

# **Examining Ukraine from within and from the outside**

**Posudin Yuriy**

National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine, Kiev

posudin@nauu.kiev.ua

The author examines the main events in Ukraine during the Independence years, expresses his own views and tries to understand what the reason is for the principle problems that are challenging Ukrainian society.

**International Position.** Independence propelled Ukraine into active participation in global geopolitical events. The world community has met with understanding and readiness this newly independent state. Currently 154 states recognize the independence of Ukraine, and 140 countries have established diplomatic relations.

Ukraine is the foundation of stability in Central-East Europe. Geopolitical importance of Ukraine is determined by its location, size (geographically, it is the second largest country in Europe and fifth largest in population [ 1 ]), and economical potential. In fact, Ukraine bridges Western and Eastern Europe. But the independence of Ukraine serves as a brake on the aspiration of Russia to spread its influence to the West. U.S. political scientist Zbigniew Brzezinski has stated that a strong Ukraine may eventually lead to democratization of Russia. As Ukraine prospers, the opportunity for Russia to become a post-empire democratic state increases [ 2 ].

Ukraine considers Euro-Atlantic cooperation as one of the priorities of international policy. Meanwhile Ukraine balances its relationships with Europe and the United States from the west and Russia from the east. In addition the interrelationship with Russia is complicated by balance of power and financial debts of Ukraine.

Ukraine has friendly relations with western neighbors especially Poland. It is a member of GUUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (Georgia - Ukraine - Uzbekistan - Azerbaijan - Moldova), which is also oriented toward the west.

**Corruption.** The Ukrainian community is plagued by corruption which is tolerated by bureaucrats and officials. Corruption Perceptions Index, CPI 2010 states that the country rank of Ukraine is 134, with a score of 2.4 out of 10 [ 3 ]. It is plausible that total corruption exists at all levels of the state with simultaneous support or ignorance of corruption by the citizenry.

Corruption also exists in the educational system. Invasion of corruptional experience in the sphere of education provides the transition of this negative phenomenon at all levels of social life properly by young alumni of educational institutions. American lecturer Ray M. Johns has expounded his impressions concerning examination of the students in Ukrainian university. He said that two good students only obtained marks of 87 out of a possible 100. Yet, the strategy for poor students is not to take and pass an examination, but to obtain the tests and to find the answers via mutual attempts or other strategies, or to use their right to re-sit an examination twice [ 4 ].

The results of interviews with Ukrainian citizens demonstrated that “the most corrupt officials are present in Parliament and Cabinet of Ministry, but the high level of corruption is inherent in other levels of the state.” According to citizens’ opinions, the worst corruption is seen in the State Road Inspection, police, medical institutions, universities, judicial system, office of public prosecutor, tax inspection, and customs services [ 5 ].

An interview with Canadian Dewey Thiele, who has spent years in Ukraine and has become familiar with all details of local life demonstrated that the most memorable observations of Ukrainian life were corruption, the near total absence of a service attitude, double standards and higher pricing of items offered to foreigners, and problems with public transportation. At the same time, he has really enjoyed the younger generation, which is initially full of hope for

their future, the beautiful countryside, the simplicity of the country life and openness of the young people to new ideas [ 6 ].

**Status of Non-Nuclear State.** Upon the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited a considerable nuclear potential, in the form of 176 SS-19 and SS-24 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs; 1,240 warheads) and 44 strategic bombers.

The first steps as an independent state were marked by the *Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine* which was adopted in 1990 [ 7 ]. It declared three non-nuclear principles: not to accept, produce, or acquire nuclear weapons.

The *Trilateral Statement* by the presidents of the U.S., Russia, and Ukraine was signed on 14 January, 1994 in Moscow. According to this Statement Ukraine agreed to the transfer of all nuclear weapons in Ukraine to Russia for dismantlement [ 8 ].

**Weapon Export.** Ukraine is an exporter of military techniques and weapons, and it is tenth on the worldwide list of major arms suppliers. According to a report of the U.S. Congress Ukraine sold weapon abroad during 2000-2007 for a total of \$5.5 billion. The traditional buyers of Ukrainian weaponry are Russia (20 % of supply), Georgia, China, Pakistan, Myanmar, Algeria, and Azerbaijan. Ukrainian rockets, gas turbines for military ships, light armored vehicles, and military four wheeled vehicles and trucks are the most in demand on the world market [ 9 ]. However, the weapons sales by Ukraine are under international control, and even so, regrettable incidents occur, such as the Kolchuga sale to Iraq (2002) [ 10 ] or capture by Somali pirates (2008) of the Ukrainian ship “Faina“ with 33 T-72 tanks and weapons [ 11 ].

