

The Blood For Yanukovych

by Oksana Syroyid

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If I were staying in Kyiv now, I would not write this – I would be busy on Maidan. However, I am physically too distanced from the events. And this very fact has made me even more emotionally involved. The feeling of despair has forced me to track the online streams and to check the headlines. I have had enough time to review all major world media including Russian media. There are no surprises from the Russians – they call me and my friends the “aggressive crowd”, our Ukrainian and European identity “radical”, and our efforts to protect our dignity and rights a “riot”.

However, it was sad to observe rather such superficial analysis even from the prominent global media. For example, on one of the TV channel the analyst asked the reporter, who streamed from Kyiv barricades, what is the difference in percentage of population supporting Maidan and Yanukovych. The reporter admitted that he did not know, but that the country is divided and that Eastern Ukraine is Russian. Such an approach to the analysis of the situation in Ukraine is not only distanced from the reality, but also reflects ideas carefully invented and implemented by Kremlin.

First of all, for those who like statistics: let us see whether the linguistic and nationality issues in Ukraine have any impact on the situation. Even though 60% of Ukrainians claim Ukrainian as their mother tongue, it is true that a majority of the population is bilingual – they can communicate in both Ukrainian and Russian. But you would not claim Swedes to be British just because 95% of the Swedish population is fluent in English. Neither me nor my parents could choose a second language for us as school students (and for some even

the first language). I had to study the Russian language, Russian literature and watch Soviet TV in Russian. Therefore, it is not my fault that I can speak Russian. Regarding nationalities: 17% of the inhabitants of Ukraine identify themselves as Russians. Crimea is the only territory where there more than 50% Russians, while seven of 24 regions have more than 10% of Russians, and there are 13.1% native Russians in Kyiv.

To judge whether the linguistic or nationality issues have anything to do with current protests I would suggest considering the following. The majority of the Kyiv population, especially young people, prefers Russian as their language of communication and most of the young residents of the Ukrainian capital are on the barricades today. The language spoken out on the Maidan stage does not matter. The nationality is never asked about and cannot be seen under the protestors’ masks. Finally, the list of those killed is the essential proof that there is no correlation between national or linguistic identity and the current protests.

However, the data are logical if you consider them from the perspective of Russian history and the eternal Russian political interest in Ukraine. Russia needs Ukraine not only as a market, a military base, or as a gas pipe. It needs Ukraine (but only as a territory) to prove its legitimacy as a “great nation” deriving from the Kyevan Rus, an Eastern European Slavic state in 9th-13 century. Otherwise, it would have to begin writing its history only after the Moscow Kingdom founded in 14th century. This state was in fact was not independent, rather a vassal of the Golden Horde,

a Mongol state. It means that Russia would not only need to redesign the exposition in the History Museum on Red Square and to change all the textbooks for schools and universities. It would also have to stop calling itself the "Slavic nation" with the status of "older brother" and the legitimacy to patronize "younger sisters" like Ukraine, Belarus and whoever was "adopted".

This is why Peter the Great in his dreams of Europe, as well as his successors, were so desperate to invade Ukraine and ravish its Orthodox Church Metropolis. This is why Stalin killed millions of Ukrainians through famine in 1932-33 and ordered in 1939 to rewrite history and replace the term "Kyevan Rus" with the term "Old Russian State". This is why Putin said to Bush at a NATO meeting in Bucharest in 2008: "You don't understand, George, that Ukraine is not even a state. What is Ukraine? Part of its territories is Eastern Europe, but the greater part is a gift from us." During his "reign" Putin put his efforts into proving both to the world and to the Ukrainians that Ukraine does not deserve a place on the map of Europe but only on the map of Russian metropolis.

As much as the Russian leader is desperate to devour Ukraine, the Ukrainian people are equally desperate to dissociate themselves from Russia. Perhaps the inherent feeling of dignity or historical memory of democracy fostered by the 20 years of freedom led, especially in the younger generation, to disgust and the rejection of the arrogance and superficiality traditionally exerted by Russians whether in the private or public treatment of anything Ukrainian.

