



Mykola Riabchuk

Ukraine: One State, Two Countries?

Political ambivalence as a socio-political phenomenon characterizes virtually every post-communist country but especially the Ukraine. Here, the country's regional, cultural and linguistic discrepancies and the atomizing impact of Soviet totalitarianism on Ukrainian society serve to explain the deep socio-political rifts within. Mykola Riabchuk argues that the post-Soviet elite currently in power cunningly uses this situation for its political survival. Will the Ukraine be able to overcome this ambivalence and usher into an era of more democratic plurality and subsequent unity?

Two Ukraines

Once again it is the fashion, just like after the last presidential elections in 1994, to discuss Ukraine's regional divisions, to bring out the maps and point to the allegedly "nationalistic" West and the "Russian dominated" East, and to speculate with due gravity on the possible division of the country into two halves. However, nobody can specify which political force would undertake such an act, and still less define the demarcation line along which "two Ukraines" could and would be divided.

As the author who introduced the concept of "two Ukraines" in 1992¹, I do recognize its ambiguity and the fact that it may explain and clarify as much as it confuses and obscures.

Anybody who visits extreme eastern and western Ukraine, for example, Donetsk and Lviv, inevitably feels the profound differences between the two regions, as if in reality they belonged to two different countries, two different worlds, two different civilizations. Architectural dissimilitude is the most immediately evident. Lviv is a typical Central European city, having been governed under Magdeburg Law for centuries. French classicism and Austrian "*moderne*" eventually supplemented German Gothic, Italian Renaissance and Polish Baroque. Today the faithful fill the numerous churches on feast-days, and little cafes have always attracted people wanting to meet and chat, even during Soviet times.

Beneath the surface however, the differences are no less substantial. Western Ukrainians have never internalized communism, never perceived the Soviet Union as "their own" country, and never believed that the Soviet Army had come to liberate them as it claimed but rather as the replacement of some other occupants. They defiantly continued to have their children baptized (in the officially banned, underground Greek Catholic "Uniate" church), and to transmit the traditional sophisticated culinary recipes from grandmothers to young ladies. This habit had disappeared from eastern Ukraine due to

permanent food shortages and the total pauperization of everyday life. Western Ukrainian peasants who put on their suits and white shirts and ties and polished shoes every Sunday for church are rather difficult to imagine in eastern Ukraine. In a sense, they are the "bourgeois", members of a *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* that had long ago been completely destroyed in the East by the Bolsheviks.

Donetsk represents what was built instead: the brave new world of victorious revolution and proletarian internationalism. A typical Soviet city, it is indistinguishable from myriads of other industrial monsters stretching for thousands of kilometers from Donbass to Kuzbass and from Norilsk to Karaganda. Their major attractions remain the towering monuments to Lenin, the streets and squares and factories bearing his name, and of course the ugly pseudo-classic buildings in the style popularly referred to as "Stalin Repressance". Here people speak a different language, which they think is Russian, attend different churches (when they attend at all), watch different TV channels and vote for different political parties. They are "proletarian" exactly in the same sense in which western Ukrainians tend to be "bourgeois": too many people here, including the top-level *nomenclatura* or the so-called "businessmen", cannot simply produce a sentence without a dirty word or endure a day without a bottle of vodka.

Political differences are no less striking. Opinion polls clearly show that western Ukrainians are predominantly anti-Communist and anti-Soviet; they believe Russia is Ukraine's main threat while America is its main ally; they favor private ownership and radical economic reforms, the revival of Ukrainian language and culture, democratization and, of course, Ukraine's eventual membership in the EU and NATO. Easterners tend to prefer the opposite. They want Ukraine to join the Russia/Belarus union, re-establish a soviet-style economy, give more authoritarian power to the president and grant Russian language the constitutional status of "second state language" in Ukraine, which in practical post-colonial terms means (as the Belarus experience has graphically confirmed) the status of the only officially functioning language in the country.

