

Political and Economic Demands in the Revolution of Dignity

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My paper concerns the issue of economic demands and, largely, economic and political attitudes of participants of mass movements in Ukraine, both Euromaidan and Anti-Maidan. Economic protests in Ukraine (as well as in the other countries of former USSR) were quite common; suffice it to recall protests against monetization of social benefits in Russia (2005), anti-austerity protests in Latvia (2009) or miners unrest in Western Kazakhstan (2011). In addition, labor and anti-gentrification movements made their presence felt from time to time (Kherson machinery plant workers' strike, a conflict around Askold's Grave in Kyiv etc.) However, when it came to mass protest movements (Orange Revolution in 2004, as well as Euromaidan) economic demands and issues of social justice gave place to slogans of resignation of the government, sovereignty or some vague "moral" slogans.

The problem of representation of economic demands (social justice demands foremost) matters for two reasons. First, there is a striking inconsistency between objective economic conditions of the majority of the population and the agenda of protest movement. This leaves an impression (that is also roused by reactionary commentators and representatives of incumbent regime) that there is some specific kind of people participating in the protest – those who are completely insensitive to economic grievances of the majority. This explanation is insufficient without any doubt. This makes us seek other shared reasons for the mass character and spontaneity of these movements or, at least reasons for absence or replacement of economic demands.

Secondly, recent post-Soviet protest movements evolve on the back of global rise of spontaneous urban protest movements such as Occupy Wall Street, Arab revolutions, unrest in Greece etc. – that are primarily consolidated by demands for social justice, more equal distribution of benefits and general anti-neoliberal agenda. At very least this tendency requires putting Euromaidan (as well as Bolotnaya movement) in the context of these issues. And in this particular case, the differences are apparent at once. The demands for social justice (let alone any substantial critique of neoliberalism) are poorly represented, giving place to instantaneous political demands or abstract "moral" slogans. Whereas some commentators claim that Euromaidan "came from the left» (Snyder, 2014) putting forward the demands for social justice, this inference requires more detailed analysis.

In my report, I will examine a hypothesis positing that not putting forward economic demands is conditioned by the situation of social and economic on the part of the state, customary for post-Soviet societies. The state takes responsibility for solving all major political, economic and social problems, while all options for civic engagement into distribution of powers and resources are reduced to zero. I am going to demonstrate how our informants from both Maidan and Antimaidan perceive opportunities for civic engagement and improving their living conditions in this context. However, it is not my intention to treat this issue merely as an inheritance of the Soviet era; therefore, I will try to relate it to major global tendencies in the sphere of political involvement. I will

use data taken from several surveys conducted by the Public Sociology Laboratory¹. I am going to focus on Ukrainian case using examples from our studies of Bolotnaya movement of 2011-12 and Electric Yerevan in 2015 where appropriate.

Economic demands in contemporary protest movements. Tendencies and importance

After 2010 the era of mass urban rebellions has come – Arab Spring in Egypt and Tunisia, Occupy Wall Street in the US, anti-neoliberal protests in Greece. Long-term popular movements such as Indignados moved to the forefront. Against this background, one could imagine that we are witnessing the rise of protest or, at least, protest attitudes brought by the Great Recession and general disillusionment in neoliberal economic policies. However, the picture appears to be more complicated. Scholars that use postmaterialism theory in their analysis of recent waves of World Values Research have shown that protest attitudes have decreased after 2008 world economic crisis (Cameron, 2013). This academic tradition usually relate this kind of fluctuations with economic difficulties and the growth of scarcity and that result in decreasing number of economically secured young people with postmaterialist attitudes, those who are usually disposed to protest (Inglehart, 1981). Beissinger and Sasse contribute to this picture by demonstrating the tendency for decrease of protest actions in general all over the globe, and particularly in the Eastern Europe meanwhile the specific amount of anti-austerity actions is growing (Beissinger & Sasse, 2014). It appears that center of attention has shifted from so-called pro-active protests (meaning demands for extra social benefits, political change etc.) gave place to reactive protests against austerity measures. Anyway, the tendency of moving economic demands to the forefront seems to be obvious². Which is, apparently, not true in the case of Euromaidan.