It is now generally known that the Maidan protests started as a reaction to the decision of the Ukrainian Government to "suspend" the process of signing an association agree-

ment with the EU in favor of closer cooperation with Russia. The data as of January show that if the referendum on the association with the EU were held today, 47% of Ukrainians would say "yes". At the same time 34% would say "yes", if a referendum were held on joining the customs union with Russia. In addition the same research shows that Maidan has 48% supporters (27% who fully support it) and 46% opponents (31% who fully reject it). Looking at the data, one would be inclined to argue that the country is split. However, one could respond: have you ever heard of any public support in Ukraine for accession to a customs union? Me neither -because the protest is not about the union, whether European or a customs union. It is all about the values as well as the will and ability to protect them. Those who support Maidan support EU integration because the Maidan and EU values apparently coincide. People on Maidan share common values of human dignity, respect to human rights and accountable government. But even more they share trust, solidarity, and personal accountability. That is why they are standing outside for three months, suffer the -25 degree frost, severe injuries and are even dying just to protect these values.

Most probably, those who fully reject Maidan are the same who would say "yes" to the union with Russia. Then another question is how much do they know about the real Maidan as well as the real Russia? Is their awareness and belief in Russian values strong enough to consistently articulate and defend them, not to mention die for them? They can reject Maidan but they would never have enough arguments to oppose it. You can see no supporters of the custom union accession on the other side of the barricades. The other side of the barricade consists of brutal police supported by paid criminal gangs called "ti-

tushki" and since February 20th even released prisoners. It would not be declamatory to say that it is a fight between "good" and "evil". And yes the country is divided into those who are ready to support the "good" and those who in fact do not care. Therefore the people in this country are just normally socially stratified – some of them are politically active and motivated and others are not. The only problem is that the will of those who do care completely contradicts the strategic interests of the leader of the neighboring state.

Putin has very diligently approached his goal. He has been very diligent in arranging this for many years. He already has made several "grabs" at Ukraine, in particular in 2000 and in 2004. But former President Kuchma was too independent, careful and smart enough not to be embraced by the "older brother". Yanukovych appeared to be the ideal instrument for manipulation: greedy, almost entirely uneducated, with low self-esteem.

The Kremlin developed the concept of "Russian-speaking population" to justify its interference into the internal policies of its neighboring states. "Russian interests go as far as Russian speech is heard" – this is one of the key formulas of Russian international policy. This formula was developed specifically for invasion purposes and is strategically implemented as follows. The Kremlin claims that part of the territory of a given state is Russian-speaking. – The "Russian-speaking population" has specific "rights" that cannot be properly protected in the unitary state, which is why the state should introduce federalist structures (this part can be skipped). – The "Russian-speaking population" is suddenly threatened by "other-language-speaking population". – Obligated to protect any "Russian-speaker", the Kremlin uses tanks and missiles to enter the territory of another

state to fulfil its "mission of protection".

This strategy has been already employed in Moldova in the 1990s as well as in 2008 to invade part of the territory of Georgia. For decades the same formula is has been effectively exploited in Ukraine, in particular, with regard to Crimea and Eastern regions of Ukraine. The actions that complement this strategy are permanent claims of the Kremlin and its emissary in Ukrainian (and not only) politics: that "Russian-speaking population" in Ukraine has some specific rights and that is why the country is divided into Russian-speaking East and Ukrainian-speaking West; that Western Ukrainians are nationalists and radicals; that EU integration and therefore all protest activity are supported only by Western Ukrainians (nationalists and radicals). The Russian lobby in the Ukrainian Parliament has already suggested changing Ukraine into a federal state. And the leadership of Crimea has already claimed that they do not feel safe as a part of Ukraine and want to join Russia. It had to be the elected President of Ukraine and not US Senator McCain to reply that "... all nations must support the territorial integrity of Ukraine, including Crimea". On the opposite, by repeating the mantra that those on Maidan are radicals and represent only small part of the country, Yanukovych is making a strong contribution to the Kremlin's efforts to open the gates for a Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Another concept developed specifically for Ukraine and Byelorussia is the concept of "single nation". According to Putin there is no Ukrainian nation, just "Little Russia". This concept is strongly supported by the Russian Orthodox Church and its "doctrine" of the "Russian world". The core strategy according to this concept is the following. Ukrainians are not a separate nation but a "branch" of the larger Russian nation. Since Ukrainians

and Russians are identical only Russia can understand what is going on in “poor Ukraine’s” head. – Europe has to allow Russia to take “care of Ukraine” and to protect Europe from possible “Ukrainian threats”. The implementation of this concept can be seen in the justifications that the President and the Government of Ukraine provided upon the abrupt decision to suspend the association with the EU. They said that we had to cooperate closely with Russia since we were two “brother nations”, used “to grow up together”, shared the same



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values and Russia could understand us better than the EU. The same concept was used by the President of Ukraine to call the extortionate Russian loan a “brotherly help”.

