



**Tomas Kavaliauskas, Tatiana Zhurzhenko**  
**Post-Orange Ukraine: Lost years?**

In an interview conducted before Euromaidan commenced, Tatiana Zhurzhenko discusses the intricacies of regional tensions surrounding Ukraine, taking into consideration questions of memory, language and a putative civic, liberal Ukrainian nationalism.

*History can be compared to a river -- sometimes its slow and smooth flow turns into a fast and turbulent cataract. In the last weeks, Ukrainian society has awakened and experienced a profound change that, under normal conditions, takes months or even years. A clear pro-European public consensus, which had crystalized in response to the failure of the Ukrainian government to sign the Association Agreement with the EU, resulted in mass protests threatening the corrupt regime of Viktor Yanukovich. The ruling Party of Regions tries to play the old "East vs West" game, mobilizing pro-Russian sentiments in eastern and southern Ukraine. While EU politicians still wonder what went wrong, Moscow is waiting for the weakened Ukrainian regime, unpopular at home and isolated abroad, to fall into its open arms.*

The following conversation about Ukrainian politics, problems of national identity and the country's relations with Russia and Poland took place in June 2013. Today, against the backdrop of the revolutionary Euromaidan, it seems hopelessly out-dated. And yet, some "eternal" Ukrainian questions addressed will certainly reappear as soon as the political crisis is solved. Moreover, I believe that the crisis has made these questions even more prescient. If it is true that a new nation was born during Euromaidan, will the Russian language continue to split it? Do we need a civic, liberal Ukrainian nationalism, which would also speak Russian and embrace the East and South? How can we dismantle the present semi-authoritarian regime, which uses "selective justice" for excluding and punishing political opponents? If Yulia Tymoshenko were released from prison, what would be her role in Ukrainian politics? Why do Russians still see the Ukrainian protests through the old imperial lens? Would a pro-Ukrainian lobby in Russia be possible? These open questions, even if they are not explicitly posed, are at the heart of the following interview. Signed, Tatiana Zhurzhenko, 15 December 2013



Kyiv, 1 December 2004. Photo: jf1234. Source: [Wikimedia](#)

**Tomas Kavaliauskas:** In 1989, and even in the 1990s, citizens in the Baltic States, the Visegrad countries and in Russia as well as Ukraine were perceived by westerners as easterners. Lithuanians, like Ukrainians, would go to France or West Germany only to be mesmerized by these country's economic achievements. Before the 1990s, being on the eastern side of Iron Curtain meant that we lacked essential food supplies and experienced collective humiliation standing in line for bananas or sometimes even milk. At that time "East was East". Would you say that today, because of the enlargement of the EU and of NATO, only Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians, along with the Moldovians, continue to be perceived as hailing from "Eastern Europe" or would you rather treat countries like Poland or Czech Republic as Eastern Europe too? What is your perspective on "Central Europe" today?

**Tatiana Zhurzhenko:** As Larry Wolff famously argued, "Eastern Europe" was an intellectual invention of the eighteenth century. It was during the Enlightenment that what had previously been the more prominent division of Europe into north and south was replaced by the opposition of the West associated with "civilization" and the East, seen as "backward" and "barbaric". Since then, the political map of Europe has changed a lot, but the East–West division has framed the cultural imagination of Europeans right up until today. As we all know, in the second half of the twentieth century, "Eastern Europe" was a synonym for the Soviet sphere of influence and an essential element in the Cold War geopolitical order. Dissidents such as Milan Kundera tried to challenge this political division of Europe by re–imagining its symbolic map. His concept of "Central Europe" (as a part of the West in terms of culture and civilization, but kidnapped by an alien Russian power) worked for the Visegrád countries. It helped their political elites to reinvent collective identities and eventually join the EU. The Baltic States have a structurally similar narrative of "Soviet occupation", which proved no less politically effective, even if at the cost of alienating the Russian minorities.

So, what is left of "Eastern Europe" today? Certainly this concept is much more ambivalent and elusive than twenty years ago. In western eyes (and this is still a hegemonic view), the "new" Eastern Europe consists first of all of Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. These are countries with an indefinite future, "lost in transition". They are fragments of the old geopolitical order still seeking their proper place in Europe and, as such, considered in need of civilizing guidance. Unlike the Visegrád countries, where Russian dominance was merely political and military, in the "new" Eastern Europe, Russia's influence is very much about culture, language and a common past; for these countries it is more difficult to redefine their national identities and decide

upon their EU future. The countries of the South Caucasus are sometimes also considered part of the "new" Eastern Europe according to the same logic. In this sense, Eastern Europe is not a geographic region, but a kind of waiting room, a purgatory for those who still have to do some homework to become a European nation. Russia, with its unfinished transition to democracy, in principle belongs to this group of countries too but, in fact, is rarely referred to as a part of the "new" Eastern Europe. And of course, Russian elites definitely do not see their country as part of Eastern Europe but as Russia, one of the European great powers. In the Russian language, which adapts only slowly to new geopolitical realities, "Eastern Europe" usually means the countries of the former Soviet block, to the west of the former Soviet border. Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova are usually referred to as the "near abroad" or "former Soviet republics", but almost never as "Eastern Europe".

