

*International Conference on
“The State of the World, Need for the New Paradigm
and Role of Ukraine in it”
April 25, 2015 (Saturday)
“Ukrainian House” on 2 Khreshchatyk Str, Kyiv*

Truth, Freedom, National Identity

Let me give you the general outline of my vision first.

It has been our Ukrainian plight for centuries to be an unknown country with no place in global history, no image, no future. We appeared to many only on the map of the East European *Bloodlands*¹ where over 15 million innocent victims were killed.

It has been our fate since gaining independence to be known in sensational news services as a land of corruption, misuse of power and failure to achieve democracy.

It is our regrettable honor now to be, in peoples’ consciousness, a trigger of the most dangerous world crisis since World War II.

Not surprisingly, the world would be happy to close what seems to be a Pandora’s Box and return to “business as usual,” to the previous “zone of comfort.” The more Ukraine seems a stumbling block, the more it irritates the world’s strongest nations.

However, I am sure there is not so much wrong with Ukraine as with wrong expectations concerning it. It is the inappropriate question that, sometimes, leads to a false answer. And this is caused, predominantly, by distorted truth about Ukraine, misunderstanding of its identity, and underestimating the importance of its freedom.

All the three elements are crucial for clarifying the outlines of the new paradigm which our conference theme refers to.

The true vision of the promising phenomena, being born in the midst of post-soviet sores, may transform our country, in the imagination of Europeans, from an “ugly duckling” and trouble maker to a depository of redeeming solutions.

A different view of Ukraine’s identity – not having Ukraine as an appendage to Russia but as a repository of inclusive cultural codes – provides an opportunity for a reorganization of the Eastern European space on a non-imperial and non-antagonistic model.

¹ Snyder, Timothy. *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York: Basic Books, 2010.

And, finally, Ukraine's freedom and independence, while threatening the neo-imperial trends in Putin's Russia, show the need for a post-Yalta state of mind and awakens a value-centered Europe which would be ready to defend its fundamental principles.

Let me analyze truth, national identity, and freedom in detail.

Truth

It may be realistic to suggest that the consequences of Russia's information war are even more damaging for Ukraine than those of the military action. Our country finds itself within a propaganda storm where we cannot compete either politically or financially.

At the time of my dissident youth, the Soviet regime had to jam radio broadcasts to prevent the truth from entering human minds. Today Putin's regime does not need to do that. Instead, it undermines the very ability of people to distinguish between the truth and lies. It does this in two ways. First, it constructs lies around deep stereotypes rooted in basic cultural instincts. Second, it misuses the basic principles of post-modernism: to treat all expressed information as legitimate *opinions* and to define "the truth" as a golden mean between different opinions. By injecting conscious fake information into the system of legitimate opinions, Russian propaganda disturbs the whole system and prevents the system from defining where truth lies.

Both the Russian people and some people in the West are influenced by these techniques – to say nothing about the Ukrainian people who are victims of them.

It was Russian propaganda that misused the deep rejection of fascism in European minds by intimidating the world with so-called Ukrainian radical nationalism and "fascism". This helped to obscure the radical nationalism and fascism of Russia itself. According to a recent NYT Editorial, "Mr. Putin's aggression is rooted in intense nationalism, which plays very well to his people and fuels the war against Ukraine."² It took a long time for the West to understand how insidious Putin's lies are.

It was Putin's regime that transformed our inter-regional disputes into an armed conflict. It was the *Russia Today* TV program that convinced a part of the world about an allegedly *inner* "civil war" in Ukraine and managed to hide the direct Russian involvement in this war. I felt relief to read in the New York Post recently: "Putin has been fomenting strife and violence in

² http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/16/opinion/president-vladimir-putins-dangerous-moves.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=c-column-top-span-region®ion=c-column-top-span-region&WT.nav=c-column-top-span-region&_r=0

eastern Ukraine from the very start of this conflict.”³ But is this conclusion widely shared by all people in the West – for example, by the new Greek government?

It is Russian propaganda that presents Ukraine as a failed state while also inflaming the bleeding conflict in the East of Ukraine which ruins the Ukrainian economy and undermines its pro-European aspirations. Many post-Soviet nations became victims of this technique. As the Russian observer Ilya Milshtein has said, “the whole history of Putin’s Russia is the history of skillfully directed hatred toward different people, social groups, states, [and] nations.”⁴

Such distortion of truth is a challenge of basic humanitarian importance, and all the nations of the world are invited to search for solutions. Without the ability to recognize and appreciate the truth, the “new paradigm” would simply mean the death of humanity. So I fully support Article 1 of the Declaration of Human Obligations proposed by Dr. Bohdan Hawrylyshyn: “Speak the truth, be honest, act according to moral ethical standards.”

