



Pressezentrum

Sperrfrist:	27. Mai 2017 15.00 Uhr
Projekt:	Zentrum Mittel- und Osteuropa
Veranstaltung:	Ukraine post-Majdan <i>Im Dialog mit der Zivilgesellschaft</i>
Zeit, Ort:	Sa. 15.00 – 17.30, CityCube, Ebene 1, Halle A8, Messe Berlin, Charlottenburg (594 E1)
Referent/in:	Myroslav Marynovych, Vize-Rektor Ukrainische Kath. Universität, Lwiw/Ukraine

Dialogue between Ukrainian and German Civil Societies: Challenges and Chances

Each side of the dialogue has certain difficulties determined by its own history.

Let me start with the Ukrainians. For a long time, Ukrainians did not speak with their own voice. Given the circumstances of the tsarist or communist dictatorships, they were rather epigones, that is inferior imitators, of Moscow; they assiduously reproduced the voice of the metropolitan center. Any Ukrainian voice that pretended to diverge from the official mainstream risked being labeled as nationalistic.

That time is not as distant as you might think: many Ukrainian dissidents, myself included, can witness how that ideological machine worked. As one of the founding members of the Ukrainian Helsinki Group, I was labeled a nationalist and a most dangerous state criminal and deprived of freedom for 10 years for daring to express independent opinions.

At first, the Ukrainian state independence obtained in 1991 seemed to provide opportunities for the nation to speak with its own voice. Indeed, the level of freedom was incomparably higher. The nation, however, had to overcome some negative consequences of its fatal history:

1. *For the long time, we didn't know who we were.* We had to regain our own history and identity which had been distorted within foreign historiographies; and we were truly repossessing our own history while reconsidering it stage by stage. This process is far from being finished yet though the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2013/14 Revolution of Dignity were huge steps forward in self-understanding. For the first time in modern history, those two important events were not part of a history that Ukraine and Russia shared in common. A genuine Ukrainian identity started to be reconsidered and revealed.
2. *We had to overcome a strong sense of inferiority.* This task presupposed that we had to overcome the long-term ban for freedom of expression and to taste the sweet and bitter fruits of independent thinking. For almost 25 years our task was to stop the paternalistic replication of all the Russian societal patterns which we considered to be more high-class and advanced. We had to develop our own social patterns. This meant to be non-Russian while not becoming anti-Russian. To illustrate, the slogan of the Orange revolution was: "We like Pushkin and don't like Putin." It was the fault of Putin's team that, claiming the identical nature of the Russian and Ukrainian nations, they started the "hybrid" war, launched an awful anti-Ukrainian information war, and built the wall of hatred between our two nations.
3. *We are still not ready for a genuine dialogue with European democracies.* We are lacking the concept and practice of true dialogue. Therefore, too often, we opt for being inferior imitators again – this time, the epigones of the West instead of Moscow. The fruits of democracy were not developed in Ukraine from below, so the implementation of democratic techniques became more difficult than we expected.
4. *Our knowledge of Europe is outdated.* Recently many Europeans have wondered why Ukrainians want to join the EU while some European nations are so eager to leave it. The reason is simple: Ukrainians want to join the Europe that, apparently, does not exist anymore. I call this the "time lag", or the "time warp." As you know if a spacecraft is ploughing through space with almost light velocity for too long, the return to Earth might be quite problematic. The time on the planet passed too fast during this period, and aeronauts might not recognize the planet they had left some time ago. That's exactly what happened with the Ukrainian "spacecraft" that seemed to fly in the dictatorship galaxies for too long. European realities changed dramatically, and only a few Ukrainians are experienced enough to be in a true dialogue with them.

Now let's turn to the difficulties of our German partner which other Europeans hold in common.

1. Because of the traumatic German history of the 20th century, the direct dialogue with Ukraine *bypassing* Russia was taboo because it meant being *in opposition* to Russia. For too long, Ukraine was part of the

Russian and, later, Communist Empire. Therefore, the dialogue with Ukrainian public figures, if any, was led through Moscow as the center of the Empire.