Indeed, this perspective leads many observers to conclude that, since western and eastern Ukraine are too different to coexist within the same country, the split between the two halves is inevitable. However, the main paradox is that nobody can say where one half ends and the other begins. Ukraine had been russified (and, later on, sovietized) very gradually, region by region, over 300 years. In a sense, the "two Ukraines", "Soviet" and "European", have overlapped and fused. They permeate each other so deeply that even in Lviv one may find many remnants of sovietism, while in Donetsk some signs of "Ukrainianness" and "Europeanness" may equally be discerned. These two Ukraines co-exist like two symbols, two options for future development: "back to the USSR" or "return to Europe" (to which Ukraine had allegedly always belonged). Lviv and Donetsk indeed can be considered as the geographical and geopolitical symbols of these "two Ukraines". Nevertheless, it would be inaccurate and deceptive to extrapolate the specific ideological implications of these two symbols onto any other significant part of the country.

Not only are the various Ukrainian regions between "Lviv" and "Donetsk" highly heterogeneous, each with its own peculiar combination of "Ukrainianness" and "Russianness", "Europeanness" and "Sovietism", but in addition each individual Ukrainian tends to be very ambivalent in his or her

ideological preferences and orientations, thereby making even the identity of many Ukrainians quite vague and nebulous. This paradox concerning the "two Ukraines" considerably prevents any split of the country into "two halves". In reality, there are many more "Ukraines" than just "two". Notwithstanding, it is these "two" which are the most visible and clearly defined, while the immense space between them remains rather fluid and heterogeneous in geographic, human and ideological terms.

We may define this space as the "third Ukraine": for the most part invisible, mute, uncertain, undecided, ideologically ambivalent and ambiguous. It is more object than subject of the political struggle, the major battlefield and the major prize in the protracted contest between the two vociferating but minor Ukraines, the "Soviet" and the "European".

Ambivalence to Ambiguity

Opinion polls confirm that Ukrainian society is not just radically divided on virtually every fundamental issue (with perhaps the one exception of territorial integrity²). They also show that both rival groups, "russophile" and "ukrainophile" (or, more precisely, pro-Soviet and pro-European) are minorities, while the real majority is an amorphous group of those who "do not care", "are not interested", "feel undecided", and "failed" (or "refused") to respond. Perhaps the best example of this ambiguity was revealed by the 1996 national survey when 1,200 respondents were asked to define which political tendency they supported. It appeared that 13% favored promoters of capitalism and 20% – of socialism, 25% claimed they did not support anybody, 22% remained undecided and – *nota bene!*– 18% stated they would support both sides, that is, promoters of both socialism and capitalism, just in order to avoid conflict³.

In 1997, at the height of Ukraine's flirt with NATO, as many as 38% respondents were in favor of Ukraine's putative membership in the Alliance, while 21% were definitely opposed, and 42% felt undecided. In the same year, 14% approved the putative admission of Ukraine's East European neighbors into NATO, 10% disapproved, 30% had no certain opinion, and 46% (!) had no interest in the issue at all. Again, 25% of the respondents believed Russia was Ukraine's biggest threat, 23% felt it to be the main ally, the rest were unsure about either suggestion⁴.

In 1998, a nearly equal number of respondents agreed with (36%) and denied (37%) the suggestion that "the referendum should be carried out immediately and the union of brotherly soviet peoples re-established" (27% remained undecided). Another question, however, was addressed to the same respondents within the framework of the same survey: "Do you agree that Ukraine, all the difficulties notwithstanding, should remain independent?" 61% of respondents agreed, 19% disagreed, 20% remained undecided⁵. The number of people who want the Union to be re-established (36%) proved to be almost twice higher than the number of people who oppose Ukraine's independence (19%). So nearly half of them believe that the renewed Soviet Union and the newly born national independence can be somehow combined.

Some commentators dubbed this phenomenon "post-soviet schizophrenia"⁶, and some play auto-ironical jokes at the daunting amorphousness of the nation, "half of which, according to various sociological polls, have no certain answer to any question. Do you approve or disapprove? Like or dislike? Want or don't want? Do you live or simply survive? Do you exist at all? Remain

undecided"⁷. Sociologists define this phenomenon still more accurately as "social ambivalence". They claim it results from people's commitment to opposite, incompatible views and values, and typically surfaces during any transition when two different political cultures, two different models of social behavior (political, economic and even linguistic) counteract. Ambivalent consciousness reconciles incompatible values and models in a mythical, irrational way; it works like a magic device bringing the individual a kind of psychological comfort in the uncomfortable circumstances when "the right to choose must be paid for with responsibility, freedom – with uncertainty, equal opportunities – with critical self-evaluation"⁸.