Apart from purely academic interest, this problem also has practical perspective. Why do economic demands matter for the protest movement? Some authors show, that setting up strong specific agenda is crucial for long-term political consolidation and prospects of the movement. This agenda does not necessary need clearly articulated demands. Thus, Jodi Dean shows, the very representation of existing class interest (expressed in the political slogan “We are 99 %!”) formed specific political and economic agenda (Dean & Jones, 2012). In principle, this is true not only for social justice

¹ Survey of “for Fair Elections Movement!” in St.-Petersburg and Moscow in 2011-2012 conducted by Collective of Politicization Researchers; Survey of Ukrainian Protest Movements in 2014 conducted by Public Sociology Laboratory; pilot survey of Electric Yerevan in 2015 conducted by Public Sociology Laboratory.

² One more issue is worth mentioning – what do we actually imply while speaking about economic demands. Typically, these are the issues of employment, fair salaries, descent living, health care and education. However, one of the most widely discussed issues in our interviews was an issue of corruption. Therefore, the question is whether we determine “struggle with corruption” as an economic, political or moral slogan. The thing is that “corruption” as well as the “struggle with corruption” appears to be not only a matter of everyday life in post-Soviet states but also one of the most preferred figure of speech for both authorities and the liberal opposition. Thus on the earlier stages of “For fair elections!” movement we have noticed that people often mention the issue of corruption, although they never encountered this problem in reality. This made us put that the slogans against corruptions in one row with vague moral slogans such as “For fair authorities!” or “Against crooks ant thieves!” Nevertheless, I tend to define struggle against corruption as a social justice demand for two reasons. First, our Ukrainian interviews demonstrate very different picture – the issue of corruption here is much more material as it affects everyday life of almost all our informants. Second, it is important what exactly is understood under the term “corruption”. Indeed procedural fairness plays significant part in legitimation of regime; however, some scholars show that the very fact of misuse of authority among power elites does not have a great impact on either the level of confidence in authorities (Linde, 2012) or growth of protest attitudes (Kravtsova & Oschepkov 2012). What really matters is awareness that authorities treat most of the citizens in equal matter and there is at least theoretical opportunity to equal access to the distribution of benefits.

demands. Mark Beissinger demonstrates that the lack of attention to basic democratic values makes protest movement irrelevant after the overthrow of the incumbent regime (Beissinger 2013). In other words, the absence of this kind of demands reduces movement's "objectness", its political weight and the effect of long-term cohesion between its members (Zhuravlev et al, 2015).

Data and Method

This report includes quotations from the interviews with participants of mass mobilization carried out by Public Sociology Laboratory in June and July 2014 in five Ukrainian cities – Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, Kerch and Sevastopol. Key condition for the informants was the absence of previous experience of political and civic involvement, however many of our informants took part in protest movement during the Orange Revolution in 2004. In order to find informants we were monitoring public pages and groups Russian social network Vkontakte that concerned Euromaidan and Antimaidan movements, looking for subscribers that were systematically writing or reposting on the issues of protest, Ukrainian nationalism, war on Donbass etc. These people were offered to give an interview. In all we have carried out 120 interviews and 50 of them were analyzed for this report.

In order to determine economic and social attitudes we asked several questions. First question was concerning most crucial issues that should be resolved in Ukraine. Then we asked what other demands (in addition to frequently mentioned resignation of the government and association with the EU) could be included into the agenda of protest movement; and finally how do our informants feel about including specific social and economic demands into the agenda of the movement. This set of questions gave us an opportunity to determine to what extent do people identify economic issues, as well as do they consider them to be important among other demands. In addition, following questions were important for the problem set up in my report: "What do you think how the issues mentioned should be resolved?" "Can people resolve these issues by themselves?", "How do you feel about the future of Ukraine, what are the best and the worst case scenarios?" and "What attracts you in integration to Europe/association with Russia?"

The case of Ukraine: regionalization and low level of trust in government.

Regionalization and the issue of foreign policy orientation appear to be specific features of political space and political discourse in post-Soviet Ukraine. Scholars explain this division in different ways. Thus, Taras Kuzio has claimed incompatibility of paternalist, pro-Soviet East and free, open and EU-oriented rest of Ukraine. Mykola Riabchuk also stresses on cultural and social differences in favor of the West. Dominique Arel, while also supporting this division presents a more sophisticated view. According to it, people from the East tend to reject the vision of Ukraine proposed by the West, because they see the unwillingness of authorities to recognize their agenda and therefore cannot imagine common future with the West. Andrey Portnov and Tatiana Zhurzhenko do not content themselves with the explanations based merely on cultural or territorial division, arguing that at least electoral preferences of Western Ukrainians (namely strong support for The Party of Regions) depend on structure of regional economy and distribution of benefits, rather than on any pro-Soviet paternalism.

