foreign debt climbed to \$117 billion<sup>16</sup> and the main lenders are unwilling to reschedule the debt or to provide new loans because the reforms are initiated only under massive pressure from foreign partners. According to IMF, The high risk of sovereign default persists, despite major international efforts.<sup>17</sup>

The major problem, however, comes not from the dismal overall economic performance but from the path the nation has trodden recent years. The Ukrainians positioned themselves as the most bold, honest and courageous people in the entire post-Soviet space, doing their best to establish democracy and adopt European values. In this sense they differed enormously from the Russians, who since 1993 have appeared too selfish to revolt against any state authorities. It seems that most Ukrainians deeply

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<sup>11</sup> The famous letter by a young Ukrainian émigré Iryna Mynich to British Prime Minister Theresa May might be good proof of that. See Tom Bevan, "Ukrainian teenager pens heart-breaking letter to Theresa May in desperate plea to stay in UK," at: <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/ukrainian-teenager-pens-heart-breaking-6673823> (website retrieved on Sept. 5, 2017).

<sup>12</sup> See Yanina Sokolovskaya and Natalia Skorlygyna, "Ukraine sells *Mriya* to China" [in Russian] at: <http://kommersant.ru/doc/3077551> (website retrieved on September 4, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> See <http://files.korrespondent.net/projects/top50/2008> (website retrieved on Sept. 1, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> See Laurence Cockcroft, *Global Corruption. Money, Power, and Ethics in the Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 122.

<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.index.minfin.com.ua/index/inf/> (website retrieved on September 14, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> See <http://ru.tradingeconomics.com/ukraine/external-debt> (website retrieved on September 4, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> See "Ukraine approaching a default" [in Russian] at: <http://www.gazeta.ru/business/2016/09/03/10174769.shtml> (website retrieved on September 6, 2016).

support the European way of life and they might appear very good Europeans. Every time they took to the streets and squares, however, the elite was able to use popular protest to advance its own interests, and one revolution after another resulted in the enriching of one or another faction of the same oligarchy. Few will disagree that, economically, Ukraine has lost at least ten years of its short independent history. This fact is very often used by the Russian political elite to discourage its subjects from any attempts to flirt with both democracy and Europeanness.

So, seen from Russian eyes, Russia's closest neighbor is plagued by all possible misfortunes. It tried to become integrated into the EU and NATO, but nothing actually happened. As a result of democratic revolutions one oligarchic group after another acquired power and looted the country. Real rule of law has never been introduced. Government decisions are made in order to balance the interests of different influential business groups.

Accusations that Ukraine has fallen into the hands of home-grown nationalists and even fascists are simply not true.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Ukraine's history offers the ordinary Russian many examples why she or he would not want Russia to follow the Ukrainian path.

For Ukraine to change—or, better to say, to challenge—Russia, it should become a real part of Europe. Of course, no one anticipates that the country will become as prosperous as Germany any time soon, but it definitely should embrace the rule of law, have a government accountable to the people, demonstrate clear progress integrating into EU structures, and, of course, to demonstrate its capability to rise economically above the late Soviet standards. There are, unfortunately, no signs that the country is moving quickly in this direction.

Ukraine simply still resembles Russia too much—a backward, corrupt, and stagnating country, for it to become any kind of a beacon for Russian society any time soon. Europe could turn Ukraine into an example for Russia, but Ukraine on its own cannot. It may seem disappointing, but a quarter century of post-Soviet transformation should teach the West a simple lesson: those nations that were for so long a part of the Soviet empire can only be reformed once they are included in the West, not before, whether one likes this conclusion or not.

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<sup>18</sup> See Vladislav Inozemtsev, "Stand up, stand up you giant country: how Russia encountered fascism" [in Russian] in: *RBC-Daily*, June 22, 2015, p. 9.

## In Search of a New Kind of Identity

The second set of reasons why Ukraine cannot be a model for Russia is of a somewhat different nature, and deals first of all with the identity issue. Russia was for centuries an empire, even of a very specific kind: the ancient Russian civilization was rooted in Kyivan Rus. The Orthodox faith was adopted there by local pagans in 988. One of the most courageous Russian princes, Danylo of Galicia, who was seeking Western assistance in his fight with the Mongols, converted to the Catholic faith in 1253 and was proclaimed by the Pope as King Daniel, *Rex Ruthenorum*, or *Rex Russiae*.<sup>19</sup> For centuries, the Russian czars were crowned by what was considered to be an ancient Kyiv relic, the Monomach's Cap.<sup>20</sup> Since Kyiv was always considered as a source of Russian statehood and nationhood, the very word Russia replaced the country's earlier name, Muscovy, after the reunification of Muscovy and Ukraine in 1654.

