

## The EuroMaidan in Ukraine November 2013 till February 2014

The events in Ukraine have unfolded very rapidly over the past few months. Initially, it looked as if President Yanukovich could sit out the crisis. However, after new laws against the Maidan activists were passed on January 16th, 2014, a further radicalization and politicization took place, which led to the dramatic clashes between the government and demonstrators on the Maidan between February 18th and 20th, 2014. The situation fundamentally changed with the unexpected increase in violence and brutality on the EuroMaidan. The tragic loss of human life made it immediately clear that Yanukovich not only was fully discredited as head of state, but also that he was not capable of guaranteeing peace and order in the Ukrainian capital.

Yanukovich's escape from Kiev provided an occasion for Moscow to brazenly intervene into Ukrainian politics. With great media attention, Putin had the highly compliant Federation Council authorize him to deploy the army outside the territory of the Russian Federation. Since then the Kremlin has been following a blunt legalistic line of argument: Yanukovich was democratically elected by the people in 2010. An impeachment procedure, as provided for in Article 111 of the Ukrainian Constitution, did not take place. The EuroMaidan demonstrators are collectively defamed as fascists and Moscow speaks of a "brown revolution" against the legitimate government. One of the most important problems is the future of Crimea. Already after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Crimea wanted to separate from Ukraine. The status quo – Crimea is an autonomous republic in the unitary nation of Ukraine – seems to be no longer acceptable for many ethnic Russians on the Crimean Peninsula.

Another complicating factor is Russia's imperial claim to this part of the country, which only was incorporated into Ukraine in 1954. The mood is very tense due to the steadfast agitations and provocations of the Putin government. The western media have painted a rather one-sided picture of the events in Ukraine: here the evil dictator, there the protesting civil society. However, two things are being crossed here: first, Yanukovich could have brutally dispersed the EuroMaidan, as there were indeed such plans. He did not do this. There are also significant doubts whether he ordered the use of snipers. Second, the right-wing block was given intense media attention, which did not correspond at all with its share of voters. Most house occupations and street battles were carried out by right-wing radicals. It will be difficult for the interim government to impose democratically defined constraints on their claims to power.

One positive result of the EuroMaidan is surely the political involvement of broad segments of society. Unlike in Russia, where the protests of 2011 and 2012 tapered off, there is an increased sensitivity to political decision-making processes in Ukraine today. The media landscape has also become more diverse as a result of the events. Above all, online media have significantly grown: the reach of the internet newspaper "Ukrainska Pravda" promptly increased with the protests, while independent internet television stations such as *espreso.tv* or *hromadske.tv* now also have a large regular viewership.

Unlike many Russians, who are indifferent towards politics, many Ukrainians are now highly involved in the affairs of their Republic and their collective struggle.

The present issue of Euxeinos was planned for December 2013, while the mass protests in Ukraine continued, but no solution had emerged yet. Instead, the events have taken a tragic turn. Up to now, there have been 98 fatalities, a change in government, and new elections will take place on May 25th. Simultaneously, the country faces diverse challenges as well as political and economic reforms.

Therefore, several texts in this issue have been partially “outrun” by the current events. Nevertheless, they convey interesting internal insights and analyses and can also be seen as a chronicle of the events in the present form.

Since 2011, the Center for Governance and Culture in Europe of the University of St. Gallen has been linked to a project on Ukraine, which analyzes interdependencies between regions, nations and cultures and assumes that Ukraine is not only divided in two, rather that different regional characteristics overlap each other and that they are constitutive for self-identity processes (<http://regionandculture.krytyka.com/>)

Among the project members was the sociologist Bohdan Solchanyk. He was killed by a shot to the head on the Maidan on 20 February 2014.

He was 28 years old.

On behalf of all project members, this edition is dedicated to his memory.

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