What the post-Maidan Ukraine is able to do is to work on the restoration of the ethical dimension of truth. By this I mean, to transform an opinion back into the truth (or lie), respectively. However, the problem is how to do that without being captured by pre-Enlightenment codes of thinking.

The Lie has prevented many people in the world from understanding that Ukraine is today carrying out precisely the main task of European civilization – to unite cultural essences of various types. The Euro-Maidan accomplished that task, and the united Ukrainian political nation appeared.

Yes, we sometimes go to extremes, fall into mistakes. Too often, our failures are caused by the fact that we are quick to defend what is doomed and to neglect what is promising. But it’s high time for the world to question the validity of the phrase: “Can any good thing come out of Ukraine?” and to, instead, reflect on Adam Michnik’s formula: “What happened in Kyiv [at the Euro-Maidan] was the most majestic moment of manifestation of the senses of European values.”⁵

For too long, Eastern Europe has been abducted by a tormenting evil. There appears now a chance for us, as Ukrainians, to believe that we are not hostages of our failures. We invite our partners to share this same view.

³ <http://nypost.com/2014/07/21/why-russia-buys-putins-lies/>

⁴ <http://grani.ru/opinion/milshtein/m.238474.html>

⁵ <http://www.ukma.edu.ua/index.php/news/1213-adam-mikhnik-ukraina-sohodni-naivazhlyvisha-dlia-yevropy-kraina>

National Identity

Hundreds of thousands of academic scholars were raised at the world's universities on the model of Russia as a core nation (in Huntington's terms) of the Orthodox civilization. Everything seemed to support that concept: the grandeur of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the military power, the glory of Russian literature and the beauty of its onion church domes. Ukrainians looked like poor relatives who try to sue for their own historical heritage against the powerful and world-wide recognized magnate.

However, it was those under-estimated Ukrainians who revealed their European nature on both Maidans while the highly respected magnate has broken ties with Europe and now threatens the world with a nuclear baton. As the same Adam Michnik put it, "Putin's policy went too far. This is already the destruction of the European world order, making harm to all the values of European democracy."⁶

In addition, it became visible that the small and weak Ukraine *is* able to move away from Russia, while the seemingly "core state" itself fails to exist without that so-called "unimportant" Ukrainian nation!

The reason is explained by the Russians themselves. According to Lilia Shevtsova, "without Ukraine, it will be very difficult to prove the legitimacy of both Russian Orthodoxy and the Russian state claims of being originated with the Kyivan Rus. Ukraine while going away to the West is taking the legitimacy of the Russian state with itself, and we stay as Moscovia inhabited with we don't know whom. Russia would have to start its history not from the millenium-long history of Christianity and the baptism of Rus, but from Prince Andrey Bogolubsky, that is from the 12th century, – but that is quite different history."⁷

So the world may decode one more historical fake which was invented by Peter the First and Catherine the Second serving the needs of the newly-emerging Russian Empire. And this would mean the decoding of one of the biggest falsifications of human history which has heavily undermined the ability of the world to understand what is actually going on in this part of the world. Thus, for many Westerners, the Russian attempt to bring disobedient Ukrainian sheep back to the fold seems more realistic and historically justified than the reorganization of the Eastern European space on a non-imperial and non-Moscow platform.

Let me give you another perspective. We all remember the famous metaphor by St. John Paul II of Europe breathing with two lungs belonging to the icons of the European project. The

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ http://news.liga.net/interview/politics/3329055-liliya_shevtsova_putin_ishchet_novye_sposoby_udusheniya_ukrainy_.htm

Western lung is perfectly defined within its history. But who represents the Eastern one? For many people in the world, the Eastern “lung” may be only “the Russian world.” It is this conviction that makes the world’s churches, including the Vatican, catch at the last remnants of “dialogue” with the Russian Orthodox Church in spite of this Church’s pride of non-compliance and the eternal stand of the Third Rome antagonism. The degradation of the spiritual heritage of Christianity in modern Russia is so all-embracing that it would mean “calcification” of the Eastern lung rather than its revival.