Given this history, the Russian attitude towards Ukraine has been extremely complex: on the one hand, Russians believed themselves to be superior to Ukrainians, since they succeeded in building a vast empire and their neighbors did not. On the other hand, at some subconscious level they understood that Ukraine is a crucial part of the historical Russia without which their nation ceases to exist. In this case, Zbigniew Brzezinski was perfectly right to state that “the loss of Ukraine was geopolitically pivotal, for it drastically limited Russia's geostrategic options.”<sup>21</sup> This explains in part the feelings of today's Russians. President Putin is not the only one who believes that Ukraine betrayed Russia by flirting with Europe. The overwhelming majority of the Russian people—even democrats and liberals—shares his views and believes that the occasional rupture between Russia and Ukraine should be overcome by expanding the Russian world and by reestablishing Moscow's predominance over Kyiv.

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<sup>19</sup> See Serhii Plokhy, *The Gates of Europe: The History of Ukraine* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p. 55.

<sup>20</sup> According to the official version, traced to the “Story of the Princes of Vladimir (Сказание о Князьях Владимирских)” (1518), the cap was first mentioned as the gift of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IX to his grandson, Kievan Prince Vladimir Monomakh. It was used during all coronations in Moscow until the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. See Boris Uspensky, *The Tzar and the Emperor: Coronations and the Semantics of Monarchical Titles* [in Russian] (Moscow: Languages of the Russian Culture, 2000,) p. 77.

<sup>21</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), p. 106.

In this complicated situation, there has been only one possibility for the Ukrainians to claim their own superiority over Russians, and that is to establish a type of promising leadership that Russians may not follow, but could find attractive to team up with. Such a strategy could be based on the premise that Muscovy was actually an offshoot of a unique and united civilization of the Kyivan Rus (as happened many centuries ago), rather than the notion that Ukraine historically is an outskirts of Russia (as actually comes from its very name). In other writings I have described this maneuver in terms of declaring Ukraine the genuine Russia (novo-Rus')—European, Westernized, and democratic—as opposed to the traditionally recognized Russia, obsessed with Eurasianism, imperialistic and autocratic.<sup>22</sup>

Such a strategy could result in two profound consequences. First, if Ukraine positions itself as the core Russia and elaborates a vision of a democratic order for all the heirs of the ancient Rus': Ukrainians, Byelorussians, and Russians, it may become a natural leader for the former Soviet nations; if it declares the Russian language having the same official use as the Ukrainian one, it will emerge as the only one internationalist power in the region deeply obsessed by nationalist ideologies; if it claims that East Slavonic people have been a natural part of the European civilization for many centuries, it may undermine every Russian effort to rejuvenate Eurasianist concepts and to push post-Soviet integration plans eastward. All this will deliver a much more serious blow to Russian imperialism than any victories that might be achieved in Donbass—since for pretending for an empire Russia must prove she is both the historical center and the most dynamic element of all the East Slavonic lands.

Second, Ukraine should be extremely Russians- (maybe not Russia-) friendly for trying to squeeze out from Russia its brightest minds, its most entrepreneurial and adventurous people, and, last but not least, the capital that now flees the country for Europe and offshore jurisdictions. In the years 2009-2015 Russia lost \$502.4 billion in private capital. If even one quarter of this amount came to Ukraine it would be more than enough to cover all its external debts. As a former businessman I can witness that many Russian entrepreneurs, who started their activities in the 1990s and now face the aggravating business climate in Russia, might move to Ukraine if they are sure of its European perspective. The mentality of

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<sup>22</sup> See Vladislav Inozemtsev, "The Island of Novo-Russiya" [in Russian] at: [www.snob.ru/selected/entry/105899](http://www.snob.ru/selected/entry/105899) (website retrieved on September 4, 2017) and Vladislav Inozemtsev, "L'Ukraine doit guider la Russie vers l'Europe," *Le Monde*, March 23, 2016, p. 23.