Whether "two Ukraines" do exist in reality or not, it is clear that regional division in the policies of the state appears to be crucial factor infiltrating all issues, including economic and social. This optics allows political leaders to avoid formulating clear programs of economic development and generally undersell ideological issues

(Beissinger & Sasse 2014; 363). Moreover, in default of clear ideology regionalization itself became a political reality of Ukraine, demanding constant attention for the sake of stability and integrity of the country. Andrey Portnov brings out clearly the way in which Ukrainian elites balance between East and West, soviet inheritance, Ukrainian sovereignty and European way (Portnov, 2010). In its turn European integration (or, depending on situation, closer ties with Russia) become a political promise, universal political program that Ukrainian political elites offer to their citizens. Furthermore, Taras Kuzio argues that in this regard, elites also adhere to the same principle of ambivalence and situational pragmatism – foreign policy vector has hardly ever articulated and complete “U-turn” was a matter of momentary interest (Kuzio, 2003).

Thus, it is hardly surprising that inside the protest movement many home policies, economic and social issues, brought up in Ukrainian society were inevitably revised through the lens of European integration, seen as a remedy form all inner infirmities of the country. This also brings us to conclusion about the importance of European association perspective in legitimation of current authorities.

Another issue is traditionally low level of confidence to authorities and low level of positive economic expectations, which can be related to the absence of enduring period of growth such as in Western Europe and the US in 1950-60. Low level of trust towards political elites is usually related to a lack of procedural fairness (Linde, 2012), as well as systematic failures to keep promises on the part of the government. However, neo-Marxist tradition provides an explanation the explanation that is most important for my argument. That is the problem of growing alienation of the majority of citizens from opportunities of self-government and participation in decision-making on how resources and powers should be distributed. This alienation, often seen as nothing less than closure of political freedom appears to be one of the main catalyst of public apathy, distrust towards current authorities and largely to basic principles of representative democracy (Streek, 2011).

In respect to Ukrainian protest, the problem of distrust can also be seen as a prerequisite of not bringing up social and economic demands, when people do not expect any intentions from the government to act for the sake of the people.

Economic and social agenda in the attitudes of protesters

Mark Beissinger argues that what we witnessed on Maidan during Orange Revolution is an example of “negative coalition” consolidating different strata and social groups of people with different understanding of basic principles of political structure, economy and social justice. They are united by a simple intention to get rid of incumbent regime (Beissinger, 2013). Many of our interviews illustrate this argument:

People came out not for the sake of better salaries, pensions, or whatever else. That wasn't even mentioned by anyone, because it was so petty in by the side of that we have a dictator in our government...

However, our interviews also show that the picture in general is a bit more complicated. Indeed, economic demands were almost not presented in Euromaidan, meanwhile in most of the interviews economic grievances were put on the forefront³. Moreover, often

³ There is a common difficulty of all retrospective studies – that informants give their judgements in light of present experience. When we were holding our survey, the most frequently mentioned issues were the war on Donbass and annexation of Crimea. I tried to consider this amendment. Nevertheless, it should be noted that

they form the core of complaints to Yanukovych's regime and solving these issues is their number one concern after the regime overthrow. Also these issues are generally seen in terms of "moral economy" (Streek, 2011) – injustice in distribution of resources, corruption and destitution of many on the back of luxury life of elites, rather than in terms of weakness of national economy, integration to global markets etc.:

Those money, stolen by his (Yanukovych's) father from the people – he gets them for nothing, everyone just brings money to him, he doesn't need to earn them. They have their own business and that is what brings people into rage. That our pensioners can barely buy bread, it's 5 hryvnas for the loaf of bread, it's equivalent to one dollar, if you please... So two loafs of bread cost 1 dollar and average pensioner gets.... not even 100, just 90 dollars per month.

The people outbraved to oppose our only head that has privatized the whole town and became a local petty monarch (...) everything what could be privatized is already privatized: kindergartens, schools, a hotel, that has to be budgetary – there is his son's nightclub there. The central city beach is privatized there is also his son's nightclub now and the beach itself is private now... (Kerch, male, 28 years, journalist, Antimaidan).