**MilitaryPosition.** Meanwhile the Ukrainian army requires modernization and training of qualified professional military staff. Serious, often fatal, incidents due to poor training have occurred in the last 10 years. These incidents include a Ukrainian surface-to-surface Tochka-U rocket which crashed through the roof of an apartment building in Brovary, outside Kyiv, killing three people (2000) [ 12 ]; an Ukrainian missile which shot down a Russian Sibir Airlines

Tu-154 passenger jet with 78 people aboard (2001) [ 12 ]; explosions in Novobogdanivka [ 13 ], Artemivsk [ 14 ] and Lozova [ 15 ] in recent years; the Sknyliv airshow disaster (2002), where a Ukrainian Air Force Sukhoi Su-27 crashed at an aerobatics exhibition at Sknyliv airfield near Lviv, Ukraine, killing 85 people [ 16 ]. All these events suggest that serious problems exist within the Ukrainian military.

Two political issues are very acute for Ukraine. The first is the Ukraine's relationship with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). A 2009 Gallup poll indicated that 40% of surveyed Ukrainian adults associate NATO as a threat and 17% as protection [ 17 ]. The negative attitude of Ukrainians toward NATO has been formed under the influence of international policy, but not under the Soviet stereotypes, confirming that NATO is viewed as an aggressive military and political bloc.

The second issue concerns the Black Sea Fleet. In 1997, Russia and Ukraine signed the Partition Treaty, whereby Ukraine agreed to lease the Sevastopol base to the Russian Black Sea Fleet until 2017 [ 18 ]. Under the 1997 bilateral treaty, Russia paid Ukraine \$98 million annually for the lease. Ukrainian President Yanukovych and Russian President Medvedev reached a second agreement in 2010, whereby the Russian lease on naval facilities in Crimea would be extended beyond 2017 for 25 years, with an additional 5 year renewal option (2042–47), in exchange for a multiyear discounted contract to provide Ukraine with Russian natural gas [ 19 ].

The presence of the Black Sea Fleet in Ukraine plays first of all a political role. The Fleet can be perceived as an influence on the external and internal policy of Ukraine, Georgia, and the Caucasus regions of Russia. It is difficult to ascertain the geopolitical role of the Russian Fleet, which is in the closed Black Sea basin, and despite the perception of modernization, the Fleet is very weak. It is expedient to remember the naval operation in the Dardanelles Campaign of the First World War, when Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, attempted to capture the Dardanelles in September 1914. After the failure of the

Dardanelles Campaign, Churchill left the war cabinet and was appointed to command of a battalion.

**Openness.** The great majority of military failures or other incidents are subject to attempts by officials to cover up or deny mistakes. After explosions of military stores, Defense Minister A. Kuzmuk first agreed to an interview, but ultimately refused to comment on the accounting and detailed inventory of the country's weaponry. He also tried to deny the participation of Ukrainian Army in shooting down a Russian passenger jet. Polish producer Krzysztof Zanussi stated that had a Japanese national deceived or lied, he would be exiled due to the long held culture of honor. A similar situation exists in parts of the west. By contrast, many Ukrainian officials simply rationalize that what they are saying is true, despite their overt deception [ 20 ].

For example, the former Japanese Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Masatoshi Wakabayashi of the Liberal Democratic Party was accused of pressing the voting button for fellow lawmaker, Mikio Aoki, whose Diet seat was adjacent, when Aoki was absent. Wakabayashi submitted a letter of resignation to the President of the Diet and the chamber accepted his resignation shortly afterward.

No such honor exists in the Ukrainian Parliament – no one is prohibited to vote for another member of Parliament, and if he does so and is caught, he certainly will not tender his resignation.

**Economy of Ukraine under Independence.** Ukraine is a country rich in natural resources, agricultural and forest lands, and agricultural products. It is one of the largest steel producers in the world. It has developed high-technologies industries, including electronics, arms industry, and space equipment. Ukraine is gradually overcoming the economic crisis and recession in which it found itself from the first days of independence in 1991.

However, in general, the economy of Ukraine remains in poor condition. Ukraine is first among the countries of Eastern Europe in annual inflation rates 15.9 % in 2009 and 9.2 % in 2010 (according to the IMF estimations)[ 21 ]. The

unemployment rate in 2010 was estimated by the World Factbook at 8.4 %, in which Ukraine is 98<sup>th</sup> out of 200 countries. Thirty-five percent of Ukrainians were below the government defined poverty line in 2009 [ 22 ]. According to a forecast by the State Employment Center, unemployment in Ukraine would triple from 3% in 2008 to 9% in 2009 [ 23 ].