Russian and Ukrainian business people is very similar, and such an inflow of independent and self-made Russians would by no means disrupt Ukraine's drift towards Europe or damage the country's economic performance. I would not address these issues if I were not sure of the attitudes of many Russian entrepreneurs—the main problem here comes from Ukrainian side, which too often confuses Russian capital with Kremlin-backed monopolies and, in many cases, fears the competition that in fact is the only plausible means to rejuvenate the ailing economy of Ukraine.

To summarize, I would say that the worst strategy to change someone would be to declare oneself her or his enemy and then try to prove your own superiority. But what we see now suggests Ukraine has already embarked on this desperate path: it wants to change Russia in many aspects, while declaring itself Russia's most radical adversary.

Back in 2003, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma published a book entitled *Ukraine is not Russia* (Україна—не Росія)<sup>23</sup> (the volume was released in Russian by a Moscow publishing house and translated into Ukrainian one year later). In this book Kuchma summarized all the most popular theses about the differences in the two nations' history and world-views, laying down substantial arguments about why Ukraine can build its future only on the basis of its own clear identity (at that time, alas, it wasn't said this should be an anti-Russian one).

Later, Ukrainian scholars and social activists developed a line of argument that Ukraine had been colonized and suppressed by Russia, and that its liberation in 1991 (which actually came about as a result of the collapse of the centralized power) and its subsequent independence were the results of an anti-colonial struggle.<sup>24</sup> But how can one describe Kyiv as a colony of Moscow if it was not Kyiv that was founded by Muscovites, but Moscow that was founded by a son of Vladimir Monomakh, the Great Prince of Kyiv?

After the revolts of 2004 and 2014 the Ukrainian leaders argued consistently that Ukraine was not only not-Russian, but actually an anti-Russian power—and, moreover, a nation that would defend democratic European states against Russian totalitarianism. President Petro Poroshenko put it extremely clearly, saying: "Today there are we, the Ukrainians, who secure

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<sup>23</sup> See Leonid Kuchma, *Ukraina—ne Rossiya* [in Russian] (Moscow: Vremya Publishers, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g. Ilya Gerasimov, "Ukraine: The First Postcolonial Revolution," *Aspen Review Central Europe*, No 3, 2015, pp. 46–53.

Europe from barbarism, tyranny, terrorism, aggression, and militarism that hung over all our continent. We, Ukrainians, are today at the forefront of the protection of European civilization.”<sup>25</sup>

With all due respect to brave Ukrainian servicewomen and servicemen, I would argue that it was not their valor but the Western powers’ diplomatic positions that stopped the Russian forces in eastern Ukraine from pushing further. Even today, it is still the West that effectively defends Ukraine from ongoing Russian aggression, and not so much Ukraine that protects the West from it.

I can easily understand how crucial the establishment of a new national identity may be for a young nation—especially for one that was really stripped off all its national patterns. I would not advise the Ukrainian politicians to change their attitudes, since I realize that only on the basis of national pride and identity can a new and successful nation be built. But I would say that since Ukraine cannot rid itself of its eastern neighbor, Kyiv should try not to oppose Moscow, but rather position itself not the strongest sibling but as an older, more clever and experienced brother who wants not to distance itself from Russia but rather to show it a better path forward to a decent European future that both parts of the formerly one Slavonic civilization desire. The language of hatred should be left to Mr. Putin; Ukrainian leaders should address more intensively the better features of both nations’ common character than their readiness to fight each other.

Many decent citizens in Russia, who wish to embrace European values and would like to democratize their country, will think twice about this perspective if their leaders would affirm to them that democratization is inspired by a Russia-hating Ukraine. I fear that what actually Ukraine is now doing for Russia looks like defamation of European principles and values in the eyes of the majority of the Russian people. It is teaching them that they should not follow suit and take to the streets to seek a better future. Unskilled reforms of the 1990s really impoverished millions of Russians. They led to a strong rejection of democracy and liberal economic practices by the Russian population. This must be kept in mind, otherwise Ukraine’s

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<sup>25</sup> Petro Poroshenko, “Ukraine emerges confidently as a new, promising European country”/An address on Europe Day May 21, 2016 [translated from Russian] at: [www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/ukrayina-vpevneno-postaye-v-obrazi-novitnoyi-perspektivnoyi-37147](http://www.president.gov.ua/ru/news/ukrayina-vpevneno-postaye-v-obrazi-novitnoyi-perspektivnoyi-37147) (website retrieved on Sept. 7, 2017).