Generally, the problem of social justice is presented equally in Maidan and Antimaidan interviews. As for division of judgements on what economic issues are most relevant – Antimaidan participants mention provision of social guarantees and production development, while Maidan participants consider issues of bureaucratization, corruption and unfair distribution to be more crucial. This is true that

Supporters of Maidan frequently use anti-Soviet rhetoric, and Antimaidan participants treat Soviet past with more reverence. However, it would be incorrect to assert that Maidan supporters unambiguously share the values of free market while their opponents march under the standard of Soviet paternalism and planning⁴. As it was already said, rather both sides share an idea of priority of "moral economy", still first ones see Eurointegration as a remedy while second ones set hopes upon cooperation with Russia. In all competence of some opinions, still people tend to choose simplified "good living" instead of simplified "bad living" and each side sees it's ideal coming from outside of Ukraine. Michael Mann and John Hall noticed similar tendency in relation to anti-Soviet uprisings of the 80-s: "It is remarkable that when communism in Central Europe has suffered a defeat, no ideology emerged except the intention to return to Europe. A large-scale historical transformation had not given birth to any new idea(...) There was no need for utopia because it was widely thought that in close vicinity, in the European union a much better society existed" (Mann 2014; 79)

At that in what relates to improving economic situation as well as in what relates to threats (which is also very important) informants tend to rely on the influence from the outside. Most participants of Euromaidan await for solution of their problems from the newly elected, non-corrupt government and strongly rely to the European Union with its "severe requirements" that will make the new regime to act "properly":

I think you know about this integration, I mean Eurointegration. It presumes that Europe requires... that if you sign this agreement you should fulfill their

aggressive pressure from the side of Russian media largely determined the agenda of the movement in a way that national slogans came to the forefront.

⁴ See N. Patsiurko "Informal Economy, Economic Initiative and Welfare Values in East and West" for survey of attitudes towards welfare and market economy in different regions.

requirements... I mean adjust social expenditures to their standards and also utility payments that are higher than ours...

Antimaidan supporters in their turn put hopes on Russia and Putin in person:

Frankly speaking, I'm delighted with Putin notwithstanding all these "Putin didn't help..." and "Putin has betrayed..." – I'm delighted with him. He is very competent politician; he has really got a large country going. Maybe with his experience and with his aid Ukraine could also scramble out. But today... this country is done. It won't scramble out. Unfortunately. I'm convinced that without help... and I'm convinced that it's better to accept help from Putin than from European Union. (Odessa, female, 43 y.o. entrepreneur, Antimaidan)

Probably most spectacular example of low expectations towards one or another domestic regime was a quite serious proposition to hire representatives of Swiss government to executive positions, in order to turn promptly Ukraine to a country with high standards of living:

So if I was God, eh? Than I would simply hire some professionals, I mean the whole government of some Switzerland on outsourcing... I would hire them to work for the salary they would be happy with... for, say, 5 years, and I think it would slide... because they know how things should be done...

In turn, during Antimaidan on the back of the conflict between mayor of Kerch and the citizens, the latter ones came out with pro-Russian slogans as well as slogans against the mayor. However, they were also convincing us, that if mayor "aligned himself with Russia" they were ready to forgive and support him. Below, one of the activists explains why cooperation with Russia was more important than any local issues.

Now on the back of all these events [Euromaidan and annexation of Crimea] Russia has to put in Crimea to the full, to show the rest of the world – damn, see how these Crimea people get on now (...) It's obvious that this will not be done at once, but we feel a lot of support from Russia now. Those who are employed in public positions are getting raises, higher pensions - they are happy and content. Those who work in private sector also benefit because pensions and salaries rise, and public employees became well payed, so it's kind of a resonance. What we lack now from Russia is just inspection. Some inspection that would control all the private traders in the shops and marketplaces. Because the prices are outrageous, I don't know why are they inflated so much.

Answering the question whether and how people could influence problem solving in their country or region this activist replies:

Not much. Ordinary people do not decide anything. Ordinary people are just ruck. We don't hold these positions. Maybe in future something will change, still at present we are not hungry for power. That means we just came out to express our opinion because we saw it proper.

The latter argument in a way demonstrates how our informants generally feel about the options for political involvement and control over authorities. In addition to external interference, people often mention the prospect of new protest mobilization, third Maidan as the only option:

We were very critical about Poroshenko here. That means we voted for him but it's kind of advance. Say, we are going to vote for you, but if you do nothing we will dispose of you like this! And we know how it works. So we gave man a chance to improve something but if he won't take this chance than it's... third Maidan to happen. (Kiev, female, 22 y.o., student, Maidan).

