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## Competing interpretations of the socio-political crisis in Ukraine in 2013-2016<sup>1</sup>

*Interpretações em disputa sobre a crise sociopolítica na Ucrânia em 2013-2016*

Valentin YAKUSHIK<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** This article addresses the sharp ideological conflicts which underlie attempts to characterise and explain the on-going socio-political crisis in Ukraine, which started in 2013. It argues that both academic and non-academic commentators have presented diametrically opposed interpretations of the nature of the events of Autumn 2013 – Spring 2014, as well as of the relevant interpretations of the continuing socio-political crisis facing the country. Characterisations of these events vary from a *revolution of dignity*, denunciations of *foreign intervention* and *separatist movements* to assertions of a *coup d'état* which promoted and provoked *regionalist movements* and *civil war*. A second objective of the article is therefore to demonstrate the limitations of one-dimensional, strikingly ideologised interpretations of these events and the need for scholars engaged in the social sciences to generate unbiased, multi-dimensional, multi-level visions of complex, contradictory, tectonic transformations in contemporary Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Ukraine - Revolution. Interpretation.

**Resumo:** Este artigo aborda os agudos conflitos ideológicos que subjazem às tentativas de caracterizar e explicar a crise sociopolítica em curso na Ucrânia, que abriu em 2013. Argumenta-se que os comentaristas acadêmicos e não acadêmicos apresentaram interpretações diametralmente opostas da natureza dos eventos do outono de 2013 – primavera de 2014, bem como as interpretações relevantes da contínua crise sócio-política que o país enfrenta. As caracterizações desses eventos variam de uma *revolução da dignidade*, denúncias de *intervenção estrangeira* e *movimentos separatistas* a asserções de um *golpe de estado* que promoveu e provocou *movimentos regionalistas* e *guerra civil*. Assim, um segundo objetivo do artigo é demonstrar as limitações das interpretações unidimensionais, notavelmente ideologizadas desses eventos e a necessidade dos estudiosos engajados nas ciências sociais gerarem visões imparciais, multidimensionais e multi-nível das transformações tectônicas complexas, contraditórias na Ucrânia contemporânea.

**Palavras-Chave:** Ucrânia - Revolução. Interpretação.

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### Introduction

The development of multi-aspect, multi-level understanding of the complex, contradictory, and tectonic transformations of modern Ukraine is important and topical for political science if efficient practical political programmes are to be developed which properly address the current crisis. *Multidimensionality* is proposed here as providing just such an approach to the analysis of the recent political events. Under this approach a strident fixation on any one level of analysis, and/or on any limited methodology is rejected. It is hoped that when considering the full range of issues of political changes that began in Ukraine in the autumn

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of 2013 and which have continued, in one form or another, until the present day, it is possible to overcome the narrow ideological isolation and biases which are prevalent in most of mass media covering the events in Ukraine. In this way, a much-needed departure from such subjectivist approaches, often highly sensationalist and usually borrowed from the media environment, will ultimately help Ukraine-related political studies reach the level in which an authentic academic would be possible, rather than a journalistic approach to the relevant key issues.

Several competing interpretations of the nature and content of the emerging and ongoing transformations in Ukraine have been proposed. These offer significantly different analyses from each other and vary profoundly in their depth, ideological orientation and in the policy prescriptions they propose. Such analyses relate to:

(a) the daily life of millions of Ukrainian citizens and citizens of those countries where a large (or a certain) part of the population perceive the problems of Ukraine as their own, often assessed as being of a vital importance;

(b) politicians (both Ukrainian and international / foreign) and the politicised section of the *expert community* (political scientists, economists, journalists and other *professional interpreters*, including those who position themselves as social scientists);

(c) academic research, for which the academic truth is of a higher importance than the short-term *party truths* and *corporate truths*.

Almost without exception these analyses have focused on either short-term or narrow (biased) aspects of the problem under consideration, so that when beginning from such position it is scarcely possible to comprehend the complexity of the Ukrainian socio-political crisis. Accordingly, the present research attempts to present this complexity in its proper light, so that future researchers of the subject may benefit from the inferences to be drawn from this paper's findings.

