



Language

The 'Euromaidan' rebellion began on 21 November 2013 and ended on 21/22 February 2014, when President Yanukovych fled from Kiev (allegedly taking \$32 billion with him). It was not, as the 'Orange Revolution' had been, a challenge to the outcome of an election achieved by electoral malpractice, but began as a reaction against Yanukovych's sudden decision to suspend negotiations on a political and trade Association Agreement with the EU. This appeared to be a decisive turn towards Putin's Russia, which was putting pressure on other former Soviet states to renounce ties with the EU. The initial demonstrators looked at the EU as a symbol of freedom and democracy, and called for Ukraine to sign the EU Association Agreement. Later, the growing movement also attacked the spectacular corruption of Yanukovych's Presidency since 2010, and demanded respect for human rights and a return to the Constitution as amended in 2004, which limited presidential powers and gave greater powers to Parliament, including the appointment of the Prime Minister.

Yanukovych had been seen as both authoritarian and pro-Russian by the activists in 2004, who forced him to accept the election of the more liberal Yushenko. But, in the following years, Yanukovych (who had always had a significant support base, especially in Eastern Ukraine) made an electoral come back, first as Prime Minister and then again as President in 2010. The conduct of the 2010 election (unlike in 2004) was not seriously criticised. But in office Yanukovych tried to discredit a former leader of the Orange Revolution, also a former Prime Minister and his rival in the 2010 election, Yulia Tymoshenko. After she was charged in May 2011 with exceeding her authority in signing a 2009 gas agreement with Russia (she used the trial to ridicule the prosecution), Tymoshenko was arrested in August 2011 for 'contempt of court', and remained in prison until 21 February 2014, when Parliament voted her release. Yanukovych also put pressure on the Constitutional Court, which in 2010 declared the 2004 Amendments unconstitutional and restored the 1996 Constitution, which entrenched his position. There were genuine constitutional issues related to the hasty 2004 Amendments, but in both 2004 and 2010 political requirements dominated.

The 'Orange Revolution' was a disciplined nonviolent movement against electoral corruption and authoritarianism, which was peacefully resolved, although it did not lead to fundamental systematic change. It also had a geopolitical dimension (some left wing commentators stressed the role of Western organisations and funding), but did not result in a decisive swing by Ukraine towards the West. Euromaidan, on the other hand, although it developed into an impressive self-organised and nonviolent protest in November and December 2013, erupted into a more violent confrontation in the later stages from 19 January until 23 February 2014. The Euromaidan movement met with serious violence from government security forces, including covert attacks on supporters by special police and unofficial government-funded mercenary agents, the 'titushki'. There were brutal beatings of demonstrators, and at the end snipers shot into the crowd. By 23 February 2014, 112 protesters were dead, over 600 injured and another 200 were still classed as missing in March 2014. An estimated 17 police members died in the fighting in the last three days, and nearly 200 were injured. Euromaidan was also much more revolutionary in its outcome, and threw Crimea and Eastern Ukraine into a geopolitical crisis.

Evolution of events

The Euromaidan protests began with a few hundred students and middle class demonstrators, but grew rapidly into rallies of around 100,000 and a tent occupation of the Maidan, Kiev's Independence Square. It also spread to other cities such as Lviv. The government escalated confrontation on 30 November, when it sent in the Berkut special police force who brutally attacked the few hundred protesters occupying the square overnight. In response an estimated 700,000 people rallied in Kiev and thousands more elsewhere. Groups, probably of agents provocateurs, fought with the police, but did not manage to discredit the main demonstration. When the government sent in Berkut again to clear the square at 1am on 11 December (joining shields and pushing demonstrators back), the protesters resisted with the mass of their bodies and began to set up barricades, but did not retaliate with violence. There were weekly Sunday rallies: on 29 December a Manifesto of the Maidan was put to the crowd, which included calls to disband the Berkut special force, dismiss legal charges against protesters, free all political prisoners, and for the resignation of the Interior Minister and others responsible for security force violence. In late December a new organization, 'Auto Maidan', used their cars to transport and provision the protesters, patrol the streets and, at times, block security forces. During January the regime stepped up covert violence against



demonstrators, including the drivers of Auto Maidan, whilst the opposition developed new tactics: a widespread economic boycott of companies owned by prominent regime members, and setting up of neighbourhood watch groups.

Yanukovytych's public response to the protests was to announce on 17 December 2013 an agreement with President Putin that involved Russia cutting the price of natural gas supplies by a third and buying up many Ukrainian bonds, thus both indicating the economic gains from ties with Russia and rejection of the EU. Unable to quell the protests, Yanukovytych prompted Parliament (where he had a majority) to pass a stringent anti-protest legislation on 16 January 2014. In response there were further mass demonstrations and militant protests in many other parts of Ukraine, including seizures of government buildings. An impromptu march on Parliament from the Maidan after a rally on 19 January 2014 precipitated into serious fights between protesters and police.