Today, "Eastern Europe" can no longer be associated with economic shortages and contrasted with the prosperous West. Market economies and consumer capitalism have, in the meanwhile, also arrived in the former communist countries, such that consumption standards in many large eastern European cities do not differ much from those in western capitals (though quality of life remains another question altogether). True, Moldova still remains one of the poorest countries in Europe, and in small mono-industrial Ukrainian towns everyday life is often about survival, while the new rich prefer to live in Vienna and London. But at the same time, inequality has also grown in the West. The socio-economic relevance of the East-West divide has faded away in Europe, especially after the 2008 economic crisis; it has also been increasingly overlaid by new tensions between the rich North and the impoverished South.

**TK:** In Ukraine we recently saw fierce debates and even a fistfight in parliament over the issue of Russian as a second state language. In February 2012, Latvia had a referendum on the same issue. What similarities or differences do you see over the issue of Russian as a second official language in Ukraine and Latvia?

**TZ:** The conflict you mention emerged in July 2012, when the Ukrainian parliament passed the bill "On the fundamentals of national language policy." According to this law, Russian can be used as an official language alongside Ukrainian in those regions and local communities where it is spoken by more than ten per cent of the local population; the same applies to other minority languages in Ukraine (such as Hungarian, Bulgarian and Tatar, among others). The new law was perceived as an attack on the Ukrainian language and on the rights of the Ukrainophone population because, according to its critics, it legitimizes the de facto dominant status of Russian in eastern and southern Ukraine, and discriminates against the Ukrainian-speaking minority in these regions by providing local bureaucrats with an excuse not to use Ukrainian. The bill was pushed through against all procedural requirements, and it goes without saying that its sponsors, notorious pro-Russian politicians from the Party of Regions, were not interested in any public discussion of their draft. While they referred to western experience of bilingualism and the European Charter of Minority Languages, the law was criticized by the OSCE and the Venice Commission for instrumentalizing linguistic minority rights in favour of Russian, which can hardly be considered a minority language in Ukraine.

Having faced opposition in parliament, the criticisms of experts and even street protests, President Yanukovich appointed a commission to work on amending the controversial law, but later approved it without major changes. Most

Ukrainian observers interpreted the new legislative initiative of the Party of Regions as the opening of the parliamentary elections race (elections took place in October 2012). Indeed, the Party of Regions, whose electorate is concentrated in eastern and southern Ukraine, has promised for many years to give Russian the status of the second state language; this was also one of Yanukovich's electoral promises back in 2009. However, the new bill brought the dominant Party of Regions very little electoral gains. Moreover, it was quickly forgotten and hardly changed the existing status quo in the regions.

While the language issue has been politically instrumentalized in Ukraine, both the promoters of Ukrainian and the defenders of Russian tend to overestimate the role of the state and believe in an ideal legal arrangement that is supposed to serve the interests of "their" group. But in fact, in most regions of Ukraine, people use both languages without much reflection. Unlike politicians, intellectuals and "linguistic entrepreneurs", they rarely connect the use of language with ethnic identity. And don't forget that the rule of law has not fully arrived in Ukraine yet. Laws often cannot be enforced even through the court and linguistic rights, like other rights, remain rather abstract. If you are a member of the Swedish minority in Finland and face a police officer, your primary concern might be as to whether he is able to address you in your language; Ukrainian citizens encountering police definitely have other concerns: how to avoid mistreatment and physical abuse, for example.

The language issue, among others, illustrates what Mykola Riabchuk calls Ukrainian ambiguities.<sup>1</sup> The country has a vast Russophone population: while ethnic Russians, according to the 2001 census, constitute only 17 per cent of the entire population, around 50 per cent of Ukrainian citizens call Russian their "language of convenience". According to the constitution, Ukrainian is the only state language, but Ukraine is a de facto bilingual country. According to one recent survey, 24 per cent of the Ukrainian citizens would like to see Russian a second state language and another 25 per cent a second official language in some regions of the country. Basically, this means that half of Ukrainian citizens are for improving the legal status of the Russian language but, paradoxically, with the exception of Crimea, these preferences have not triggered grassroots initiatives. Language stands very low on the list of people's concerns; Ukrainians are more preoccupied with economic issues, the quality of healthcare and education and omnipresent corruption. While the Party of Regions and the Communists traditionally lobby for elevating the status of the Russian language, there is neither a Russophone party nor a party of ethnic Russians in Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Russophones do not really feel like fighting for their rights.