Much of the recent analysis of Ukraine's current crisis is ahistorical, failing even to acknowledge the nation's precarious socio-economic dynamics over the course of the last 25 years, a period which encompasses Ukraine's transition to independent statehood following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991. During this period, Ukraine has become notorious for its poor economic performance and the nation's rankings as defined by most prominent global socio-economic indices. Per the World Bank's *Doing Business* index, Ukraine's ranks 80<sup>th</sup> (among 137 economies examined) in 2017 on regulatory measures that enhance or restrain business activity (WORLD BANK, [2016]). More worryingly, the Ukrainian economy is perceived as being beset by persistent corruption and inefficiency (see e.g.: (RAPOZA, 2016), and has exhibited a tendency for further degradation. According to Ukrainian economist Igor Tyshkevich, the Ukrainian economy has been consistently declining in terms of its economic complexity indicators (as measured by Harvard's Centre for International Development (CID) 1995 methodology). Indeed, should present trends continue, it is feared that the country will have become hopelessly bankrupt by 2030 (TYSHKEVICH, 2016). Hence, the problem of State dysfunctionality is a powerful underlying conditioning factor which needs to be constantly borne in mind when referring to the current Ukrainian crisis.

The socio-psychological context of the post-2013 crisis reflects the general disillusionment of the Ukrainian population regarding the perspectives of both the state and "official" civil so-

ciety. In particular, according to the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) integrated survey project published in May 2015 (with V. Paniotto and N. Kharchenko being the presentation's authors), contemporary Ukrainian society is dominated by pessimistic or at least restrained perceptions on the prospects of its further development. According to KIIS, 64% of respondents expect a further deterioration in the economic situation over the next 5 years (though 42% of respondents believe that it can be improved over the same period) (PANIOTTO; KHARCHENKO, [2015], p. 9-10). Negative attitudes towards key political institutions of the State are also increasing. In March 2015, only 12% of those polled expressed confidence in the government, while confidence in Parliament was measured at minus 54% (PANIOTTO; KHARCHENKO, [2015], p. 24). In addition, a survey conducted by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation and the Razumkov Centre's sociological service among residents of Ukraine for the period from 14 to 22 November 2015 (excluding Crimea and the uncontrolled territories of Ukraine in Donetsk and Lugansk regions), in which 2009 respondents aged 18 and over were interviewed, demonstrated that Ukrainian society does not have trust in its political parties. Only 1.1% of respondents would "fully" trust these structures, while 39.2% of respondents were found to be "completely" distrustful of political parties. Only 10.7% would claim to be "generally" confident of the Parties' efficiency, while 40% would "mostly not trust" them (RAZUMKOV CENTRE, 2015).

Purely *political* interpretations of the meaning and direction of political transformations in Ukraine are directly dependent on the general positions of the relevant politicians, political parties and the related politicised expert community sections. Such a link between the political positions of the respective national elites and their representation in an *expert* form once again highlights the fact that many of the serious analysts often interpret events based on the strategic-philosophical positions of the political and intellectual leadership of their societies and their dominant components. Within the Ukrainian expert community, there are two polar positions, presenting, respectively, a *pro-European* and a *pro-Russian* side. The pro-European group includes analysts such as Sergii Datsyuk and Yuri Romanenko, while their opponents within the pro-Russian group include Mikhail Pogrebinsky, Vladimir Kornilov, Rostislav Ishchenko and Vasily Stoyakin. The latter grouping generally adopts a *conciliatory* position, both in terms of the preferred relations with Russia, and in its advocacy of Ukrainian domestic policies). Their contrasting views are discussed below.

It should be noted that, due to multiple factors, objective academic analyses of the political transformations taking place in Ukraine are currently in their infancy, if not in an embryonic stage. This is reflected both by an insufficient temporal gap between the respective processes' starting points and the beginning of their analytical interpretations. In consequence, discussion of contemporary issues, even among the expert community is subject to a high level of politicisation. However, the author hopes, that in the future it will be possible to develop such objective academic approaches and strengthen their influence (if not hegemony) in the academic and expert community both in Ukraine and abroad.

The pluralistic and antagonistic nature of contemporary political debate in Ukraine frequently manifests itself in implicit or explicit confrontation concerning interpretations of the events in Ukraine in 2013-2016. These *antagonisms of interpretation* are not to be confused conceptually with the policy debates and disputes conducted within longer-established liberal democracies, regardless how rancorous these may sometimes become or

the extent to which paradigmatic differences may arise among factions and parties. In Ukraine, such disputes can be seen as representing an existential crisis concerning not only the future size, composition and orientation of the Ukrainian state, but the continued existence of the state in a recognisable form. Thus, these debates manifest themselves in numerous ways and on different levels.