“Europeanness” may well turn the great part of the Russians further away from Europe than bring them closer to it.

Ukraine’s ability to change Russia depends primarily on two factors. The first is Ukraine’s chance to join the European Union and to become a truly European nation, the first among all those who belong to historical Russia. Since even today the majority of Russians pay great respect to Europe, recognizing Russia as a European nation, Ukraine’s successful accession to the EU could be of great importance for the Russian public opinion. I believe this is so because neither economic successes, nor the establishment of a democratic and law-abiding society, will turn Ukraine into a beacon for the Russians. The biggest need for a Russian is the need for recognition, and if Ukraine is formally recognized by the Europeans as a part of their community, this fact might be taken into account in Russia, but nothing else.

The second factor is, as I earlier said, the feeling of unity between Ukraine and Russia, and the sense of a shared history, a unique fate, and a common future. Only if Ukraine turns into a state and society that proclaims itself as not only a part, but rather a source, of the Russian civilization, the one that is currently better than Russia itself, could it change Russian society and challenge Russian politics.

One may look at the Baltic countries to understand what I mean: these nations are wealthier than Russia, they succeeded in constructing an effective contemporary state, they have joined the European Union, and they even succeeded in keeping their Russian population from leaving the supposedly hostile nations—but nevertheless they have never been counted as a possible ideal by the Russians living in Russia. To change Russia, Ukraine should be both European and Russians-friendly, which, from my point of view, is next to impossible.

## **Overcoming Old Prejudices**

It is hard to know whether even successful Ukrainian pro-European reforms, however unlikely, will push Russia towards democracy and modernization. In recent years Russian propaganda appeared extremely anti-European, and if in the 2000s it was NATO, and in a few instances the EU, that was criticized and bashed, today Russia tries to reject and damn contemporary European civilization in general. Moscow actively dislikes the spirit of internationalism, the revisionist approach to sovereignty, the

excessive attention to human rights, the decadent flirt with sexual minorities, and other contemporary European attributes. Russian ideologues are trying to depict Europe as a source of all the possible vices that might affect Russia, and so turn it away from its unique predestination. Under this perspective, a truly European Ukraine is seen as even more hostile, alienated, and dangerous than the Ukraine of today.

Russia possesses a very strange sense of success. Andrei Kokoshin, a former deputy Minister of Defense and long-time Duma member, argues that a successful country should enjoy unlimited sovereignty, real sovereignty, as he puts it. He and most of Russia's political elite contend that even Germany and Japan aren't really sovereign nations these days, since they have foreign military bases on their territories and are involved in strong military alliances with stronger states.<sup>26</sup> The very idea of being part of a group or an alliance in which another state is stronger than you strikes a Russian as dangerous. In this context, one should pay attention to Russian President Vladimir Putin's extremely equivocal statement made at a Security Council meeting in 2014: "Russia, is fortunately not a member of any alliance. This is also a guarantee of our sovereignty [since] any nation that is part of an alliance gives up part of its sovereignty."<sup>27</sup> If one takes into account that Russia is a signatory of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Eurasian Union and other groupings, it appears necessary to consider what Russia's obligations to international treaties really mean. But my point is that today Russia has a very special sense of partnership: it excludes even a possibility to be a partner to anybody stronger than it. This is likely to ruin its relationship with China in the not-too-distant future.

It may not be true that Russia today is not a part of any alliance. But what is definitely correct is that for centuries Russia has had no wish to partner with stronger powers. The only time it happened was in cases of extreme emergency, such as during the Napoleonic wars or during World War II. For most of the country's history, Russia's rulers have faced a basic question: Who is with us, who is against us? Whenever Russia appeared as an alliance-builder, it was the alliance's major power (as can be traced from the Holy Alliance years to those of the Warsaw Pact).

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<sup>26</sup> See: Andrei Kokoshin, *Real Sovereignty in the Contemporary World-Political System*, 3rd edition [in Russian] (Moscow: Evropa Publishing House, 2006, pp. 63–65).