And here is my answer to your question about parallels and differences over the issue of Russian in Latvia and Ukraine. In Latvia, Russians are constituted as a "minority" by citizenship law, education system and language policy. The dominant historical narrative of "Soviet occupation" stigmatizes this group as the descendants of Soviet colonizers. At the same time, Russians have their media, organizations and political parties; they are even represented in the European Parliament. The cultural and linguistic boundaries between Latvians and Russians are rather clear-cut. In most regions of Ukraine, however, these boundaries are blurred, and ethnic Russians are hardly to be distinguished from the large Russophone population (Crimea and western Ukraine can be considered exceptions, although for different reasons). The dominant view among Ukrainian intellectuals is that this situation needs to be changed: Russophone Ukrainians must return to their abandoned "native language", that is, Ukrainian. And ethnic Russians should be reconstituted as a minority or

assimilated, so that Ukraine becomes a "normal" nation–state without what Riabchuk calls "ambiguities". At the same time, the proponents of Russian as a second state language would like to enshrine the existing bilingualism in law. Both approaches are seductive in their simplicity, but I don't believe in simple solutions. I personally think that the Ukrainian state could do much more to promote the Ukrainian language, literature and culture in an intelligent way: it could pursue a policy that would encourage the Russophone Ukrainians to identify with their state instead of forcing people to choose between multiple identities and thus further polarize Ukrainian society.

**TK:** The interwar period for the Lithuanian capital Vilnius was quite dramatic: it was occupied by Poland and, in 1939, given back to Lithuania by Stalin, albeit only because of his anti–Polishness. And Lviv had a similarly dramatic experience during that time. Not long ago, a group of Polish nationalists came to the Polish cultural centre in Vilnius to perform rap, in which they aggressively asserted that Vilnius and Lviv will be Polish again. What tensions do you experience in western Ukraine concerning the Polish political heritage?

**TZ:** Indeed, there are some parallels in the historical fates of these two cities. Like Vilnius, Lviv (Lwów, Lemberg) was in the nineteenth century a multicultural city with a significant Jewish population. And like Lithuanians in Vilnius, Ukrainians in Lviv were a minority. With the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, the Ukrainian–Polish military conflict over Lviv and east Galicia broke out. Ukrainians lost this war, and Lviv became a Polish city, one of the most important academic and cultural centres of the Second Polish Republic. The memory of this half–forgotten war is not as painful as the more recent trauma of the brutal Polish–Ukrainian conflict during the Second World War. And yet, memorials and war cemeteries of the Polish–Ukrainian war of 1918–19 were restored during the post–Soviet decades, the Eaglets Cemetery in Lviv being one of the most prominent examples. The local Ukrainian community, which perceived the reconstruction of this Polish pantheon as a provocation, initiated a new Ukrainian war memorial nearby and reinvented the interwar cult of the Ukrainian heroes, the Sich Riflemen (*Sichovi Stril'tsi*). The controversial restoration of the Eaglet Cemetery, which the Lviv authorities opposed, significantly complicated the dialogue between Warsaw and Kyiv. The issue was solved only after the newly elected president, Viktor Yushchenko, who was popular in western Ukraine and supported in Poland, mediated in this conflict. The liberal Ukrainian intellectuals in Lviv and the Greek Catholic church leaders worked hard to turn this memorial into a site of Ukrainian–Polish reconciliation, but it still provokes anti–Polish sentiments.<sup>2</sup> There is a similar Polish–Lithuanian military cemetery in Vilnius, and you will probably agree with me that such memorials are inherently ambivalent, and even if they are integrated into the official narrative of reconciliation, international cooperation and European integration, they still can be used for mobilization by nationalist groups.

Just as Stalin returned Vilnius to the Lithuanians, the old nationalist dream of a Ukrainian Lviv was fulfilled in 1939. Ukraine was united, but under Stalin's boot, with the new regime targeting not only Poles but also Ukrainian nationalists and those who sympathized with them. After the Second World War, Lviv became a Soviet Ukrainian city. Its Jewish population had perished in the Holocaust and those Poles who had not been deported to Siberia left to Poland, afraid of both the Ukrainian nationalist and the Stalinist terror. As William J. Risch demonstrated in his study on post–war Lviv, Soviet authorities tried to erase all traces of Polish memory.<sup>3</sup> Even some Polish monuments, such as those to the Polish King Jan III Sobieski and to the