**1). Define the type and the sort of dominant processes at work (including, in particular, the dichotomies of “revolution” versus “coup d’état”, “civil war” versus “foreign intervention”, “European integration” versus “de-industrialization” “external control of the Ukrainian state”).**

It should be noted that both the U.S. and Russia have expressed their formal positions on the situation in Ukraine unequivocally. For the U.S., Geoffrey R. Pyatt, U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine from 2013 to 2016, described the *Euromaidan*<sup>3</sup> events, as “the Revolution of Dignity”, and an expression of “[...] an active, engaged, and committed civil society [that has] pressed forward on difficult political and economic reforms to bring Ukraine closer to its chosen European future [...]” “[...] in the face of a Kremlin-manufactured conflict in the East” (PYATT, 2016). In contrast, TASS, Russia’s official news agency, describes the *Euromaidan* as a *coup* carried out by renegade pro-opposition lawmakers in defiance of Ukraine’s constitution (TASS, 2015). TASS, moreover, emphasises the pro-Western orientation of “the new authorities”, implying that they have from the very beginning intended to curb the rights of the “Russian-speaking population” (TASS, 2015). Judging from these two extremities of opinion, one may already gain a perception of how polemically charged assessments of the Ukrainian conflict have become.

Typologically, views of various Ukrainian analysts on these problems can be presented as a form of Weberian *ideal types*. As mentioned above, there is a clear correlation between the ideological, political and geopolitical orientations of the relevant analysts, on the one hand, and their advocacy of respective interpretations of the abovementioned processes, on the other. On the eve of the *Euromaidan* movement (which finally, in February 2014, overthrew the regime of President V. Yanukovych), Ukrainian philosopher Sergii Datsyuk, argued that contemporary Ukrainian society was at a turning point of historic alternatives, justifying the necessity of a revolution led (or, at least, directed) by the “intellectuals” whom he contrasted to the “creative class” as a functional instrument of other social forces (DATSYUK, 2013). Datsyuk elaborated on his understanding of the respective events as the expression of Ukrainian revolution, pointing out that the providential purpose of the Ukrainian revolution of 2013-2014 was to reformat the political elite from one being focused on personal enrichment in a society characterised by fundamentally irrational values, into one holding an in-

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<sup>3</sup> The term “*Euromaidan*” is used to denote the mass protest movement under pro-European (pro-European Union) slogans against Ukraine’s President Viktor Yanukovych and his government. This continuing movement (initially lacking any name) gained its most significant impulse from the civil unrest that began on the 21 November, 2013 (after the Ukrainian political leadership decided “to postpone” signing an Association Agreement with the EU), and initially concentrated in and around the historic symbolic location in Kiev, connected to the memories of the 2014-2015 “Orange Revolution”, – the Independence Square which in Ukrainian is called “*Maidan Nezalezhnosti*”. Thus, “*Maidan*” literally means “Square”, “*Euro-Maidan*” – protest actions in *Maidan* demanding integration with the European Union. Often, in Ukrainian political context, the term “*Maidan*” is used as a synonym of the “*Euromaidan*”.

novation-oriented and ethically rationalist approach to social change (DATSYUK, 2015b). According to S. Datsyuk, however, following the *Euromaidan*, the vectors of change have been blocked, due to the intervention of the Russian Federation as a bearer of a hostile, statist geopolitical project, which allowed a significant segment of the old elite to retain power. For S. Datsyuk, ethical rationalism (oriented primarily toward the North American, rather than the European model of social values) has maintained its relevance (DATSYUK, 2015b).

A similar position was taken by Yuri Romanenko, who published a series of articles before the *Euromaidan* arguing the practical bankruptcy of the post-Soviet economic model and governance prevailing in Ukraine during the periods of presidency of Leonid Kuchma and his successors – Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych. This point of view was shared by Vitaly Portnikov, a Ukrainian journalist and political scientist, who believes that Ukraine has exhausted the resources of the old Soviet system after 20-25 years of use (PORTNIKOV, 2015). As an advocate of practical neoliberalism (and a so-called “middle class” revolution (ROMANENKO, 2012), Yuri Romanenko has argued for a radical-liberal modernisation of Ukrainian society (including – should such a measure be deemed necessary – the “expelling” of overly “sovietised” territories (ROMANENKO, 2014), an idea of which he has recently become a chief intellectual proponent (ROMANENKO, 2015b). However, Romanenko was not the first to advocate such territorial expulsion. In 2010, Yuri Andrukhovych, a famous Ukrainian writer, expressed the idea that it might be worthwhile for Ukraine to “get rid of” the Crimea and the Eastern Ukrainian region of Donbass to allow Ukraine to become an authentically Ukrainian society, obviously in ethno-cultural and political terms (A UKRAINIAN WRITER, 2010). According to this approach, the *Euromaidan*’s rationale, in addition to the declared aspirations for European integration, consisted in overcoming archaic and counter-modernist elements of Ukrainian society, including both social structures and institutions, and political and socio-cultural values of the majority of the Ukrainian society (ROMANENKO, 2015a). Thus, for Yuri Romanenko, the *Euromaidan* and the events that followed it should assume the character of an existential conflict between (using American novelist’s George R. R. Martin’s terminology from the “Game of Thrones” series) “wildling”, the backward and ultimately doomed supporters of the “Russian World”, on the one hand, and the “enlightened Westernised liberal intellectuals” on the other. Yet, incidentally and quite ironically that same “enlightened western liberalism” openly accepts the utilisation of another group of “wildlings” namely the Ukrainian conservative ethno-nationalists as political “proxies” and their use as a striking force to attain its tactical goals (BORYSLAV BEREZA, 2014). In fact, S. Datsyuk and Yu. Romanenko’s often criticise the most “wild”, totalitarian versions of Ukrainian ethnic nationalism; and in the typically pro-Western press, both Ukrainian and international, there is a widespread criticism of real “[...] totalitarian tendencies in post-Maidan Ukraine” (e.g. see (CHEMERYS, 2016).