**Arts.** The desire of show-business celebrities to earn as much as possible, with little regard to artistic merit, has led to what has been expressed by Ukrainian composer and producer Mykola Mozgovyi [24]: "...everything that we have is "vener" art (performance with recording, **Yu.P.**), that makes progress. It is far easier for them to record in a studio so as to allow for repeated editing and result in recorded listening of our "unsurpassed stars." It remains to be seen if they are able to sing "in vivo" (live) with the accompaniment of an orchestra!"

At present, Ukrainians listen to voice challenged "singing rector" such as M. Poplavsky who has filled up a lot of television and radio programs, or to the alumni of numerous "star factories" who have learned only to wag their bodies, but not to sing.

**Culture and Education.** It is very interesting to hear the opinions of foreign tourists concerning Ukrainians [ 25 ]: "politicians are speaking a lot, but are doing nothing for the people," "Ukrainians are very honest people but they do not have enough money," "foods are delicious and aromatic; if you will taste Ukrainian tomato you will never eat an American one," "lard and sunflower seeds are the objects of special pride," "Ukrainians seldom eat in the restaurants, they prefer the domestic kitchen," "women are considered the property of men," "Ukrainians appear to be crude, but they are really very friendly," "men are eager to drink," "there are a lot of pretty girls."

Education and development of Ukrainians begins with preschool and goes through elementary and secondary school levels, but the state does not provide sufficient subsidies for education. Rhetorically, what can you expect from the graduate of a pedagogical university who decides to begin his carrier in the

country, if he must think about fundamentals of daily support, living accommodations, and food? Our young people don't learn proper manners and decorum such that it is rude to litter the outdoors, to drink beer outside, to use foul language, or to speak loudly on mobile telephones about private conversations in public transport etc.

It seems to me no branch of Ukrainian society was suffered from so much various reforms as education.

As I remember, the education system was exposed periodically to such requirements as children's age to start school, basic number of academic years, fundamental privileges for graduates, and requirements to pass an entrance exam to university.

For example, in 1964, I had to pass a chemistry entrance exam to university during the Khrushchev period of total emphasis on chemistry in the U.S.S.R., although such a discipline was not taught by radiophysical faculty. However, when my son decided to apply to university, representation of the certificate for the invention (!) was welcomed.

Now the Bologna Process, to standardize higher education and incorporate some U.S. standards is proceeding. As a result of a desire to follow a university charter, we are now expected to accept the student based on results of a 30 questions, short answer test. It is only necessary to provide an answer in the form of the formula or one-two words, rather than an essay or long answer that shows a student's deeper understanding of the subject. Instead, they are taught the test.

I visited Berezhany in Ternopol area, in particular an historic museum of the former grammar school. The graduate certificates of that time show that pupils studied physics, chemistry, biology, and six (!) foreign languages, obviously receiving a classical education in science as well as the humanities. Properly these graduates were recruited to become part the Ukrainian diaspora abroad.

I have been teaching 30 years at university, but I do not remember a case where the Vice Rector for Academic Affairs has offered to purchase or obtain a device or laboratory equipment for educational process. However, various orders requiring writing of educational and methodical syllabi, working and typical programs, with all documents, presented in written and electronic formats, are a constant. By contrast, I saw nothing similar abroad in American and Japanese universities where modern equipment (chromatographs, mass-spectrometers, electron microscopes) which cost \$100,000-150,000 are intended for educational use, and often more than one such device is available in a department or unit.

It is no wonder, that universities in these countries play a dominant role in space exploration, nanotechnology and other advanced scientific research.

**Democracy.** Democracy by definition is a political system where the people serve as the source of political power [ 26 ]. The people take part in management by referenda or elections of their representatives [ 27 ].

I am not a politician, but it is not clear to me as to how candidates are selected to serve in Parliament of Ukraine, local and regional administrations. Why I should vote for a political party when I am not a member of the party? Why do the lists of candidates also contain their relatives whom nobody knows? Why do the same representataives run repeatedly, without rotation, in the political theater? I remember in the first years of the independence that candidates worked in housing offices, educational institutions and the like. Now such citizen-candidates have disappeared from the political system, replaced with professional politicians.

The same situation exists in higher education. In previous years, several applicants were sent forward for positions such as departmental chairs, deans, and vice-rectors, but now each position is appointed solely by the order of rector (University President).

**Language.** Many wranglings arise concerning an official state language. My opinion is that it is not necessary to be afraid of either Ukrainian or Russian



languages. There are bilingual and multilingual countries such as Belgium, Switzerland, the U.S., Canada, and Finland, where the citizens are living in an atmosphere of tolerance to other languages. In Ukraine, the discussions of one official language is purely political.

It is only necessary to be dismissive of “surzhik”, which is an illiterate mixture of Ukrainian and Russian languages.