playwright Aleksander Fredro, were transferred to Poland. After national independence in 1989, the Ukrainians of Lviv, who perceived themselves as the collective victim of the communist regime, were preoccupied with the de-Sovietization of their city. Seeking to establish their national narrative as hegemonic, they excluded the memories of "others". Today, Lviv remains a stronghold of Ukrainian nationalism (since 2010, the right-wing nationalist Svoboda party has a majority in the local council). But at the same time, Lviv claims to be a European city proud of its multicultural heritage. Its mayor, Andriy Sadovyi, who hails from the NGO sector, has good contacts in Poland. The municipal authorities want to present the city as modern and inclusive ("A city open to the world" is the official motto). Institutions such as the Ukrainian Catholic University, the cultural magazine *Ji* and the Centre for Urban History of East Central Europe all contribute to a lively liberal intellectual milieu. Due to their efforts, some new inclusive commemorative projects have emerged recently, among them an initiative aimed at increasing the visibility of the local sites of Jewish memory. In 2011, the memorial to the Polish professors executed by the Nazis in 1941 was erected as a common initiative of the Lviv and Wrocław authorities.

There can be no doubt that Lviv still fuels the cultural imagination and nostalgia of the Poles. In the last two decades, Lviv has become an important destination for Polish nostalgic tourism. Buses with visitors from Poland arrive with especially high frequency on weekends and holidays. One-day tours to Lviv usually include a visit to the Lviv opera, a walk through the historical centre and an obligatory visit to the Lychakiv Cemetery. Polish nostalgia is of course understandable. Svetlana Boym, a Russian-American scholar, recently rehabilitated the notion of nostalgia. She suggested the need to differentiate between restorative and reflective nostalgia. While the first "evokes national past and future", "gravitates towards collective pictorial symbols" and "takes itself dead seriously", the second is more about individual and cultural memory; it can be ironic and humorous too, "as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgement or critical reflection".<sup>4</sup> Reflective nostalgia, in the broader sense, is the nurturing ground for any culture, while restorative nostalgia, exploited by irresponsible politicians and blended with conspiracy theories, can become dangerous and destructive, especially in our region, where national borders were drawn quite recently, with physical and symbolic violence.

**TK:** My next question is a continuation of the previous one: Vilnius and Lviv are the objects of Polish, imperialistic nostalgia. But how do you perceive contemporary Polish politics towards Ukraine? Not only in terms of diplomatic efforts to promote Ukraine within the framework of the Eastern Partnership, but also with regard to the Poland's active role in the memory politics game? From your Ukrainian perspective, do you see Poland today acting along the lines of Jerzy Giedroyc seeking a true dialogue with his neighbours? And how do you view the vision for the region, to construct a federation of Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Poland?

**TZ:** Indeed, unlike other countries of the Visegrád group, Poland has developed an "Ostpolitik" which has deep historical roots. As you already mentioned, the contemporary doctrine of Polish foreign policy towards its neighbours goes back to Jerzy Giedroyc. His vision of a future Eastern Europe influenced a whole generation of Polish intellectuals and shaped the political ethos of Solidarity (*Solidarnosc*). Already in 1990, Lech Walesa, Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuron established contacts with the newly formed Ukrainian popular movement *Narodnyi Ruch*. On 3 September 1990, even

before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Polish Senate officially denounced Operation Vistula. In 1991, Poland was the first state to recognize Ukraine's independence, a conscious act of the Polish leadership that carried great symbolic weight. In the early 1990s, this "solidarity ethos" determined Poland's policy towards Ukraine. In 1993, the 50th anniversary of the Volyn tragedy went practically unnoticed, because there was a consensus among Polish politicians and intellectuals that Ukrainians were not yet ready to critically address the dark pages of the common past. As Timothy Snyder put it, Polish national elites demonstrated the ability to differentiate "between state interests and national memories".<sup>5</sup>

Among the three new eastern neighbours of Poland sharing the historical legacy of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ukraine was the biggest and geopolitically the most important. The Lithuanian elites were united in anti-communist consensus and their determination to join the EU and NATO. They saw Poland as a rival rather than a partner. Meanwhile, the increasingly authoritarian Belarusian regime had already turned its back on Poland in the mid-1990s and embarked on a pro-Russian course. In opposition to both, Ukraine, torn between the EU and Russia, was an ideal object for Polish paternalism. For the new Ukrainian state, Poland's support was crucial in the first years of independence, and helped to counterbalance the strong Russian influence. Poland became a model of economic and political reform and, later, an advocate of Ukrainian interests in the EU. It has been one of the few geopolitical allies to support Ukraine's accession to the EU and NATO, even more resolute in this respect than the Ukrainian leadership itself. In 1997, the "Common declaration of the Presidents of Ukraine and Poland on mutual understanding and reconciliation" was signed in Kyiv. Good relations with his Polish counterpart were important for Leonid Kuchma, who in his second term became embroiled in political scandals and came under severe criticism both at home and in the West. Polish president Kwasniewski tried to prevent the international isolation of Kuchma's government at the same time as supporting the Ukrainian democratic opposition. While in 2003 the Ukrainian and Polish parliaments became caught up in contentious debates on the interpretation of the Volyn tragedy, both presidents met for a commemorative ceremony in the village of Pavlivka in Volyn and made a joint statement on the need for reconciliation. The democratic opposition in Ukraine criticized this act as a "reconciliation from above" and actually denied Kuchma the right to represent Ukraine in the reconciliation process.