"Of course, the "ambivalent consciousness" plays a positive role by protecting society as a whole and each person in particular from the untenable challenges of a changing world and its inevitable psychological traumas. Yet in the long run it becomes an unbearable burden *per se*, a collective neurosis that lends itself to skilful manipulation by the new spin-doctors. Stability turns into nasty stagnation, ambivalence into ambiguity. People with a fluctuating identity and with only a vague idea of the country's optimal choices are highly susceptible to brainwashing, and they quite naturally are targeted by official propaganda, authoritarian blackmail and political manipulation.

Needless to say, the post-soviet oligarchy has a vested interest in keeping society highly atomized, confused and alienated. They do all they can to prevent any civic democratic development within the country, since it could expose them to objective (and fair) political competition entailing, ultimately, the loss of political power and power-based economic privileges. People respond to an "anything-goes" attitude on the part of the government by widespread cynicism and indifference to everything except daily survival alleviated by a few minor pleasures.

The real problem that post-soviet rulers faced in post-independence Ukraine was the lack of a founding ideology. Neither of the two former Ukrainian nationalisms is viable today since neither mobilizes the population at large. (Ukrainian political leaders are very prudent where nationalism is concerned, given that for 67% of the voters, a candidate's "nationalistic orientation" is perceived as deterrent.) There is no Ukrainian counterpart to the Russian evolution in this respect, since in Russia, inversely, every political force can call upon two nationalisms: both the former, imperial (or soviet-imperial) kind and the new totally Russian one. In Ukraine, with its divided and undecided politicum, native, ethnic nationalism is weak and marginalized, and imperial nationalism, that legacy from the soviet past, is moribund and marginalized by communist monopolization. Theoretically of course, the possibility of Ukrainian civic nationalism could at least have been considered. But to be viable, this option should have been rooted in strong civic institutions and democratic procedures; Ukrainian leaders should have promoted a full-fledged civil society and a genuinely transparent political and economic environment. Clearly, this would have translated into inevitable political suicide for the highly corrupt and incompetent post-soviet elite, a suicide which none of them was eager to commit.

Therefore in Ukraine we have the emergence of a peculiar *ersatz*-ideology, which always starts with negative assumptions. Things are going badly but could get much worse. So, the oligarchic media proclaim, would it not be wiser to accept the status quo, rather than to rock the boat with all kinds of crazy demands and radical suggestions? Our officials are corrupt? Yes, but there are corruption scandals everywhere! Just take look at model western democracies

like Germany or the USA! After all, please remember that our democracy is only ten years old. Did you say that our elections are a farce? Well, they are no more and no less imperfect than our society, only so recently emerged from totalitarianism. But things aren't as bad as in Belarus or in Uzbekistan... You say, people's life is deteriorating? Well, but on the other hand, we've avoided warfare like in the Balkans, or Chechnya, or many other places...

In reality, the regime gets credit not for what it has done, but for what it hasn't. It did not distort elections as cynically as Mugabe, did not steal as much as Mobutu or Marcos, and did not kill in the same proportions as Milosevic or Putin. The social consent, so called "*zlahoda*", is officially proclaimed to be the supreme objective and the government's major achievement, but it has a clearly negative dimension: we don't do much wrong because we don't do much. A bad peace in Ukraine is certainly better than a good war, but the "peacekeeping" efforts of the Ukrainian oligarchy are rather peculiar. Their policy is aimed not so much against a "good war" which actually is not a threat in Ukraine, but primarily against a "good peace" which does constitute a real threat for the ruling regime. The fact that the latter exists as an alternative to a "bad peace" is deliberately silenced, while the former is propagandistically overemphasized.