Putin has taken care of everything, even Maidan. Of course he would be happy to acquire Ukraine on voluntary basis. However, the protests started and he adapted them to his strategy. Kremlin’s emissary in the Presidential administration and in the Ukrainian

Government made it possible. The brutal violence of police is absolutely illogical for Yanukovich as he will never benefit from it. But it is very beneficial to Putin. The “bloody” Yanukovich made him “unacceptable” for the West, meaning that he either has to resign or to be abandoned by the civilized world. Putin is well aware how difficult it will be for Yanukovich to resign and the isolation is the best reason for Kremlin “to take care of Ukraine”. The recent statement of Angela Merkel that she agreed with Putin on the joint measures

against Ukraine proves that Putin’s strategy is advancing. All the agreements between Germany and Russia, including those in 1918 and in 1939 only had negative consequences for Ukraine. But – no pity. It just shows that Europe, at least its key players, do not understand and therefore do not deserve Maidan.

Not understanding Maidan is a problem for Europe and serious mistake in Putin’s equation. Maidan is not one square that can be

smashed and cleaned up. Maidan is not about supporting any party or opposition leaders – it will deal with which parties and leaders to support when the elections come. . Maidan is 27% of Ukrainians ready to fight for their dignity and 21% who are willing to support this fight. Yanukovich had to implement de facto a state of emergency, in order to block Kyiv, close the subway, put armed police at check points on every downtown cross-road

and on the main roads to the city just to prevent these 27% from arriving at their focal point of their struggle. However, it demonstrates that he knows nothing about the people he appeared to be the President of.

For those who never have been on Maidan I can report that the barricaded territory until recently had its own medical service with a fully equipped hospital and a number of medical checkpoints, accommodations and permanent meal services for thousands, a library, two street universities, an IT center, art centers, permanent hotlines, etc. It was self-sustaining and self-organized. How did it work? I know a doctor, who has been volunteering in the medical service from the very first days. I know a retired prosperous businessman, who has been going to Maidan every day supplying protestors with gas and firewood for heating. I know dozens of people, students, top managers, analysts, NGO representatives, businessmen, artists, and public servants who have been going there everyday and taking efforts to maintain the Maidan. They cut sandwiches and built barricades, monitored court trials and protected injured in the hospitals from the police, delivered grocery and taught in the street universities, coordinated call centers and purchased and installed medical equipment. And, most importantly, they kept Maidan safe and clean.

The violence that started on February 18 turned Maidan into one of the most dangerous and apocalyptic places in the world. However, the ensuing violence only increased the significance of Maidan for Ukrainians. Despite hundreds killed and thousands injured, people are not leaving Maidan – they are just arriving with the necessities – food, medicines, tires, equipment. And all of them are bringing their courage, mutual trust and belief in their values. When was the last time that Europe has

experienced something like this?

Finally, to explain the difference in the level of support for Maidan and for Yanukovich I suggest one illustration. After the terror of February 18th the medical service announced around 9 in the morning next day that the blood donors were needed. The transport system was blocked and there was only one donor station in the city. By the noon the emergency call center reported that the line of donors consisted of more than 100 people. In a few hours the medical service reported that they have collected enough blood and asked people to keep it for other situations of need. Unfortunately, the next situation of need was next day and the situation repeated. How many people do you think would stay in line to give their blood for Yanukovich?

P.S. On February 20th around one hundred people were shot dead by snipers. Doctors and volunteers were singing the Ukrainian anthem when the bodies of twelve protestors were taken from the improvised hospital in the hotel lobby... Even after resignation Yanukovich has to be prosecuted and deprived of his lifelong presidential status – he cannot die as a President and have the Ukrainian anthem sung in his honor.

P.P.S. From the moment I have started to write it until the moment I finished, just two days have passed. The situation is changing every hour. A solution has not yet been found. I always knew that Putin never gives up. But I also know that Maidan will always win.

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