It was during the Orange Revolution in 2004 that Poland showed the highest expression of Polish paternalism for the young Ukrainian democracy and for Ukrainian independence. Alexander Kwasniewski and Lech Walesa took the role of mediators and helped solve the conflict in Kyiv peacefully. It looked like the Polish dream of a pro-European democratic Ukraine truly independent from Russia was going to become true — a visible sign of the success of Poland's *Ostpolitik*. In Poland, Viktor Yushchenko was seen as the political leader of a new generation, pro-European and free from the burden of the communist past. But radical political changes were soon to occur in Poland as well: in September 2005, Lech Kaczyński became president and soon afterward, his right-wing populist PiS Party won the majority in the Polish Parliament. The new conservative and nationalist Polish leadership instrumentalized historical memory in domestic as well as in international politics, re-opening the political confrontation with both Russia and Germany. In the context of the escalating Bush–Putin rivalry, anti-communist and anti-Moscow sentiments became an ideological priority in Ukrainian–Polish relations. However, Kaczyński and Yushchenko soon lost popular support at

home and respect abroad. Both found themselves in a marginalized position appealing to the right-wing and conservative segments of their electorates and thus unwillingly reanimating old nationalist ghosts. Yushchenko's politics of painting the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) and its leaders Stepan Bandera and Yuriy Shukhevych as heroes, although not directed against Poland, did not improve relations between the two countries.

What we observe today is a deep frustration and fatigue within Ukraine, which can be easily understood — current political trends in Ukraine are indeed depressing. This does not mean, however, that Poland will abandon its *Ostpolitik* and give up Ukraine. But frustration and disappointment with the Ukrainian political developments removed some of the old taboos going back to the Solidarity era — one such taboo being the politicization of past conflicts. Now, not only the right-wing nationalist Ukrainophobes, but also mainstream Polish politicians don't hesitate in using rather harsh language, accusing Ukrainians of mass killings, ethnic cleansing, even genocide, and demanding apologies. This year, the anniversary of the Volyn events (which in the previous twenty years served as an indicator of the Ukrainian-Polish relations) has proven that even a successful reconciliation process can suffer from backlash. On 20 June 2013, the Polish Senate adopted a statement on the 70th anniversary of the Volyn tragedy, in which these events were referred to as "ethnic cleansing with elements of genocide". This statement was perceived in Ukraine as a hostile act and a step backwards in the Ukrainian-Polish reconciliation process. Unlike in 2003, when the administration of president Kuchma invested much effort in staging the 60th anniversary as a reconciling ceremony, President Yanukovych evidently had other political priorities. A regional federation of Lithuania, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland seems to me something of a fantasy, which from time to time animates academic conferences but is not realistic. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth lies in the distant past, and while historians might see it differently, as a social scientist, I doubt that these countries, with rather different political regimes and geopolitical affiliations, have much in common today. Some years ago, at the peak of the gas wars with Russia, energy security seemed to be such a uniting issue. I think it was in 2006 that Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus proposed to develop a common energy policy for Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine as transit countries. However, time proved that all European countries are rather egoistic in this respect and prefer to negotiate with Russia bilaterally.

**TK:** My next question is about Yulia Tymoshenko: is she a political martyr or an oligarch who has lost her power??

**TZ:** Your question is quite illustrative of how Ukrainian as well as European public opinion is polarized on the Tymoshenko issue. I actually think that she is both, and this makes her case rather complicated. Her first trial was clearly an example of politically motivated justice and ugly revenge, and I don't know who could not feel sympathy with her as a human being, as a still young, ambitious woman locked away from her family and excluded from active public life. At the same time, her martyrdom is a political spectacle staged mainly "under western eyes" with the aim of keeping alive the media attention and returning one day to Ukrainian politics. As I argue in my article recently published in Eurozine, politicizing her body and turning it into a site of personal resistance has been Tymoshenko's main strategy since her arrest in summer 2011.<sup>6</sup>