In order to play the role of a "peacekeeper" in Ukraine, the post-soviet *nomenklatura* needs to maintain division, disorientation and intimidation within the state. Had Ukraine not had a colonial, communist legacy, the authorities would have invented it. The colonial legacy furnished the *nomenklatura* with the specific regions and local identities that could effectively be played against each other. In addition, the totalitarian legacy construed an "uncivil" and easily manipulable society. The objective of the post-soviet rulers was to preserve this legacy for as long as possible. Ten years of Ukrainian independence give a graphic example of how the consolidation of a nascent civil society and nation can variously be impeded. To expose the total process would require a voluminous study, yet certain characteristics of the government's artificial maintaining of the nation in a "state of ambivalence" were particularly highlighted during the March 2002 legislatives, and thereby deserve our closer examination.

Oligarchic "peacekeeping"

Democratic elections are a major headache for a good many authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes throughout the world. Most try to imitate democratic procedures and institutions, since it is preferable to be member of the prestigious "western democracies club" rather than to be chastised as an international pariah. Democracy is fashionable but it comes at a price and very few third-world leaders are prepared to pay it fully, fairly and on time. Many jostle for various waivers and discounts, "justified" by their local peculiarities, their temporary difficulties, their uniqueness as a civilization, and so forth. Some are granted a waiver because of their dimension and power, like Russia and China; others due to their strategic importance and their "honorable" status of "our sons of bitches" (according to the term used by an American president in justifying his support for some ugly Latin American dictators). Ukraine has no oil, no nuclear power and no significant role to play in fighting international terrorism. Ukrainian leaders have little choice but to "join Europe" (as they have never stopped declaring since independence) or to share the destiny of Milosevic or, at best, Lukashenko.

Every election for them has turned into a sprint across a minefield. A careless step too far left or right, and their politico-economic set-up may blow up. On the one hand, they are perfectly conscious that they can win the elections only through widespread, systematic and coordinated fraud, since the opposition is gaining in strength while their own popularity is plummeting at close to nil. Yet on the other hand they also realize that violations, which are too brutal, too visible and too cynical, could entail harsh international sanctions especially for the ruling elite. These considerations must be taken into account when adjusting the implementation of electoral fraud in terms of scale, configuration and frequency in order to ensure national victory and to avoid international defeat. So far, the ruling nomenclatura in Ukraine has played the tricky game called "democratic elections" more or less successfully, although at each new and successive try, there is rather "less" success than "more".

Throughout all these years of independence, the post-soviet *nomenclatura* has been selling itself to the electorate as the "lesser of two evils". In western Ukraine they pretend to be the natural allies of the national democrats against the "red threat", while in the East they imply that they are better than those crazy "western nationalists". Still, their main electorate has traditionally been in central Ukraine where most people supported the "party of power" as a guarantor of a "bad peace", usually presented as the only alternative to a "good war". Despite not having a clear majority in parliament, the post-soviet *nomenclatura* was in a position to keep both the communists and national democrats at bay by playing them off against each other and, if necessary, blackmailing each side with threats of political coalition with the other. However, as much as the communists and national democrats may have disliked the oligarchs, they hated each other even more, which resulted in their submitting to the government's blackmail and, *nolens-volens*, playing the "lesser of two evils" game.

In 1994, Leonid Kuchma won the presidential elections with the support of the communists against the allegedly "nationalistic" incumbent, Leonid Kravchuk. By the same token, he beat his communist rival with the support of the national democrats in 1999. The communists did not have much sympathy for Kuchma in 1994 or the national democrats in 1999 when his popularity declined to a one-digit percentage. The same "lesser of two evils" game was successfully played in 2000/2001 during the notorious "tapeagate" when the highly unpopular and compromised Kuchma avoided an imminent impeachment just because neither the communists nor the national democrats were determined enough to push him into a corner. Each side was primarily concerned that the other would benefit from Kuchma's departure.