Within Ukrainian domestic discourse, one also finds views on the need, in the short to medium-term, to actually “postpone the final victory of the revolution”, which was clearly expressed in a thesis advanced by Ukrainian sociologist Iryna Bekeshkina: “Allow the Soviet people to live to the end of their life peacefully” (BEKESHKINA, 2016, no page numbers) (meaning the older generation). In her statements, I. Bekeshkina also offers traces of an appeal to national reconciliation and, in a certain aspect, to “[...] a historic reconciliation with the past [...]” of Ukraine. Such appeals to a (limited) toleration of present non-conformist Ukrainian nationals and of reconciliation with history have been condemned by S. Datsyuk

(DATSYUK, 2016), and by V. Vyatrovich, the main present-day ideologists of decommunisation in Ukraine, who claim that I. Bekeshkina's arguments match neither the current socio-political situation in the country, nor the long-term strategic interests of Ukraine (VYATROVYCH, 2016).

Unsurprisingly, the core views of analysts adhering to generically "Eurasian" / "pro-Russian" positions on the presently dominant processes in Ukraine is diametrically opposite. Thus, to Mikhail Pogrebinsky, the *Euromaidan* and the subsequent aggravation of Ukrainian-Russian relations have been caused primarily by the focus of the EU leadership on the "inclusion of Ukraine in the sphere of exclusive influence of Europe" within the framework of the "Eastern Partnership", promoting negative responses and counter-measures on the part of the Russian leadership (PERVAYA STOLITSA, 2014). Like Yu. Romanenko, but proceeding from a different ideological position, Pogrebinsky believes that the model of governance and property relations developed under the presidency of L. Kuchma had exhausted its viability by the end of Viktor Yanukovich's presidency, so that the *Euromaidan* was merely the final push, rather than the direct cause of the subsequent political destabilisation (PERVAYA STOLITSA, 2014). In addition, the political discourse advanced by M. Pogrebinsky can be characterised by an emphasis on the predominant role of external actors in the development of international and internal dimensions of the socio-political crisis in and around Ukraine. M. Pogrebinsky's narrative aligns closely with arguments which emphasise the extent of "external control" with such control exercised by foreign powers at the present stage of development of Ukraine (NEWS AGENCY "KHARKOV", 2015).

It should be noted that there are serious conceptual discrepancies in the assessments of current relations between Ukraine and Russia, depending on the purposes of the relevant Ukrainian actors. A state of war has not been officially declared in Ukraine: officially an "Anti-Terrorist Operation" ("ATO") is underway. Nevertheless, the Ukrainian Parliament along with several Ukraine's regional authorities have declared the Russian Federation an "Aggressor State". Meanwhile, Ukraine is conducting trade relations with Russia, people, goods, services and money continue to move between Ukraine and Russia and only limited restrictions have been introduced. Meanwhile the Embassy of Ukraine is in full operation in Moscow. Furthermore, President P. Poroshenko's "Roshen" confectionary factory in Russia (in the city of Lipetsk) is functioning quite well and continues to expatriate dividends to Ukraine. Confusingly President P. Poroshenko has stated frequently that in Ukraine "[...] we do not have any ATO. We have Russian aggression against our independent, sovereign state" (NOVOE VREMIA, 2016).

