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2013–2019**

Volume II

The Annexation of Crimea and the
War in Donbas

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Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Cover-picture: ID 143391254 © Oleksandr Tkachenko | Dreamstime.com

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-1726-0

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Printed in the EU

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Part IV

The “Russian Spring” in “New Russia”

IV.1 Headwind from “South-East”

IV.1.1 The “Anti-Maidan” in the “Province”: Protest against the Change of Power in Kyiv

The insurgent “people of the Maidan” (Ukr.: “narod Maidanu”) did not represent the entire population of Ukraine. A large part of the people in the east and south of the country did not consider the government, that had come to power in Kyiv as a result of the victory of the “Maidan” to be legitimate; even less did they share the Ukrainian national feeling that had awakened—or strengthened—by the Maidan”. In the center, west and north of Ukraine, the “new power” had the support of the people, while in the large cities of the “Yugo-Vostok”¹ (“South-East”) of the country, where it had remained quiet during the “Maidan”, people began to protest against the change of power in Kyiv. These demonstrations looked spontaneous at first,² but soon it became clear that they were orchestrated by Russian agents who took control of the protest.

The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology³ conducted on behalf of the weekly newspaper *Dzerkalo tyzhnya/ Zerkalo nedeli* an opinion poll⁴ from April 10 to 15, 2014 in eight southern and eastern oblasts, namely in the southern oblasts of Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and in the eastern oblasts of Kharkov;

-
- 1 The Russian designation of the south and east of Ukraine as “Yugo-vostok” (Ukr.: “Pivdenno Skhidna Ukraina”) is not only a geographical designation, but also implies a politically “different” Ukraine due to the high proportion of the population that is more “pro-Russian” than “Ukrainian-patriotic” and mostly Russian-speaking. The “Yugo-Vostok” is a macroregion comprising the oblasts of Kharkiv, Dnipro (until 2016 Dnipropetrovsk), Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Odessa (Russian: Odessa) the Autonomous Republic of Crimea annexed by Russia and the city of Sevastopol.
 - 2 The so-called “Anti-Maidan” organized by the “Party of Regions” in Kyiv next to the Verkhovna Rada building was “artificial”: the paid participants were brought to the capital from oblasts of the East.
 - 3 Ukr. Kyivskii Mizhnarodnyi Instytut Sotsiologii; Russ.: Kievskii mezhdunarodnyi institut sotsiologii.
 - 4 1476 telephone interviews, 1756 personal interviews, in 160 localities in 8 oblasts of the South and East.

Dnipro(petrovsk⁵), Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk, and Luhansk.⁶ Only 42 % of the respondents considered the Parliament legitimate, although it was the same as the one elected in 2012, and although its composition had not changed in the wake of the change of power.

The interim President Oleksandr Turchynov and the Prime Minister (equally ad interim) Arseniy Yatsenyuk were illegitimate in the eyes of half of the residents of the eight oblasts surveyed.⁷ In the two oblasts of the Donbas region, Donetsk and Luhansk, the stronghold of the “removed” President Yanukovich, 70% considered both illegitimate. The negative portrayal of the events in Kyiv broadcast by Russian television stations, which were the dominant medium in the east and south of Ukraine, strengthened the already dominant “Anti-Maidan” sentiment in these parts of the country.

The resentment of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians in Ukraine’s eastern and southern oblasts towards the capital Kyiv did not mean, that the majority of them wanted to “join” Russia. According to polls, only a third of the population in the Donbas harbored separatist feelings. This explains why Putin’s secession project “Novorossiya” (“New Russia”) ultimately failed.

With the exception of the Donbas, the east and south of the Ukraine did not get involved in Putin’s separatist adventure. And in Donbas, too, the separatists were only able to hold on to a third of the two oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk militarily, because their losses of weapons and fighters were compensated for by ongoing supplies from Russia. The Russian President Putin had miscalculated his Ukrainian venture: “New Russia” did not fall into his lap like Crimea. He had not foreseen, that with his military support of separatism in Donbas, he was igniting a fortified defensive Ukrainian patriotism.

Notwithstanding the above statement the “Maidan” was not a manifestation of a conflict between parts of Ukraine (“regions”), but of the resistance of a large part—the larger part?—of the people against the kleptocratic regime of President Yanukovich, who comes from Donbas. Politicians of his Party of the Regions had fuelled the (old) anti-Kyiv resentments, as well as the contempt nourished during the Soviet era against the population of western Ukraine, which was annexed to the Soviet Union under the Hitler-Stalin Pact—and which overwhelmingly supported the uprising against President Yanukovich’s regime.

On December 7, 2013, the governor of the Kherson oblast, the mayor of the Kherson oblast capital, and deputies of the oblast council and municipal councils took part in an “anti-Maidan” event in the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson. In the port city of Odessa on the Black Sea, citizens demonstrated with a “march for the federalization of Ukraine” and for “Ukraine’s accession to the (tripartite) Customs Union” (Tamozhnyi Soyuz / TS of the three states of the Russian

5 In 2016 renamed “Dnipro”.

6 <https://golos.ua/i/219987>.

7 Ibid.

Federation, Kazakhstan and Belarus.⁸ On December 13, 2013, demonstrations were also held in the port city of Sevastopol on the Crimea in support of Ukraine's accession to the TS. In the eastern Ukrainian oblast capital Donetsk (in Donbas) there were solidarity rallies for the "Maidan" in Kyiv, but the "Anti-Maidan" clearly prevailed there.