But by 2002 the "lesser of two evils" game was becoming more and more problematic. Firstly, the Communist party lost a significant percentage of its popularity, in part through the gradual shrinking of its elderly electorate, in part through a dubious collaboration in certain key issues with the highly unpopular Kuchma regime. Secondly, a broad national democratic base was consolidated for the first time since 1991 under the leadership of the very popular former Prime Minister, Victor Yushchenko. Thirdly, the electoral law adopted in 1997 and modified in 2001 stipulated that half of the 450 deputies in Ukrainian parliament would be elected under the proportional system and the other half directly under the "majority" system. This meant that the authorities have been able to practice electoral fraud in a significant way in the majority districts, but were confronted with insurmountable problems in rigging results decisively in the proportional districts. And finally, to make things even more complicated, after September 11 and Western rapprochement

with Russia, for the most part Ukraine ceased being a geopolitical asset for the US, and to some degree its rulers lost the privileged status of "our sons of bitches".

Kuchma was determined to win the battle at any price. Many observers believe that the recent parliamentary elections are just a prelude to the presidentials of 2004 when the problem of Kuchma's succession must be solved. If it is true that the incumbent president has only two choices, the Milosevic option or the Lukashenko option, he would certainly choose for the latter, as his recent election campaign has proved.

Government pressure on the political opposition, their supporters and sympathizers, and on the members of electoral commissions has been extremely strong, especially in certain regions, small towns and villages. Many people have been blackmailed and intimidated by officials or even harassed and beaten-up by unidentified civilians. On election day, in some eastern Ukrainian regions the paramilitary groups went from poll station to poll station openly, attacking opposition members and sympathizers in the presence of police forces⁹. Here and there opposition headquarters got demolished, billboards destroyed, newspapers confiscated. In one way or another, the authorities obstructed every other electoral meeting held by opposition candidates. Having monopolized all the TV channels and virtually all the newspapers, the government and pro-government oligarchs launched an extremely filthy disinformation campaign against opposition leaders, particularly Victor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko¹⁰.

Ukraine's ambivalence once again was the government's major trump card. With little chance of success in western and central Ukraine, Kuchma and his supporters decided to make a last stand in the more sovietized and russophone Donbass and other eastern Ukrainian *oblasts*. As a Canadian observer aptly remarks, "They returned to traditional methods of mobilizing eastern Ukrainians by denouncing their opponents as 'nationalists'"¹¹. It is important to remember that the very word "nationalist" has traditionally had a strong negative connotation in Ukraine. In Soviet times, the term "bourgeois nationalist" constituted a serious criminal accusation (entailing from 5 to 15 years of imprisonment); as the popular adage had it, "Ukrainian bourgeois nationalists are the worst enemies of the Ukrainian people" (and of all humankind, right up in the front line with "American imperialists" and "Zionists"). So, ironically, the pro-presidential party called "For a United Ukraine" embarked on Ukraine's "disunification" by playing easterners against westerners and blindly relying on the propagandistic support of Russian politicians and mass media. Once again, like during Kuchma's 1994 campaign, horrible stories have been broadly circulated, stating that if Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" comes to power, the border with Russia would be immediately closed, visas introduced, gas and oil supply cut off, enterprises inevitably shut down, and forceful "Ukrainisation" inflicted on all human beings!

Neither Yushchenko nor Tymoshenko were allowed to respond in the respective media to the most insulting accusations (such as, for example, that Yushchenko favors "western Ukrainian fascists" and that his father himself was a Nazi collaborator; or that his wife, a former American citizen, is a CIA agent). Sociologists estimate that this propaganda cost "Our Ukraine" some 5–6% in votes, mostly among the pensioners whose sympathies fluctuated between the communists (traditionally promising to raise pensions) and Yushchenko (who as a Prime Minister did). Three more percent have probably been stolen from Yushchenko by various manoeuvres during voting and ballot

counting. (The data appears reliable since both exit polls and parallel vote counting confirm it).

Nonetheless, Yushchenko's "Our Ukraine" came in first with 23% of the nationwide vote. For the first time in ten years, the communists finished second with 20%, and pro-presidential For a United Ukraine came third with a dubious 12% despite the incommensurable financial, media, and "administrative" resources employed to secure victory. Another pro-presidential group, the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United), which is in reality a party of major energy and media oligarchs, made only 6%, while the other pro-presidential oligarchic groups did not cross the 4% threshold. The two radical opponents of Kuchma's regime, the Socialist Party of Ukraine and Yulia Tymoshenko's coalition, won 7% each, despite having been completely blacklisted in the mass media and undergone massive obstruction during their election campaign in the regions.