Significant and persistent differences have been found between the views of Russian citizens and their Ukrainian counterparts concerning relations between Russia and Ukraine and responsibility for recent developments. The views of Russian citizens have been surveyed by the "Levada Centre" (August 2014), and Ukrainian respondents to the survey conducted by KIIS (see above). Thus, 70% of Ukrainian respondents tend to unambiguously interpret the current situation in the Ukrainian-Russian relations as a state of war, while 59% of Russian respondents rejected such argument (PANIOTTO; KHARCHENKO, 2015, p. 29). These surveys also indicated, though in a less pronounced form, the previously observed (i.e. prior to the events of 2013-2014) dynamics of regional differences in the levels of support afforded to

certain vectors of the preferred future foreign policy of Ukraine (PANIOTTO; KHARCHENKO, 2015, p. 43-45).

**2). Selection of the interpretation methodology: one-dimensional, simplified, or, alternatively, multi-level, multi-faceted; focused on deep understanding, or on propaganda and uncritical, apologetic promotion; paying main attention to “local” – related mainly to a country, or to the sphere of “regional” (a region of the world), and civilization, as well as to the global dimension, etc.**

In terms of methodological aspects, a clear dichotomy can be observed between: (a) the interpretations of political events in Ukraine as being caused primarily by the impact of global trends in the development of the major geopolitical and geo-economic conflicts, and (b) localist and regionalist approaches to the explanation of the origins and direction of political transformations in Ukraine. The approaches declared by S. Datsyuk and Yu. Romanenko in interpretation of the *Euromaidan* and its consequences clearly manifest the desire to link these processes primarily with the global dynamics of change of technological structures and political relations models, relegating purely political issues to the level derived from the corresponding global dynamics (LYSENKO, 2014; DATSYUK, 2015a). Their opponents, M. Pogrebinsky and V. Kornilov tend to view events in Ukraine as derivatives of either the existential conflict between “Europe”/USA and the “Russian world”, or of “adventurism” on the part of the Central-European EU actors/entities who had decided to push the EU as a whole to a “geopolitical challenge” vis-à-vis the Russian Federation (PERVAYA STOLITSA, 2014); (KORNILOV, 2015). Given the differences in ideological orientation and methodology of the opposing parties, it is possible to draw a preliminary conclusion that the “pro-European” analysts tend to focus on the global and long-term measurements of the relevant processes, while their opponents tend towards a focus on the short- and medium-term results of the supposed geo-political and geo-cultural confrontation.

Criticising the quality and the level of the predominant discourse in the contemporary Ukraine, Vasily Stoyakin, an opposition analyst, says: “Ukrainian mass media operate in the paradigm of the myth that virtually everything that happens in the country is determined by Putin” (STOYAKIN, 2016).

**3). The perception of Ukraine as a natural culturally, politically and regionally “divided society”, or as a “unitary state” (official authorities advertise a “single [i.e. united] country”), and more particularly, substantiating and/or promoting/using institutional and organizational models of “federalization” or, alternatively, “unitarianism”.**

It should be noted that none of the major analysts dealing with this issue, regardless of their (apparent or potential latent) political advocacy orientation, have any doubt about the presence, in Ukrainian society, of a long historical memory of opposing potentially contentious cultural and political trends, which are often associated with certain historical regions of the country. Meanwhile, there is a diametrically opposite character of the competing interpretations of this kind of value differences.

V. Kornilov, R. Ishchenko and other “pro-Russian” analysts use the thesis of ideological confrontation employing a “fascist/anti-fascist” narrative as the primary determining factors in



the current conflict. For V. Kornilow and R. Ischenko, the essence of the contradictions between political communities of the East and the West of Ukraine lies along this fascist/anti-fascist axis. In practice, the understanding of “fascism” by the supporters of such theses may include a wide range of “westernising” ideological positions, including extreme liberalism and even some forms of “pro-Western” leftist ideology.

The concepts of “federalisation” and of a “unitary state” have been used frequently as tools of ideological propaganda, particularly by the media oriented towards the respective opposing camps. However, some analysts are inclined to accept the use of such terms in some intellectualised form. For example, on the eve of presidential elections in Ukraine in May 2014, M. Pogrebinsky stressed the necessity of a “confederal treaty” with “Novorossia” (i.e. with the separatist republics in the Donbass region) as a means of settling political confrontation in the country (PERVAYA STOLITSA, 2014).

Yuri Romanenko, in contrast, has advanced the idea of “federalisation” as being a kind of geopolitical trap for Ukraine, which aims either at tying it to Russia, or at slowing down its path “to the West” (HVYLYA, 2014). At the same time, he implicitly rejects any “one country” thesis, emphasising the existence of significant cultural and political distinctions between the (according to him) “wildling” inhabitants of the Crimea and Donbas and the “Europeanised layer” of Ukrainian society (HVYLYA, 2014). Yu. Romanenko and S. Datsyuk propose to resolve these contradictions by a tough and uncompromising policy towards the relevant regional groups, reminiscent of the (ethno-)national policy of the Baltic States since their independence in 1991, or even of Czechoslovakia vis-à-vis the German and Hungarian minorities after World War II which led to mass expulsions of population (ROMANENKO, 2015c; HVYLYA, 2015).