On February 17, 2014, the magazine *Tyzhden* (published weekly in Ukrainian language) published the result of journalistic research, according to which part of the "anti-Maidan organizations" was fictitious, that is, did not exist in reality.⁹ On February 1, a fictitious "Red Sector" (Russ.: "Krasnyi sektor") acknowledged to have set fire to the vehicle of a "Maidan" activist.¹⁰ Another virtual "Organization against fascists" propagated on a Facebook page the slogan "Against violence—only violence!" (Russ.: "protiv sily—tolko sila"), but then disappeared from the network. (The founder was a certain Nikolai Omelchenko.) On February 16, 2013, another phantom organization claimed responsibility on YouTube under the name "Ghosts of Sevastopol" (Russ.: "Prizraki Sevastopolya") for the murder of an activist of the "Auto-Maidan" on February 13, 2014, in the South Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhya.¹¹ Another virtual "civic platform" ("Hromadska platforma", Russ.: "Grazhdanskaya platforma")¹² with the name "HroMaidan" (Russ.: "GroMaidan") was founded in Odessa, as its coordinator Serhii Dubenko announced at a press conference on January 15, 2014.¹³

Under a similar name—"Civic Platform Maidan" ("Grazhdanskaya platforma Maidan"—a pseudo or clone "Maidan" was created in January 2014, which was conspicuous for its massive media presence. According to the Institute for Mass Media (Institut Masovoi Informatsii / "IMI"), 11% of the cost of covert political advertising was accounted for by this platform, which posed as the "real" Maidan, broadcast false messages purporting to be from the "Maidan", and prided itself as a platform for ideas to solve the crisis.¹⁴ The origin of the funds for this strong "media presence" was unknown. It was suspected to be the leader of the pro-Russian pseudo-movement "Ukrainian Choice" ("Ukrainskii vybor"), Viktor Medvedchuk. The "GP Maidan" appeared at the time when

8 Customs Union of the Eurasian Economic Union (Tamozhennyi soyuz Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soyuza).

9 <http://tyzhden.ua/News/102073>; *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russ edition), 17.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/17/7014106/>.

10 *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), 01.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/1/7012329/>.

11 *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), 16.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/16/7014042/>.

12 *HroMaidan* / "Hromadskiy Maidan; Russ.: "GroMaidan" / "Grazhdanskii Maidan".

13 News Agency "Unian": <https://www.unian.net/politics/872726-v-odesse-sozdana-obschestvennaya-platforma-gromaydan.html>. <https://www.unian.ua/politics/872727-u-odesse-stvorena-gromadska-platforma-gromaydan.html>.

14 Yelena Holub, Roman Kabachyi: *GroMaidan* protiv Maidana, in: *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), February 17, 2014; http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/02/17/7014100/view_print/.

Andrii Klyuyev became the head of the President’s administration. The suspicion was that it was a project of the presidential administration to discredit the “Maidan”. This pseudo-“Maidan” propagated a “Maidan without politicians” (meaning: without opposition politicians); the mission was obvious: To split the “Maidan”.

IV.1.2 The Kharkiv Congress of the “Party of Regions”

Coup Attempt in Kharkiv?

On February 22, 2014, on the day when President Yanukovich escaped from Kyiv, a congress of deputies of his “Party of Regions” from oblasts and municipal councils of the Eastern and Southern oblasts¹⁵ as well as of PoR’s deputies of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and of the city council of the port city of Sevastopol (which, like Kyiv, has a special status) took place in the Sports Palace of Kharkiv, the second largest city of Ukraine, under the chairmanship of the head of the Kharkiv oblast state administration Mikhail Dobkin and under the protection of the riot police, “Berkut”. The speaker of the congress, along with Dobkin, was Vadym Kolesnichenko, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada and deputy chairman of the faction of the Party of Regions.¹⁶ According to the organizers, the meeting was attended by more than 3000 people. Participating was a Russian delegation, which included Aleksei Pushkov, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Gosudarstvennaya Duma (the Parliament of the Russian Federation); Vasili Golubev, Governor of the Belgorod Oblast; Aleksandr Gordeev, Governor of the Voronezh oblast; Nikolai Denin, Governor of the Bryansk oblast; Mikhail Margelov, Senator of the Pskov oblast and Sergei Semenov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Kharkiv.

The fugitive President Yanukovich had announced that he was flying to Kharkiv with the aim of participating in this congress; however, for unknown reasons he did not appear at the congress after landing in Kharkiv, but flew on to his ‘stronghold’ Donetsk. The resolution adopted by this congress stated:

We, the organs of local self-government at all levels [...] the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the municipal council of the city of Sevastopol, have decided to assume responsibility for ensuring normal conditions for the work of the people’s deputies (of the Verkhovna Rada) – without extortion and threats against them and their families – observance of the law and respect for human rights throughout the territory of Ukraine, in order to restore the constitutional order in Kiev.¹⁷

15 With the exception of the two oblasts of Odessa and Mykolaiv.

16 Kolesnichenko was known for his ostentatious contempt of the Ukrainian language. He fled after the change of power to Russia, where he took Russian citizenship.

17 *Ukrainskaya pravda* (Russ. edition), 22.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/22/7015713/>.