Tymoshenko for me is a tragic figure, and I mean by that not just her personal fate, that of a very successful businesswoman and politician, who lost

everything including her individual freedom in a bitter fight without rules. What happened to Tymoshenko is tragic because it testifies to the impossibility of a moral alternative in Ukrainian politics, as the moral alternative she claimed to represent was in fact reduced to a populist PR campaign. While the imprisoned Tymoshenko sees herself as the leader of the opposition to the increasingly authoritarian Yanukovich regime, a significant part of Ukrainian society perceives her not as a solution, but as part of the problem. Some Ukrainian analysts even argue that Tymoshenko should not, under any circumstances, be released before the coming presidential elections, as she will split the opposition and spell disaster for the democratic camp.<sup>7</sup> I don't think that such pragmatic considerations, even if based on rational arguments, can justify an abuse of law. Moreover, I agree with Taras Vozniak, who some time ago wrote in his blog in *Ukrainska Pravda* that Tymoshenko's case reveals the moral crisis not only of the Yanukovich regime and the political opposition, but also of Ukrainian society in general, whose plebeian instincts are exploited by the politicians.<sup>8</sup>

The example of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a Russian oligarch who also had to pay for his political ambitions with his personal freedom, demonstrates that imprisonment can force a deep personal evolution and create a new type of a (potential) political leader so far missing in post-Soviet politics. Can Julia Tymoshenko, indeed a strong woman, evolve in this way and leave prison as a moral leader of the nation and not just a revenge-driven politician? We don't know how her case will develop and if she will soon get a chance to return to the political arena, or stay behind bars for years or end up in exile in the West. But if Yanukovich is re-elected for another five years, Tymoshenko risks getting a life long sentence for alleged involvement in a contract murder of the Donetsk businessman Shcherban (a new criminal case was opened against her in order to eliminate her from political life once and for all). In this case, she might repeat the fate of Khodorkovsky.

In fact, the Tymoshenko and Khodorkovsky cases have many parallels, just as the new democracies in the post-Soviet space have a lot in common. These are essentially oligarchic regimes with a weak rule of law and a judiciary used by interest groups as an instrument of political infighting. And just like Putin, who cannot release Khodorkovsky and had to stage the next process against him, Yanukovich runs the risk of becoming a long-term hostage of his imprisoned political opponent. In Slavic folklore, Koschei, an incarnation of evil forces, cannot be killed by conventional weapons. His soul is hidden separately from his body inside a needle, which is in an egg, which is in a duck, which is in a hare, which is in an iron chest, which is buried under a green oak tree, which is on the island of Buyan in the ocean. As with Koschei, the political immortality of some post-Soviet autocrats is hidden in a prison cell where their political opponents are locked away.

**TK:** Your wonderful essay "The Myth of Two Ukraines" ends as follows: "I will never agree to the argument that in order to open a new window the old one has to be closed. What is also true, however, is that all windows should be cleaned from time to time."<sup>9</sup> The window here is the one to Europe, the old promise by Peter the Great, but as you mention earlier in this essay, eastern Ukraine used to have a window to Russia. Then how do we harmonize regional mentalities and coordinate political visions if different windows provide different vistas?

**TZ:** The essay you cited was written more than ten years ago, and I am not sure if I would still use the metaphor of the "window to Europe" today. In a

way, a window assumes a wall, the key symbol of the Cold War. The choice of this metaphor was not least due to my personal experience of having lived in Ukraine during the 1990s and being able to go the West only on rare occasions after collecting mountains of papers and queuing for hours in front of western consulates in Kyiv. I believe that the world has become more interconnected in the last decade. And while the Schengen visa regime remains an obstacle to free movement, Europe is nevertheless "growing together", many young people from the East speak foreign languages and travel throughout the continent as a matter of course. And with the Internet and Skype, we do not even have to move physically to exchange ideas with others.

And yet, such personal contacts, however important they are, cannot replace an institutionalized exchange of information and knowledge which is crucial for the political and economic modernization of Ukraine. In this sense, I believe that the metaphor of the window is still relevant. The Ukrainian government does not do much to facilitate intellectual and cultural exchange with the West (but at least it does not hamper it openly as Putin's government does now), and very little has been done to Europeanize the Ukrainian education system and academic institutions. For sure, the historical connections and cultural closeness to Russia cannot compensate for this, even more so as Russia's own "window to the West" now risks being bricked over.

But still, like ten years ago, I don't believe that the cultural isolation of Ukraine from Russia is not the right instrument to create a strong national identity. I must say that it has become more difficult to articulate and defend this position. One reason for this difficulty is Russia's neo-imperial drive. We all know that, at least since the Orange Revolution, the Kremlin has been using information warfare in the post-Soviet space; a lot was written on how Moscow is promoting the idea of "Russkiy mir". The second reason is the popular, often vulgar interpretation of post-colonialism, which has conquered the post-Soviet space. Today, almost every Ukrainian intellectual acquainted with the post-colonial approach will tell you that, as a nation, we still see ourselves with Russian eyes. What I call a "window", some of my opponents would probably call "Russian glasses" — through which, they argue, Ukrainians still view the world. I am not going to deny the asymmetry in Ukrainian-Russian relations, but I do think that the post-colonial discourse often becomes an excuse for Ukrainian national complexes. And I am not inclined to panic about Ukrainians being allegedly "brainwashed" by Russian media. Decades of Soviet propaganda resulted in fact in a total failure; the masses ended up longing for the western way of life and are now more receptive than ever of western values. Why should we consider Ukrainians so stupid as to be indoctrinated by the Kremlin-controlled media, if more and more Russians themselves feel disgust for them?