A more moderate view of the issue of federalisation of Ukraine has also been advanced. Thus, Volodymyr Fesenko, political scientist and director of the Centre for Applied Political Studies “Penta”, argues that “there is nothing wrong” with the federative form “per se”, in that it is a democratic form of state organisation, but because of the efforts of Ukraine’s political elite to strengthen national unity and to promote the uniformity of the country, as well as due to the 2013-2014 events, any further support for federalisation project is currently politically impossible (POLITICAL SCIENTIST EXPLAINED, 2016). Meanwhile “pro-Russian” analysts tend to attribute to Galicia (the West Ukrainian region), a predominantly Greek-Catholic and “westernised” region, a crucial role in the development of political conflicts in Ukraine on the eve of and during the *Euromaidan*, often hinting at the need for this region’s separation in the future (HALYCHYNA ISLAND, 2014; KORNILOV, 2014).

The dichotomy of “decentralisation” – “separatism” has become one of the key issues of contemporary debate between the supporters of the “pro-European” and “pro-Russian” vectors among the analytic/expert community of Ukraine. It is quite popular in both camps to claim that the central authorities have no interest in really attaining “decentralisation” as a substitute for “federalisation” (which currently is a kind of an ideological/conceptual “taboo” in Ukraine). In this case, one side accuses the authorities of making vain attempts to avoid a real decentralisation because of vested interests, while the other – that the “decentralisation” would in fact be a form of legitimisation of federalist aspirations of regional elites of the South-East and elsewhere (RIA NEWS UKRAINE, 2015; SHVETSOV, 2015). Currently the

right-wing nationalist organisations often try to prevent any expert discussions on decentralisation and federalism by attacking such events or preventing them from happening (see, e.g.: (IN NIKOLAEV, 2016).

Little research has been undertaken into the correlation between the concepts of “separatism” and “irredentism” in the context of the events in the Crimea and Donbass. It is, however, clear that some active players in the relevant processes sought separation on practical, pragmatic grounds providing the maximum possible decentralisation (promoting the concept of Donetsk “regional patriotism” that has been actively developed during the period of political hegemony of the Party of regions). Among the pro-Russian factions can be found promoters of irredentist programmes and slogans embodied in the thesis of a “Russian spring” which is proposed as a counterweight to the “Euromaidan”. Meanwhile, one should also not forget the phenomenon of the “new Cossacks” movement which has spread in some parts of the border areas with the Russian Federation in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions which, until 1917, comprised the Province of the Don Cossack Host of the Russian Empire. That movement in fact somehow opposed itself to the “people’s republics” and the “Novorossiya” project (DIKHTYARENKO, 2014; SKORKIN, 2015).

**4). The boundaries of “cultural-political Europe” and the “Russian world”, which are closely connected with the history of Ukraine, the territories of which, prior to the 1917-1918 revolutions, were part of the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires.**

This range of issues is perhaps the most frequently discussed topic in the Ukrainian and Russian media and in analytical publications. To avoid generalities, it should be noted that two opposing concepts lie at the heart of this debate. Under the first Ukraine is viewed as an integral part of European culture / civilization (primarily in the context of historical ties of the Ukrainian lands with Central Europe). Under the second concept “Novorossiya” (or “New Russia”) and “Malorossiya” (“Little Russia”) are identified as historic regions, while “Carpathian Ruthenia” (potentially) as parts of the “Russian world”, which is identified, more or less clearly, within the cultural and state traditions of Muscovy, and through it with the Orthodox Byzantine Empire. In any event, supporters of both points of view have offered multiple variations of the inherent desirability for expansion and the elimination of “The Other” (see, e.g., the aforementioned S. Datsyuk’s thesis on the need to isolate and take control of the separatist regions of Donbass). At the same time, there is widespread acceptance of the fact that any “elimination” of this kind is unlikely to be achievable, despite the current degree of bitterness and military brutalisation of the grassroots populations on both sides of the conflict in Donbass. What is clear is that the current military conflict does not provide for any long-term compromise or agreement between the opposing forces. The current military impasse reflecting this configuration of cultural, historical and political aspirations, along with the multitude of conceptualisations which these have spawned, recently led Russian Federation President V. Putin, to declare that, “Russians and Ukrainians are one nation... *In the beginning we have been divided, and afterwards set against one another. But we are guilty of it ourselves. And we have to find a way out of this situation*” (PUTIN, 2016).