In the final phase of the movement there was an escalation both in the violence used against protesters (including the wounded in hospital) and in the militancy of protest. Key buildings in Kiev and other cities were seized - often by the direct action group Common Cause, which was trying to focus attention on opposing the regime itself. There was also a turn towards greater willingness by some protesters to use violence. In the four days of confrontation from 19 January protesters threw stones and molotov cocktails, and there were reports of home-made weapons such as slings and *ad hoc* rocket launchers. During the final days of 18-23 February guns were also in evidence. Common Cause had authorized members with military training to shoot if the government did so first (according to Oleksander Danylyuk in an interview with Andrew Wilson). Police stations were occupied in Lviv, which led to over 1,000 guns going missing (it was not clear who acquired them), and the Right Sector advertised their possession of arms on stage at the Maidan on 21 February. But the great majority of protesters were not armed.

The Yanukovytych government adopted a dual strategy in the final phase. It negotiated with leaders of the protesters and offered apparent concessions, for example on freeing prisoners if occupations of buildings ended, and on a possible new Constitution (although Yanukovytych refused to reinstate the 2004 constitution as the protesters were demanding). His party in Parliament joined with the opposition on 28 January to repeal most of the laws against protest recently passed, and the Prime Minister resigned. But the government was also making preparations to crush the rebellion by force. On 18 February there were violent confrontations between protesters and regime forces in the streets and security forces tried unsuccessfully to clear the Maidan. On 20 February riot police again tried to clear the square while snipers on high buildings shot and killed demonstrators. The regime was apparently planning to use much greater military force on 21 February, but the government was losing its parliamentary majority, as members of Yanukovytych's Party went over to the opposition, and late on 20 February parliament voted for security forces to leave Kiev. There were also military defections in the final days, both at the top and in the ranks - many summoned to Kiev stayed in their barracks. Activists reportedly also blocked both railway lines and roads carrying troops.

The Interior Minister and other top officials left the country on 20 February, just ahead of Yanukovytych. An interim coalition government was created - Parliament endorsed an ally of Yulia Tymoshenko as a temporary president on 23 February and soon after accepted a new Prime Minister. The interim coalition was committed to holding new presidential elections in May. On 25 May 2014 Poro Poroshenko, a wealthy businessman who had supported the Orange Revolution and become prominent during the Maidan protests, was elected as the new President.

Important and Debatable Issues

Interpretations of both Euromaidan and the subsequent developments vary with different ideological perspectives. One especially sensitive issue is the role of the far right in the protests. For brief analysis of the different rightist groups see Wilson (2014, pp. 70-72), and Ischenko (2014, pp. 5-6 & 8), both listed below. It is generally agreed that far right groups (though in a minority) were quite prominent in the square and in the movement across the country in the later stages, but their impact on events is less clear. Their role was highlighted by the Russian media. The far-right did have some influence in the temporary coalition government, although the leading role was played by Tymoshenko's Party. For example, the far right Party Svoboda (founded in 1991), which first gained representation in Parliament in 2012, held four seats in the cabinet.

A second source of confusion concerns who started the shooting in the Maidan on 20 February, when snipers fired at and killed demonstrators. Protest leaders continued to blame the security services and previous government, and it was also claimed that Russian security forces were involved. But there were rumours too of a third force trying to provoke trouble, and accusations against protesters. A leaked telephone call of 4 March 2014 between the Estonian Foreign Minister and the EU foreign affairs representative, Catherine Ashton, revealed that a doctor in



Kiev had suggested that snipers shooting both protesters and policemen came from the opposition (MacAskill, Ewen, 'Ukraine Crisis: Bugged Call Reveals Conspiracy Theory about Kiev Snipers', *Guardian* (5 March 2014). A BBC documentary a year later interviewed a man who claimed he was a protester in the square, was given a gun, and began to shoot at policemen, though he said he was trying to force them back, not to kill them. The report also noted conflicting evidence from various groups involved (Gatehouse, Gabriel, 'The Untold Story of the Maidan Massacre', *BBC News Magazine*, 12 February 2014: <http://www.bbc.co.uk> [1]).