For those who want to see it that way, the results can indeed be seen as a triumph for the nascent Ukrainian democracy or, at least, as a clear sign that Ukrainian society is becoming more politically mature and less susceptible to official manipulations and propagandistic brainwashing. However, the election results in the majority constituencies leave much less room for optimism. Here, the notorious "administrative resource" (i.e., all sorts of illegal administrative pressure on the participants) proved to be unbeatable, bringing a landslide victory to the "FUU". Pro-presidential forces, including the so-called "independents" that were almost unanimous in joining the "FUU" faction, once again secured a relative majority in parliament and a convenient position for blackmailing both communists and national democrats and playing them against each other.

The reasons for this electoral twist are twofold: Firstly, local authorities have more incentives to promote specific pro-government candidates in the majority constituencies rather than campaigning for some abstract party list—and of course, the candidates promote themselves much more actively than the party they represent. Secondly, people depend much more on the individual candidates directly, since it is at their discretion to make decisions regarding their districts such as creating new jobs in the local factory, paying pension arrears, or purchasing some urgently needed equipment for the local hospital.

Leonid Kuchma proved to be a perspicacious politician. Favorable to a 100% majority system, last year he vetoed the new electoral law that would have implemented a 100% proportional election system in Ukraine. The "mixed system" was therefore voted as a kind of a compromise between the government and the opposition. Consequently, party lists account for half of the parliament's 450 seats, while the remainder come from constituencies where deputies are elected on a first-past-the-post basis. One may easily calculate that if the proportional system had been adopted, the opposition parties could have created an anti-oligarchic majority in parliament even without the communists. Yet, if the majority system remained in place, the "FUU" with its allies would have had not just a majority in parliament but probably a qualified majority, habilitated to change the constitution, grant new powers to president Kuchma whose second (and last) term expires in 2004, and perhaps even substitute a "referendum" for the elections, in the Central Asian style.

Two Ukraines, TBC

However imaginary they may seem, these two Ukraines do exist in reality. Western Ukraine tends to support democratic parties and their candidates in both proportional nationwide voting and head-to-head contest in local districts. Irrespective of the electoral system, these people would always elect more or less the same parliament. Southern and eastern Ukraine tends to support *kuchmists* and communists in both the proportional and the majority framework. Their parliament would also be more or less the same regardless of the electoral system. Once again it is the "third" Ukraine, which constitutes the real problem since it tends to support democrats in the nationwide party list, but yields to the omnipotent "administrative resource" in the single-mandate districts.

Resistance is growing in strength. There are many signs that since the ruling regime is gradually losing ground in central Ukraine, it is moving east into the heavily sovietized regions of traditional communist domination in an attempt to stay in power. This move might result in the eventual marginalization and decline of the semi-authoritarian system of government in Ukraine or, vice versa, it might lead to a brutal totalitarian restoration.

"A region [a Ukrainian publicist warns, commenting upon the situation in Donetsk] with an important concentration of capital but totally devoid of any democratic parameters is a dangerous problem for a state which has learned to at least imitate civilized behavior and pretend that it formally recognizes the need for certain democratic values. But in Donetsk the authorities do not even appear to bother with appearances. These are the people who are the main bulwark of the declining president, his most reliable long-term partners. The party list (proportional) electoral results show the authorities' real strengths, while their manner of implementing the elections in the individual (majority) districts show to what lengths they were willing to go in the agonizing struggle for their own political survival. They used violence, bribery, intimidation, and electoral fraud: the whole gamut. But even in this respect, Donetsk is an exceptional case in point. The totalitarian 'values' which are so carefully preserved in this region in their practical, and not only historical, applications as the foundation of its way of life may very well become determinant for all of us. If all the other political forces, clans, and individuals do not fully apprehend this danger, it might turn into reality"¹².