**5. Crisis (degradation, degeneration) of the state structures (manifested, in particular, in the “paralysis of the will” of the authorities (power structures), incompetence, corruption, degeneration of public functions, often being substituted by**

**“volunteer activities”; lack of real humanitarian technologies and their substitution by “spin-masters” political technologies of the struggle for power and its retention.**

The assessments of experts belonging to or aligned with different geopolitical orientations, on this set of issues are surprisingly unanimous. Thus, Yuri Romanenko and Mikhail Pogrebinsky unambiguously assess the present-day ruling elite as incompetent in practical and theoretical terms, and incapable of translating its own political rhetoric into any consistent practical action. R. Ishchenko, an open sympathiser of “Novorossiya”, concludes that the conflicts between different “Maidan” groupings will continue in the future, contributing to further undermining of the legitimacy of the ruling group (“OKO PLANETY”, 2015).

Several “pro-Russian” analysts openly put forward the thesis of an impending “collapse of Ukraine” (RIA NEWS UKRAINE, 2015; PERVAYA STOLITSA, 2015). The deterioration of relations within the “post-Maidan” political elite, as well as negative socio-economic dynamics inspire pessimism in some “pro-European” analysts. One such assessment is provided by invectives directed at Ukrainian society and national mentality in articles published in the style of a journalistic polemics on Yu. Romanenko’s web site (“Hvylya”) (BUNYAK, 2015; TYSHKEVICH, 2015). Taken together, such assessments provide a highly pessimistic assessment of the prospects for future developments in Ukraine with such pessimism characterising the assessments of both sides of the expert community.

## **6. Domestic and international mechanisms of legitimation of power, and a sharp “conflict of legitimacies”.**

Critical importance attaches to the “revolutionary” character of the *Euromaidan* events and, following this, the legitimacy of the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich and the removal from power of his Cabinet of Ministers and top government officials. As is the case with several other aspects of political transformations in 2013-2016 in Ukraine, the methodological approaches and the ideological positions among the relevant analysts have a direct impact on their positions. Supporters of the *Euromaidan* defend the legitimacy of their practices through the thesis of the “treacherous role” played by President V. Yanukovich in the context of Ukrainian-Russian relations. V. Yanukovich’s treachery is said to include his alleged cooperation with the FSB (Russia’s Federal Security Service) during the *Euromaidan* and his official appeal to the Russian Federation and personally to President V. Putin to bring Russia’s Armed Forces onto the territory of Ukraine (28 February 2014). These and other actions corroded and eliminated the legitimacy of President V. Yanukovich and, from this point of view, made his revolutionary removal from power justified and legitimate. On the other hand, while the *Euromaidan* opponents originally defended the legitimacy of the government of Viktor Yanukovich (though not overly vigorously), many later switched to the support of “Novorossiya” separatism / irredentism, or (in the case of Crimea) of direct entry into the Russian Federation. Such an abrupt transformation (in March-April 2014) can be interpreted as an acceptance of a significant degree of delegitimation of the government of Viktor Yanukovich in the South-East of Ukraine even before the *Euromaidan*, in which not the least role has been played by Yanukovich’s geopolitical and cultural inconsistency.

In terms of international legitimacy, the *Euromaidan* and the events that followed in the Crimea and Donbass, indicate inconsistencies by both the states of the West and the Rus-

sian Federation: the two geopolitical sides presented actions of political forces sympathetic to them and challenging the existing legal order of the Ukrainian state (as national-democrats and ethno-nationalists of the *Euromaidan*, and pro-Russian federalists and separatists of the South-East) as related to a “legitimate” desire for “democracy” or “national self-determination”, while demonising the actions of the state authorities that opposed these forces. This sort of “legitimacy conflict” could not but lead to further discrediting of the state institutions and the general deterioration of the situation in Ukraine.

## Conclusion

As well as the above mentioned topical and controversial issues of Ukrainian transformations since 2013, there are a number of other considerably longer-standing issues that deserve the attention of social scientists. These include such problems as: (a) the emergence of the old cleavages and the “traditional Ukrainian archetypes” on the surface of socio-political life of the country, which were clearly manifested during the 1917-1922 civil war (in particular, in anarchic tendencies of the so-called “*Makhnovshchina*” / “*Makhnovia*” – Nestor Makhno’s anarchist revolutionary guerrilla movement in 1918-1921, and other “*ataman*” (warlords) movements; divisions into “national-conscious”, “white” and “red” groupings), and during the earlier periods of the country’s history, such as Bohdan Khmelnytsky Cossack uprising (1648-1657), the Epoch of Ruins (1657-1686), *Koliyivshchyna* (1768) peasant rebellion; (b) the increasing role of extreme right movements; (c) peculiarities of the formation of new “post-Maidan” elites; (d) and the available concepts and practical programmes of national reconciliation and the frameworks for working out an international consensus vis-à-vis a country in a sharp political crisis, etc. It has not been possible to address such issues here, although a fuller research programme focusing on the current crisis can undoubtedly draw important lessons of contemporary relevance.