Following the emergence of the opposition movement in Russia in the last two years, I was surprised that the Ukrainian experience of the Orange Revolution was never actually seriously discussed there: it was not even seen as a lesson worth studying. On the other hand, Ukrainian national democrats lost interest in the Russian oppositional movement as soon as they convinced themselves that Navalnyi and Udaltsov are the same kind of Russian nationalists as Putin. What I am trying to say is that both Ukrainian and Russian societies badly need a dialogue, a platform for an intellectual exchange and a space for debates. Such debates should not be instrumentalized for political reasons, as all too predictably happened in the historians' discussion of the genocidal character of the Famine. Yaroslav Hrytsak, a prominent Ukrainian historian from Lviv, once told me that, in the 1990s, Ukrainian and Polish intellectuals

interested in reconciliation between both nations created various institutional structures that made dialogue possible. And I think it was also Hrytsak who once noted that Russia is still waiting for its Jerzy Giedroyc to help it to come to terms with its new borders and finally accept the independence of its western neighbours.

Why has eastern Ukraine, the Russian-speaking borderland, not become such a window, a bridge between the two countries? A similar question I was often asked in the West about Ukraine — why has it not become a bridge between Europe and Russia? The answer lies in the same problem of marginality, in the lack of an indigenous voice and of an original project or vision for the future. After the Orange Revolution, Ukraine missed its chance to become a successful model for the post-Soviet countries including Russia. It is now a problem rather than a potential partner for the EU. In a similar way, Eastern Ukrainians failed to reinvent their regional identity (or identities) in a positive way and to offer an alternative to Ukrainian ethnic nationalism as well as to nostalgic Russian pan-Slavism.

**TK:** My last question is on the European football championship: what did it mean for Kyiv, Donetsk, Lviv and Kharkiv to host such a multicultural event? Did football clean some of the windows to Europe? And since this tournament was co-hosted with Poland, was there a sense of solidarity between these two European countries?

**TZ:** The Ukrainian government has been presenting the Euro 2012 as a success story, but the public opinion in the country is more critical about its outcomes. Local media reported on ineffective use of public funds and alleged corruption; the mega event did not give the expected boost to the Ukrainian economy and failed to attract the desired volumes of foreign investment. According to Mykola Riabchuk, "partial achievements and minor success stories notwithstanding, Euro 2012 was a wasted opportunity for Ukraine in terms of both substantial modernization and positive image making".<sup>10</sup> Superfast Hyundai trains purchased from South Korea proved ill suited to the Ukrainian winter, a fact that the Ukrainian government had to acknowledge. Now, not much is left of the festive mood of summer 2012.

It was probably naive to expect that such a sport event, even on a European scale, would work a miracle and solve Ukraine's numerous problems. Sadly but not surprisingly, sport fell prey to politics, and it could hardly be different in a divided country frustrated by corruption and tired of political scandals. To be fair, it was Tymoshenko's government that wasted time, repeatedly failed to fulfil UEFA's requirements and nearly lost Euro 2012 for Ukraine. In my view, the current government can take the credit for the relatively good organization and smooth running of the championship. But in a bitter paradox, the persecution of the opposition and the authoritarian drive of the current leadership made it impossible to achieve the main political goal of this event, namely the rebranding of Ukraine as a European country. The championship was overshadowed by the Tymoshenko case; Angela Merkel even called European politicians to boycott the Ukrainian part, and western media discussed the possibility of transferring the final stage of the tournament to Poland. As an attempt to put pressure on the Ukrainian leadership, the idea of a boycott did not raise popular support for Tymoshenko; just the opposite, it was used by the authorities to evoke anti-western sentiments and hostility towards the opposition, which was ready to sacrifice the long awaited sports festival for the sake of its leader's release.<sup>11</sup> Another hot topic in western media in the wake of the championship was racism and xenophobia in the Ukrainian

stadiums. In a campaign launched by the BBC both Poland and, especially, Ukraine were presented as "dangerous places where crypto-fascist violence and intolerance reigns supreme".<sup>12</sup>