However, the inertia of this pro-Russian fascination leaves unnoticed the fact that it is a true layer of the ancient Christian civilization of Kyiv that is emerging from under a concrete slab of despotic dominance. The manifestation of authentic spirituality on the Maidan in Kyiv, along with people’s yearning for spiritual values throughout the country in late 2013 and early 2014, was magnificent. Kyiv’s Independence Square, the Maidan, was a place of daily prayers, night vigils, and conversions to faith. The Maidan was a site of ecumenism and interreligious cooperation on human dignity, that is, there was a public consensus of all Ukrainian Christians, Jews and Muslims. There is now incredible volunteer work being done to help numerous refugees, the wounded and the traumatized. So I agree with Dr. Bohdan Hawrylyshyn that “they did it out of a sense of obligation towards their fellow-countrymen and their country.”

This is the phenomenon that is clearly able to enrich European civilization. What is needed, one might say, is a midwife’s assistance for this tiny flash of a different, though dialogical and value-based, Christian platform being born in pain. It would be too early to label it as the Eastern lung. In general, the regeneration of the Eastern lung appears to be a difficult process. However, we would be glad if the West would respect and appreciate the openness and the dialogical nature of this newly-emerging platform that is, actually, based on a win-win paradigm. *This* is the authentic spirit of the Christian Kyiv that has been so long hidden under the shadow of imperial Moscow.

Freedom

Both Ukrainian Maidans (2004 and 2013/14) demonstrated quite spectacularly what freedom means for Ukrainians. It is still being demonstrated now at the theatre of war in the East of Ukraine. For the first time in 500 years, we have a real chance to liberate ourselves from the noose of the false “brotherhood.” For the first time since independence, the new generation was born which cannot be labeled as *homo sovieticus*.

But what does our freedom mean for the rest of the world?

First, the liberation of Ukraine signifies that the post-Yalta *status quo*, according to which Ukraine must remain under Russian control, is outdated. Actually, this is one of the main messages revealed by Putin's action. And too many people in the world are ready to suggest it would be much safer for the whole community to make concessions to Russia and force Ukraine to accept the deal. However, the conflict of Russia with the West will *not* be solved even if Ukraine is back in the Russian orbit. The bear has been awakened already, and the spirit of Stalin is calling Putin to take revenge on a global scale.

What is ignored here is the wisdom that history *matters*, but does not *dictate*. History shapes our behavior, but does not – and should not – predetermine our future. It is not only Ukrainians who have to believe that we are not hostages of our failures. It's also people in the wider world who have to understand: fear is a legitimate warning but a questionable adviser. Quoting wartime US president Franklin Roosevelt, Herman Van Rompuy, the president of the European Council, recently said that the “biggest enemy of Europe today is fear,” and that this ultimately could lead to war.⁸ And I agree with him even if he interprets this in a different way.

In conclusion...

The danger of the present moment is that, with the so called Ukrainian crisis, the system of international relations has entered the stage when the old post-Yalta *status quo* does not work anymore although a new *status quo* is only appearing in dim outlines. It is risky both to abandon the former *status quo* and to repose trust in unclear phenomena. Putin's nuclear blackmail makes the choice even more costly. Of course, it would be easier if Ukraine were ready to serve as a reliable and trusted alternative. But the trick is that it is difficult for Ukraine to transform itself while the West is imprisoned by fear and reluctance. And, please, don't underestimate the ability of Russia to undermine the hopes and the development of Ukraine.

Edward Lucas, the Economist writer, was Moscow bureau chief when Putin came to power in 1998. I do hope that his recent warning despair is wrong and that the West's heyday is not over. Lucas has said the West is losing. “We are not willing to take risks. We are not willing to use force. We are not willing to accept economic pain. We are not willing to deal with Kremlin information warfare. ... we are not yet willing to even accept that Russia is a revisionist power which wants to change the rules”.

⁸ <https://euobserver.com/institutional/31240>

Is there any way out of this deadlock? Yes, there is, and the key is *values*. Putin's regime is firmly tied to hatred, the lie, and violence. It is Ukrainian Maidans which were so outspoken in claiming freedom, goodness, and honesty. The world has to choose while recalling what Benjamin Franklin said over 250 years ago: "They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."⁹

Is it possible that Europe has lost its ability to resonate, or even risk, inspired by Franklin's principles which are part of Europe's own core identity?

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⁹ <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/b/benjaminfr136955.html>