The Donetsk region was the only one where the "FUU" scored highest in majority balloting. "Our Ukraine" won in 14 regions (center and west), the Communist Party in nine (south and east), the Socialist Party in one (Poltava¹³). The top scores of the "FUU" were in prisons, hospitals and military units with practically 100% of the voters supporting the pro-presidential coalition. The authorities must indeed sorely want to generalize the Donetsk and prison-army pattern to Ukraine as a whole.

This scenario will not appear so far-fetched if we remember the 1999 presidential elections, or if we just refer back to the alleged conversations between president Kuchma and his aides, as revealed by his former guard Mykola Melnychenko. Simply a few examples suffice to understand how to make electoral success happen, and how the notorious "administrative resource" works. Kuchma (speaking over the phone to Interior Minister Yuriy

Kravchenko):

Azarov [head of the National Tax Service] is here. This is the mechanism at work here. They have a case on virtually every collective farm head. They have to be collected in every rayon, so that every militia head and tax service head... And say: guys, if you don't give, [expletive], the number (of votes), say it like that, that are needed, then tomorrow all of you will be where you should be...

Another fragment is very similar, although this time the president is speaking to Leonid Derkach, head of the SBU, the successor organization to the KGB:

The militia will have to work seriously... It's necessary for a tax worker to go to every collective farm head in every village and say: dear friend, you do understand clearly how much material we have on you so that you could find yourself in jail tomorrow... And there is probably more than enough material on every collective farm head. Yes or no? Probably yes. That's why the militia... that is, the services... they all have to, that is, take (the task) and have a serious talk with every collective farm head¹⁴.

The American scholar Keith Darden who co-directs the Melnychenko Tapes Project (www.wcfia.harvard.edu/melnychenko.htm) contends that the system that has been forged in Ukraine as in many other post-soviet republics can be defined as a "blackmail state".

"Blackmail [he explains], as a tool for establishing state control and compliance, relies on three basic elements. The first is a permissive attitude of state authorities towards corruption. In Ukraine, corruption and illegality among the elite were accepted, condoned, and even encouraged by the top leadership, resulting in a general condition of impunity. The second element is extensive state surveillance. Even as the violation of the law is encouraged, the state (or rather the surveillance organs controlled by the President) continues to monitor and collect information on such illegal activities. Thanks to the surveillance organs, the state amasses a stockpile of files and criminal cases documenting the wrongdoings of office-holders as well as private actors. When compliance with state directives is required, this information is used for blackmail, with payment exacted -- not in cash, but in political obedience¹⁵."

Keith Darden believes that "once set in place, this type of corruption becomes particularly difficult to undo, since those who are in a position to alter this mechanism is precisely those who derive the most benefit from it. The president and his team gain power, the oligarchs gain wealth, the press is controlled, and the masses are threatened, fragmented, and repressed. In this manner, the informal mechanisms of state control continue to be sustained, and graft is unlikely to be eradicated so long as it remains an essential tool of rule¹⁶."

However acute these observations may be, they do not account for certain phenomena that render Ukrainian reality even more complex. In fact, Darden

very aptly describes one Ukraine, but tends to ignore the other. The press is indeed controlled, but not completely; the masses are threatened and fragmented but still able to resist; and the oligarchs, although greedy and selfish, are far from being a homogenous group, and more and more "dissidents" defect to the opposition. And finally, there is one more player on the Ukrainian scene who can metaphorically be called international civil society and international public opinion. International government and non-government organizations try to encourage Ukrainian politics and economy towards a greater transparency and at the same time to dissuade authoritarian tendencies. None of these factors taken alone can bring about radical change; but working together, they could bring about the much-needed transformation of Ukraine's crypto-soviet political system.

Conclusion

The 2002 legislative elections have underlined the all-pervading sense of ambivalence in the Ukrainian society and its perverting impact on the nation's political development. Having obtained an impressive victory in the nationwide vote, democratic forces sustained a no less significant defeat in the majority constituencies. The ruling elite has, once again, proved its talent in profiting from the nation's ambivalence, playing not only easterners against westerners but also people's particular needs against the national interest. Victor Yushchenko and his "Our Ukraine" coalition constitute a serious threat to the stagnant post-soviet regime. There is every reason to believe that he will remain the main target for an attack by pro-presidential forces from the present until the eve of the 2004 presidential elections. The main objectives of the anti-Yushchenko strategy are clear: to discredit him as the national leader by depicting him as a narrow-minded nationalist and by silencing or distorting his real message that reached Ukrainians everywhere, not just in western Ukraine, i.e., the call for clean politics, transparent economy, rule of law and Christian values. We shall see what kind of strategy Victor Yushchenko and his team will implement, given that their media access will be limited by the authorities. More importantly however, it depends on the extent to which Ukrainian voters will submit to government brainwashing.