2. We feel the strong after-effect of this even now. *The "Ukrainian policy" of Germany is still a derivative of its "Russian policy."* I remember a very characteristic moment at the Fourth Kyivan (German-Ukrainian) Dialogue held in 2008. That was the time when President Yushchenko led his campaign to return to the collective memory of Ukrainians the tragic history of Holodomor (the hand-made Big Famine in Ukraine under Stalin in 1933/34 that cost Ukraine more than 3 million of its population). Of course, Putin's Russia denied the very fact of Holodomor and blamed Ukraine for the nationalistic distortion of history. So I was really shocked when our German colleagues at that meeting unanimously warned Ukrainians against "being so unwise in raising the issue of Holodomor that irritates Russia." In other words, it would be better to suppress the memory about the major tragedy of Ukraine's history on behalf of the imperialistic arrogance of the Russian leadership. So, in German minds, it is Russia that was, and still is, a reference point for reading Ukrainian history.
3. *Too many Europeans, including Germans, suggest that the world has to sacrifice the genuine interests of Ukraine in favor of global security.* This became especially visible when Putin had "overthrown the chessboard" in international relations. Russia considers Ukraine as its own "underbelly" and jealously studies direct contacts between Ukraine and its European partners. Unfortunately, the historic tradition of cajoling an aggressor is still valid for too many Europeans.
4. There is one more difficulty the German side seems to experience and that is about *uncertainty with whom the dialogue has to be conducted.* The British analyst, James Sherr, has observed an interesting contrast: "Russia is a country with a strong state and a weak civil society, Ukraine is a country with a weak state and a strong civil society." This has at least two important consequences. Firstly, foreign governments and EU structures usually deal, of course, with the official representatives of the country which, unfortunately, is not the strongest part of Ukraine. The face of the country that is represented, too often, by corrupted officials is quite repulsive. Secondly, the Ukrainian civil society is very fragmented and mosaic. It worsens the situation because a certain closed loop is being formed: to know Ukraine better you have to organize a dialogue, but to organize a dialogue better you have to know Ukraine.
5. *The lack of knowledge about Ukraine* is the reason why Europe, too often, misunderstands the Ukrainian reactions and, consequently, falls into the well-known "Ukraine fatigue." Let me give you two illustrations.

At the end of the 1990s Roman Prodi, an EU diplomat, said aphoristically: "We expect Ukraine to express its will clearly with whom it wants to be: with Europe or with Russia. We will respect either decision." Let's put aside the question to what extent this phrase was politically correct. The phrase looked very democratic, but it was not. At that time, Ukraine was not able to answer this question without alternatives because it consisted of two parts of the population with different geopolitical orientations. To remain democratic presupposed suppressing neither. Therefore, this lack of knowledge led to erroneous expectations.

Lack of knowledge was almost unavoidable taking into account that no German media had their permanent correspondents in Kyiv. The unknown country has no identity, so there was nothing strange in the unwillingness of some Europeans, including Germans, to sacrifice their vital interests in favor of an almost unknown country. Ukrainians look too barbarian to be respected as fully European. However, it is the Ukrainian Maidans which were so outspoken in proclaiming such values as freedom, goodness, and honesty, thus revealing our European origin. According to Adam Michnik, "What happened in Kyiv [at the Euro-Maidan] was the most majestic moment of manifestation of the senses of European values."

Summing up, it is the task of Ukrainians to succeed in building a modern nation, to overcome the strong complex of inferiority, to develop a genuine dialogue with European democracies and to familiarize themselves with contemporary European realities.

In turn, it is the task of Germans to develop a genuine Ukrainian policy without looking back to Russia and to overcome incorrect expectations with better knowledge of Ukraine and its civil society. As to security, I would quote 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." I would rephrase that in the following way: "They who can give up essential values to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither values nor safety."

These tasks are not the focus of the future exclusively. Recent years have already brought many promising changes.

On the one hand, there are clear signs that Germany is reconsidering the role of Ukraine from being a trouble-maker deteriorating the relations with Russia to being a means for the transformation of the whole Eastern Slavonic space. I applaud this change.

On the other hand, a new generation seems to be formed in Ukraine that cannot be labeled as *homo sovieticus* anymore. Freedom and dignity are an inherent part of their personal and social posture. They easily overcome regional differences and have a common value platform. There is only one important thing that is still lacking: they

have no access to the decision-making process in the sphere of state management. Though, as you can see, this is only a question of time.

I am sure both German and Ukrainian societies can assist each other in overcoming their limitations. Strangely enough, Ukraine may illustrate the old proverb that "everything new is simply the well-forgotten old." When Ukraine fully regains its own voice some critics may recall the irony of the well-known words: "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Having in mind the achievements and potentials of both Maidans, Ukraine might be transformed from a "trigger of war," as many Europeans now think, into a promoter of peace.

The role of Germany could immediately be enormous. In Ukraine, business and Church are the entities which strongly influence and transform the society in direct or indirect ways. These are the fields where German assistance might be especially helpful. Because, rephrasing the words of James Sherr, Germany is the country with the effective state and strong civil society. In this way, the new changes mentioned here might become rich opportunities for further development for both nations.

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