Against the background of this moral panic and political manipulation, it is even more surprising that the local experience of Euro 2012 was rather positive and not overshadowed by any significant accidents, conflicts or acts of violence. Ukrainians celebrated in the streets and in fan zones together with thousands of European football fans, and the collective mood was just great. In Kyiv and Lviv, locals have long been used to western tourists but, even for them, this experience was outstanding. What should one say then about Donetsk or my hometown Kharkiv, industrial centres of eastern Ukraine, rarely visited by western tourists? I was not in Ukraine last summer to experience Euro 2012, but heard the impressions of my excited teenage son who saw three matches in Kharkiv. The city hosted the Dutch fans who marched through the whole city warmly welcomed and joined by thousands of local residents. Numerous amateur videos of this "orange invasion" (orange is the colour of the Dutch team) can be found on YouTube. I believe that this collective experience of encountering "Europe" at home was indeed very special for the Kharkiv residents and overall positive. Today, as the Russian government, concerned about the security of sportsmen and tourists, develops plans for a mass evacuation of the local residents from Sochi for the whole period of the 2014 Olympic Games, the Ukrainian experience seems even more unique. I don't know if one can trust a recent sociological survey that correlates the rise of patriotism in eastern Ukraine with hosting the championship;<sup>13</sup> it could just be wishful thinking. But in any case, despite all the scandals and political manipulation, Euro 2012 is one of the very few positive symbols in recent Ukrainian history that is accepted by the whole nation. The bitter irony is that this positive symbol is associated with the Yanukovych government, while Tymoshenko — the anti-symbol of Euro 2012 — represents the democratic opposition.

I am not sure if Euro 2012 affected Ukraine's relations with Poland in any special way and if it has generated any particular sense of solidarity between these two countries. My impression is that the championship hardly brought something new to the mutual perceptions of Poles and Ukrainians. While Ukrainian journalists reported on successful preparations and less corrupt organization of the championship in Poland as a positive example for their country, Polish politicians expressed their regrets about the continuing prosecution of the opposition in Ukraine, which could have hampered the whole event. But there was also an element of rivalry in this story, and Angela Merkel's idea of boycotting Ukraine found some supporters among right-wing nationalists in Poland. In general, however, the media and politicians in Ukraine framed the championship as a "national" event, and the aspect of partnership with Poland was rather marginal.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mykola Ryabchuk, *Playing with Ambiguities*, *Current Politics in Ukraine Blog*, 24 June 2012, [ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/06/24/playing-with-ambiguities/](http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/06/24/playing-with-ambiguities/)

<sup>2</sup> Tatiana Zhurzenko, "The Border as Pain and Remedy: Memorials and Commemorations of the Polish-Ukrainian Conflict of 1918-1919 in Lviv and Przemysl", in: *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, [dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.801416](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2013.801416)

<sup>3</sup> William J. Risch, *The Ukrainian West: Culture and the Fate of Empire in Soviet Lviv*, Harvard University Press, 2011

<sup>4</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, Basic Books, 2001, 49-50

<sup>5</sup>

Timothy Snyder. *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999*, Yale University Press, 2003, 274

- 6 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Yulia Tymoshenko's two bodies", Eurozine, 25 June 2013, [www.eurozine.com/articles/2013-06-25-zhurzhenko-en.html](http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2013-06-25-zhurzhenko-en.html)
- 7 Anton Shekhovtsov, "Out of harm's way", in: *Open Democracy*, 7 June 2013, [www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-shekhovtsov/out-of-harms-way](http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/anton-shekhovtsov/out-of-harms-way)
- 8 Taras Vozniak, "Tragedy of Tymoshenko or Our Own Diagnoses?", *Ukrainska Pravda Blogs*, 23 January 2013, [blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/voznjak/50ffd2acc17ac/](http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/voznjak/50ffd2acc17ac/)
- 9 Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "The Myth of Two Ukraines", Eurozine, 17 September 2002, [www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-09-17-zhurzhenko-en.html](http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2002-09-17-zhurzhenko-en.html)
- 10 Mykola Riabchuk, "On Brave Faces and a Sorry Business", *Current Politics in Ukraine Blog*, [ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/07/24/on-brave-faces-and-a-sorry-business/](http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/07/24/on-brave-faces-and-a-sorry-business/)
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Uilleam Blacker, "Eastern European Xenophobia Under Western Eyes: Euro 2012 in Poland–Ukraine", *Current Politics in Ukraine Blog*, 5 June 2012, [ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/06/05/eastern-european-xenophobia-under-western-eyes-euro-2012-in-poland-ukraine/](http://ukraineanalysis.wordpress.com/2012/06/05/eastern-european-xenophobia-under-western-eyes-euro-2012-in-poland-ukraine/)
- 13 See: [www.unian.ua/news/521037-na-donbasi-zrosla-kilkist-patriotiv-opituvannya.html](http://www.unian.ua/news/521037-na-donbasi-zrosla-kilkist-patriotiv-opituvannya.html)

---

Published 2013–12–18

Original in English

Contribution by Kulturos barai

First published in *Kulturos barai* 11/2013 (Lithuanian version); Eurozine (English version)

© Tatiana Zhurzhenko, Tomas Kavaliauskas / Kulturos barai

© Eurozine