What the current work has attempted to illustrate is the miasma of conceptions, ideologies personalities and influences which have contributed both to the ongoing tragedy that afflicts Ukraine and which fuel its continuation. Regional and international actors have played major roles in this drama, as have domestic actors, whether politicians, administrators, academics, representatives of the various news media and assorted demagogues. All of them have contributed, to a greater or lesser extent, to the “antagonism of interpretations” referred to above.

That such antagonisms should become manifest during a period of profound (inter)national instability is perhaps unsurprising. Indeed, it might be seen that such antagonisms are inevitable given the nature and scale of the problems confronting Ukraine. While it might be hoped that the removal of an elected President and his government, along with the militarised conflict in the East of Ukraine should lead to sober reflection on the nature and form of the Ukrainian state, such a hope is perhaps naïve when so much is at stake. In these circumstances the standard conceptual tools of political discourse have themselves become weapons with which to attack opponents. Both demagoguery and self-interest (both enlightened and otherwise) are clearly at work.

What is clear is that no legitimising narrative of Ukrainianism can be anticipated unless and until the capacity for its construction is created. This does not currently exist. Such work,

while fundamental, cannot rely on external consultants providing one-size fits all solutions as happened frequently following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Neither does it mean that foreign powers, whether to the East of Ukraine, to its West or further afield, can impose “solutions”. Likewise, foreign political constructions of democracy, freedom, sovereignty, the integrity of the state, self-determination, civil society, etc. cannot be imposed but must be nurtured internally, in whatever form is found most acceptable (or, failing that, least unacceptable) to the people of Ukraine who will ultimately have to determine the system of government most appropriate to their wishes and needs.

Such a programme must inevitably involve the political and other social scientists of Ukraine in examining the formative influences driving current events, along with the time-scales on which these operate. Careful and dispassionate analysis is needed of the available conceptual toolkit, and governmental forms along with the likely consequences of their adoption. The case of Ukraine demonstrates clearly that all states are provisional and contingent entities. All states which are not to fail, whether through military or other forms of conflict need to confront this reality.

The author of this article has tried to follow an unbiased academic approach, though this has not been easy, as with any ordinary human being full of emotions (his emotions have been affected by the traumatic events in his own country, and, to some extent, his own experience). It is acknowledged that the results of this academic research are somewhat fragmented and do not provide a holistic vision of the processes in Ukraine, but hopefully these materials will be of use for further academic research and practical political consultancy.

Now there are clear signs that the challenges of the developments in a number of geopolitical “conflict zones” demand serious corrections to the mainstream political science approaches, usually apologetic of specific versions of sovereignty, democracy, revolution/evolution, regime change, etc. Concerted responsible actions are needed, on the part of the major geopolitical actors, primarily the USA, the European Union and Russia, to cure the “old mistakes” – Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Ukraine, and to limit the probability of committing similar mistakes (not only by politicians, but also of those their advisors from academia that advanced “unbalanced” concepts).

There are many possible definitions of the essence of the situation in the present-day Ukraine, and one of them is a “tragedy”. Gleb Pavlovsky, a well-known Russian analyst (late-ly expressing opposition views), has stressed that “[...] the Ukrainian tragedy is a very serious issue; the most tragic aspect of which is dilettantism of decision-making and confusion in administration and management, which obviously had led to numerous deaths” (PAVLOVSKY, 2016). Dilettantism and strategic irresponsibility have been shown by a great number of influential internal (Ukrainian) and international/foreign actors. Uniting the efforts of the international academic community in better understanding and providing a clear explanation of very complex processes in and around Ukraine may provide both for bringing a viable and worthy solution of the Ukrainian crisis, and for learning how to avoid such impasses in other countries and regions.

Based on the foregoing, it can be concluded that the political transformations that began in Ukraine in the autumn of 2013 and continue today, are of a multi-faceted and multi-vectored

nature, which does not allow them to be reduced to just one plane or direction. At the same time, the long-term prospects for the development of the political situation in Ukraine appear to be of a contradictory nature and unclear. This kind of complex, "hybrid" political conflict involves several internal and external actors. The consequences of such conflicts may be very far from the original expectations of the initiators on the opposing sides.

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