¹ "Two Ukraines?" *East European Reporter*, vol. 5, no. 4 (1992).

² The earlier survey revealed that only 1% of respondents in Lviv and 5% in Donetsk agreed that Ukraine would be better off if divided into separate countries. See Yaroslav Hrytsak, "Shifting Identities in Western and Eastern Ukraine," *New School for Social Research. The East and Central Europe Program. Bulletin*, vol. 5/3, no. 18 February 1995), p. 7. The recent survey confirms these findings indirectly: 58% of the young respondents in Lviv and 47% in Donetsk answered positively to the question whether they would agree, if necessary, to defend their country with arms. (The national average for the positive answers was 51%; negative 16% and 33% remained undecided). See *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 23 September 2001, p. 18.

³ Yevgeniy Golovakha, *Transformiruyushcheyesia obshchestvo. Opyt sociologicheskogo monitoringa v Ukrainie*. Kiev: Institute of Sociology, 1996, p. 102. Two years earlier, in another survey, 20% of respondents stated socialism would be the most desirable economic system for Ukraine, 18% preferred capitalism, 20% expressed uncertainty, while 42% rejected both systems and suggested that Ukraine should opt for its own way. All these results largely correlate with subsequent sociological findings. A number of surveys carried out in 2000–2001 proved that there are some 14–17% of respondents who support the communist ideology, 11–19% who support pro-Western national democrats, there are also some smaller groups that support other political/ideological trends, and up to 40% who "don't care". See *Den*, 24 July 2001, p. 1.

⁴ *Politychnyi portret Ukrayiny*, no. 18 (Kyiv: Democratic Initiatives Center, 1997), pp. 111–118.

⁵ *Den*, 16 July 1998, p. 1.

- ⁶ *The Economist*, 4 February 1995, p. 27.
- ⁷ Yuriy Andrukhovych, *Krytyka*, vol. 6, no. 6 (June 2002), p. 2.
- ⁸ Yevhen Holovakha, "Osoblyvosti politychnoyi svidomosti: ambivalentnist suspilstva ta osobystosti," *Politolohichni chytannia*, no. 1 (1992), pp. 24–39.
- ⁹ See, e.g., Yevhen Stakh, "Khronika odnogo dnia z zhyttia vilnoyi Ukrayiny," *Ukrayinska pravda*, 10 April 2002; www.ppravda.com.ua
- ¹⁰ The most extensive and impartial account of the election violations can be found at the web-site of the Committee of Ukrainian Electors, one a few major NGOs that had monitored the election campaign in virtually every region, due to financial and technical assistance of TACIS and some other international organizations. See www.hq.org.ua.htm
- ¹¹ Taras Kuzio, "'Antinationalist' Campaign to Discredit 'Our Ukraine'," *RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report*, vol. 4, no. 14 (9 April 2002).
- ¹² Tatiana Korobova, "Strana voskhodiashchego zastoya?" *Grani*, no. 13, 2002; www.grani.kiev.ua.htm
- ¹³ The colourful map of Ukraine that reflects the results of the voting in each region is available at www.hq.org.ua/electionresults/2423.htm See also *Dzerkalo tyzhnia*, 6—13 April 2002; www.zn.kiev.ua/nn/show/388/34402.htm
- ¹⁴ "New Tape Translation of Kuchma Allegedly Ordering Falsification of Presidential Election returns," *KPNNews*, 14 February 2001.
- ¹⁵ Keith A. Darden, "Lackmail as a Tool of State Domination: Ukraine Under Kuchma," *East European Constitutional Review*, vol. 10, nos. 2–3 (Spring–Summer 2001);
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*

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