**The Health of the Nation.** Ukraine is in the midst of a population decline. There are 11 births and 16.3 deaths per 1000 persons per annum [ 28 ]. Alcoholism, smoking, and illegal drug use are the principle causes of mortality. The Head of the Kharkiv organisation The Struggle Union for National Sobriety, Svetlana Silyakova, estimates that although about one million patients diagnosed with chronic alcoholism are officially reported, the true number is probably closer to 8-10 million [ 29 ]. The number of beer alcoholics alone has increased by 10 times during the last decade. According to international standards, the nation’s health is considered to be in decline if it uses more than 9 litres of pure spirit per capita in a year. The average for Ukraine is 12 litres.

About 380,000 Ukrainians die annually from alcohol or drug related disease, and more than 30 per cent of the Ukrainian population does not reach pension age. According to the World Health Organisation, Ukraine is the leader among 40 European countries for the number of teenagers who regularly use alcohol, with a shocking number of 40% children from 14 to 18 years in that demographic. Yet, Ukrainian television commercials regularly interrupt programs, especially sports’ advertising for vodka and beer advertising targeted at younger viewers.

As a whole, 41 % of Ukrainians smoke [ 30 ] and 100,000 Ukrainians die each year from smoking related diseases [ 31 ]. For current smokers 57 % of men and 10% of women are current smokers and an additional 21% and 7%, respectively, were ex-smokers [32].

The prevalence of current smoking among Ukrainian men (standardized for age) was 54.8% in 2001 but increased to 66.8% in 2005 [ 33 ]. Among

Ukrainian women, the incidence increased from 11.5% in 2001 to 20.0% in 2005. In the Ukraine, smoking prevalence is increasing in most population groups. Men with limited education had the highest smoking prevalence. Among women, the most educated, youngest and those living in larger cities are the most frequent tobacco users; other groups are also increasing their tobacco use. The decline in cigarette prices in Ukraine in 2001-2005 could be the main factor explaining the recent increasing prevalence of smoking [34].

One impediment to changing this disastrous increasing frequency of smoking in the Ukraine is that many Ukrainian physicians, who should be implementing an anti-tobacco policy among their patients, actively use tobacco themselves. In all, 13.9% of physicians were current smokers and 21.6% reported being past smokers, with significantly more men than women in either category [35].

About 700 women of Ukraine were surveyed for possible effects of smoking during pregnancy [36]. The study showed that smoking during pregnancy is associated with placental insufficiency, low birth weight infants, fetal hypotrophy, and hip joint dysphasia. The father smoking is related to decreased fertility, late pregnancy toxemia, miscarriage threat, low infant birth weight, and lower infant functional status.

From the first site, there are attempts of Ukrainian Parliament and government to mitigate these hazards, For example, the Directive N 131 from June 24, 2005, concerning the approval of Complex Plan “Prophylaxis and overcoming smoking in Ukraine in 2005-2010” [37]. Parliament of Ukraine has approved the Law of Ukraine “About Prevention of Using Tobacco Products and its Ruinous Effect on Population Health” [ 38 ]. This is moving forward in these decisions, but unfortunately Ukraine continues to possess the advanced position in tobacco smoking.

It is a pity, but some of the best and brightest representatives of our young population – students and scholars, are smoking and either do not understand, or choose to ignore the future consequences of their actions. Based on this

evidence, I readily concur with the conclusions of the scientists at National University “Kyiv-Mohyla Academy” [33, 39-40] that “tobacco promotion efforts appear to have been significantly more effective in the Ukraine than those for smoking control.”

Whence all our problems and how to undertake them? How to solve them? I would like to offer an article of Matvey Ganopolsky in newspaper “Moskovsky komsomolets” [ 41 ] where he analyzes, why the American policemen do not take a bribe. The principle cause is a fear to lose his government job and the health services for him and his family, stable pension in 20 years, and lifelong pension which can reach \$65,000 dollars annually. Whether it is necessary to change all this for extortion of 100 dollars at the driver with risk to be caught?

What is the reason of the majority of the Ukrainian problems?

It seems to me, from the economical point of view, these problems arise in the absence of means which it is not enough owing to the dishonest relation to the duties of officials and their desire to snatch as much as possible. That’s why we have insufficient development of science, education, medicine, art, military forces etc. To explain the political point of view, I should like to offer the statement of prominent Ukrainian historian Yaroslav Gritsak who considers that Ukraine has not enough strategic compromise “which would concern such questions as language, historical memory, and external orientation”; according to the scientist, such compromises demand one more revolution – intellectual one [ 42 ].

The author appreciates Dr. Lucy Rowland, Professor Emeritus, University of Georgia, for her review of this manuscript.

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