<sup>27</sup> Vladimir Putin, "Remarks at the Security Council meeting, Moscow, July 22, 2014" at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46305> (website retrieved on Sept. 7, 2017).

For most of Ukraine's history, in contrast, it was a weaker nation that was forced to answer a different question; With whom do we partner? Ukrainian statesmen had to choose which side to take, and of course historically the principal question whether the nation should take Russia's side, or stay with Europe (Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Poland, Germany, the EU, etc.). Therefore, the main question for the Euromaidan was simple, and the people were ready to make their choice.

Russia, however, presents a different case and is confronted by different choices. Even if Ukraine succeeds in Europe, it will be extremely hard for Russia to follow suit. For a Ukrainian, to choose democracy and the European future is to choose revival of her or his state and to save it from reintegration into the Russian Empire. For a Russian to do the same means sacrificing her or his state and abandoning its imperial history and global ambitions. Because of this, Russia will not follow Ukraine in its drift towards Europe, and might become even more conservative and aggressive if Kyiv succeeds on its reformist path.

## Conclusion

I cannot imagine how Ukraine may change Russia in coming years. I would agree that the struggle of Ukrainian citizens may challenge and change the lives of many Russians, since they realize the role their own country plays in the ongoing conflict, and because they will make their own individual pro-European choices (look at how rapidly emigration from Russia has grown in recent years). But I cannot agree that many Russians will profit from what is now going on in Ukraine (one may cite dozens of cases where bright and ambitious Russians went to Kyiv, after both the 2004 and 2014 events, and actually achieved nothing)<sup>28</sup> or that Russia might be galvanized by Ukrainian events to the extent that it will abandon its authoritarian legacy or follow Kyiv's road to Europe.

The window of opportunity for Ukraine to transform Russia actually existed only in the mid-2000s, when some political freedom still existed in Russia, when Russia was much friendlier towards Europe, when neo-authoritarian trends in Russia were much weaker; and when the European path was considered to be the right way for Russia, even by many inside

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<sup>28</sup> Recent examples include Alexander Stchetinin's work and death, Maria Gaydar's troubles with Odessa's political elite, or former Russian State Duma deputy Denis Voronenkov's ill-fated exile.

the political elite. Vladimir Putin himself said in his Bundestag address that “as for European integration, we not just support these processes, but we are looking to them with hope” since “Stalinist totalitarian ideology could no longer oppose the ideas of freedom and democracy as the spirit of these ideas was taking hold of the overwhelming majority of Russian citizens.”<sup>29</sup> The Orange Revolution opened many more opportunities for changing Russia than the Euromaidan did. Times have changed. Ukrainian and Western politicians should abandon the hope that Ukraine’s transformation may become someone else’s in coming decades.

The transformation of Ukraine into a prosperous and democratic European nation is now at stake. Its success is itself an incredible opportunity, challenge, and priority. What the West should do today is to win the battle for Ukraine, not for Russia.

In coming decades, Russia’s story will evolve in its own sovereign way: the country’s fate will depend largely on domestic political developments. Today, Russian politics is dominated not so much by its President, Vladimir Putin, as by a long history of antidemocratic and quasi-despotic rule, which was slightly shaken, but not reversed, in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>30</sup> Since the West appears to have no interest in provoking a sustained transformation in the country (in the 1990s it considered Russia as a normal country, just as Weimar Germany was counted as normal in the 1920s), it will take years, if not decades, for the Russians to experience a new economic meltdown comparable with that of the late 1980s, to realize that all of their geopolitical adventures have failed, and to then rise up and demand a radical change of the existing system.

This will be a tough task. If the Kremlin learned any lessons from Ukrainian history, they are the need to stay firm against the crowd, and to defend your authority through all available means. That means that the prospects for change in Russia, three years after the Euromaidan, look much bleaker than at the time of the 2004 Orange Revolution.

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<sup>29</sup> Putin, Vladimir. “Speech in the Bundestag of the Federal Republic of Germany, Berlin, September 25, 2001” at: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21340> (website retrieved on Sept. 7, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> For greater detail, see: Inozemtsev, Vladislav. “Vernarrt in die Vergangenheit: Die Wurzeln des Putinismus reichen bis in die neunziger Jahre zurück” in: *Internationale Politik*, 2017, № 1 (Januar-Februar), SS. 74–83.