In the previous report of the Laboratory it was argued that economic agenda was implicitly integrated to a broader agenda of protest movement with the idea of European integration (Alyukov et al, 2015). However, what I consider crucial here is the deficit of ideas about prospects of society and opportunities to influence politics. Some of the reasons of this drift in post-Soviet societies lie on the surface: protracted alienation from (self)government, institutional and ideological weakness of civil society, economic paternalism, seen not as a hope upon authorities but rather as skepticism and refusal to any attempt to form positive agenda.

However, this issue is much more complicated, than merely the inheritance of Soviet regime that to some extent shared all the features mentioned above. In principle, what we are dealing with here is a general tendency in the evolution of bourgeois democracy, while post-Soviet elites, consisting mainly from late Soviet nomenklatura, have just successfully embedded into this tendency. It is referred to alienation of ordinary citizens from political decision-making on all levels: decline of unions and labor movement in general; bringing electoral politics (which presumes passive acceptance or non-acceptance of political programs or, populist slogans) to the fore (Streek, 2011); individualization of economy that replaces welfare with the idea of personal responsibility for the well-being; changing structure and role of political parties, that turn to private clubs that serve the interests of big business (Crouch, 2004). In these conditions people begin to keep themselves aloof from politics and proceed passively wait for supply of “appropriate” economic changes. In Ukraine regionalist populism and inert promises of integration with one or another foreign ally have formed respective expectations.

Conclusion

I was seeking to examine the issue of not bringing up economic demands and demands for social justice to the agenda of Euromaidan and Antimaidan. My hypothesis was that this problem is determined by political reality of contemporary Ukraine, including low level of confidence in local domestic political elites, orientation to external sources of resources and control, and substitution of clear economic agenda by regional division and “wars of history”.

Certainly, this explanation is not sufficient. In the analysis of protest mobilizations one should also consider the nature of political regime (which seems even more important for “For fair elections!” movement in Russia). Participants of the OWS brought up their class slogan “We are 99%!” under the conditions of political pluralism when parties change while social inequality reproduces. In contrary, in Russia citizens may attribute growing level of social inequality and economic stagnation to irremovability of Putin’s regime.

Another explanation possible is weak awareness of social structure and one’s specific position in it. Colleagues from PS Lab demonstrated this issue by analyzing answers to “Do you refer yourself to any social group or stratum or class?” This question caused troubles to many informants and the answer were “I’m a mother”, “I’m Homo Sapiens”, “I’m ordinary good man” (Alyukov et al, 2015). Because of not being aware of their position in class structure people may fail to recognize causes and consequences of

economic issues and ways to improve situation, attributing all misfortunes at their own charge. Indeed, class self-identification among citizens of former Soviet states is very low; still we need analysis that is more complex in order to judge how it is related to “misunderstanding” of the nature of economic issues.

One more explanation, namely the idea of “negative coalition”, when representatives of different groups cooperate for the sake of momentary need to dismiss incumbent regime, was already provided in detail. Considering aggressive duration of mobilization this coalition simply does not have enough time to elaborate common economic agenda. Social movements and civic organizations with elaborated social agenda that take part in the protest represent only a smaller part of participants of the mobilization. Furthermore, Ivancheva based on the study of Bulgarian protest shows that slogans and performance of social movement organizations can come into contradiction with feelings of broader movement (Ivancheva, 2013)

Finally yet importantly, this issue can be explained by suspiciousness towards social justice agenda perceived as a rudiment of Soviet era. Slavoj Žižek in one of his public lectures⁵ pointed out that the Global recession in the Eastern Europe brought into being a burst of radical anticommunism, because people still believed that they were manipulated by some kind of “hidden” elite that derives its origin from Soviet era. This argument perhaps seems a bit arrogant in relation to protesters; nonetheless, this tendency is quite vivid. Speaking the words of one of participants of Electric Yerevan movement: “If you declare social demands people begin to treat you as an old-fashioned socialist”. In Ukraine, in this regard the tendency to substitute political agenda by “memory wars” played its role, so that many activists considered destruction of Lenin’s monuments to be most relevant political statement.

Finding out what factor can be seen as most crucial for formulating sustainable political agenda means an opportunity for breaking vicious circle of populist elites change. If we agree that formulation valuable agenda depends on continuing long-term activist mobilization (Beissinger, 2013), than more attention should be played to specific activist groups and civic organizations both old-established and emerged during this mobilization.

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