A third question is how to assess the formal agreement reached in the evening on 21 February by three parliamentary opposition leaders with Yanukovytsch (brokered by the EU foreign ministers from France, Germany and Poland) in the context of subsequent developments. The agreement was endorsed by Russia. It was accepted (under pressure from the Polish Foreign Minister) by the Maidan Council, which included many politicians, by 34 votes to 2. Under this compromise Yanukovytsch would (among other concessions to demands of protesters) reinstate the 2004 Constitution immediately, but could remain in office until new elections to be held by December 2014 (three months ahead of the already scheduled elections in March 2015). Parliament voted unanimously that evening to reinstate the 2004 Constitution and to remove the Minister of the Interior. The protesters in the square had been radicalized further by the violence used against them in the preceding days, and there was booing when the terms were read out. There was also obvious support for a much reported speech of passionate rejection by a 26-year old man, who called for seizure for government buildings in Kiev unless Yanukovytsch resigned by 10 am the next day. But there was no formal vote in the square on the terms of the agreement.

Yanukovytsch, whose household had been recorded by security cameras packing up for several days, left very early on 22 February for Kharkov in Eastern Ukraine (perhaps to try to rally support), and then travelled on to Russia, where he was treated as the legitimate president of Ukraine. The Kiev Parliament voted by a majority on 22 February to remove him from the presidency, but did not follow the more prolonged constitutional procedure for impeachment, and the reported majority of 328 out of 450 fell slightly short of the constitutionally required three quarters. Moscow has continued to stress the legitimacy of the 21 February internationally endorsed agreement and accused the subsequent Ukrainian government of breaching it. Western states have backed the new government in Kiev.

A week after Yanukovytsch and other senior government members fled, armed groups seized the Crimean Parliament and set up a pro-Russian 'government' in the Crimea. This led to Russian military annexation, given a semblance of legitimacy by a hasty referendum. Uprisings in other parts of eastern Ukraine against Kiev (interpretation of these is also disputed) led to a state of war between the new government and breakaway areas such as Donetsk, and threatened a revival of serious conflict between Russia and the West. As a result it is now difficult to assess Euromaidan without taking account of the immediate aftermath. Some of the references listed below cover both, although others focus on the Euromaidan movement.

Bachmann, Klaus ; Lyabashenko, Igor, [The Maidan Uprising, Separatism and Foreign Intervention. Ukraine's Complex Transition](#) [2], Frankfurt-am-Main, Peter Lang GmbH , 2014, pp. 523, hb.

Collection of 17 essays by academics, journalists, lawyers, policy makers and activists covering Euromaidan and the election of President Poroshenko in May 2014, and also developments in Crimea, from a multidisciplinary perspective. It is sponsored by the Polish National Research Institute, but includes also contributions from Germany, Sweden and the USA. There are chapters on post-1991 Ukrainian politics, on the Orange Revolutions and Euromaidan (focusing only on Kiev).

Bartkowski, Maciej J. ; Stephan, Maria J., [How Ukraine Ousted an Autocrat: The Logic of Civil Resistance](#) [3], Atlantic Council, 01/08/2014,

This work discusses the Euromaidan movement from a perspective of nonviolent strategy, highlighting the role of 'backfire' when the police attacked peaceful students' sit-ins, nonviolent tactics used to combat covert intimidation and the importance of the army's refusal to crush the protest. It also comments on the negative impact of the 'radical flank' that turned to violence.

See also: Ackerman, Peter, Maciej J. Barkowski and Jack Duvall, [Ukraine: A Nonviolent Victory](#) [4]



, *OpenDemocracy* (3 March 2004)

Chapman, Annabelle, [Ukraine's Big Three: Meet the Opposition Leaders at the Helm of Euromaidan](#) [5], *Foreign Affairs*, Snapshot, 21/01/2014,

A journalist expert on Ukraine assesses the three opposition politicians - Vitaly Klitschko, Oleh Tyahnybok, and Arseniy Yatsenyuk - who, after the 2012 parliamentary elections, created a 'united opposition' and put themselves forward as 'leaders' of the Euromaidan protests.

Diuk, Nadia, [Euromaidan: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution](#) [6], *World Affairs*, issue March/April, 2014

Report by a Vice-President of Endowment for Democracy covering the developments of Ukraine's demonstrations until the end of December 2014. It stresses the creative and disciplined popular organisation; the unwillingness to rely on politicians; the breadth of support not only in Kiev but in other cities of eastern Ukraine; how provocateurs have been kept out of Maidan and how violence was avoided when responding to brutal attempts to clear the square. Available on line: <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/euromaidan-ukraine%E2%80%99s-self-organizing-revolution> [7]

Fishwick, Carmen, ['We were so naive and optimistic': Ukraine Euromaidan protesters tell us what's changed for them](#) [8], *The Guardian*, 04/03/2014,

Interviews with three protesters, two of whom were then protesting against Russian military intervention.

See also: Stelmakh and Tom Bamforth, ['Ukraine's Maidan Protests - One Year On](#) [9], *The Guardian*, 21 November 2014

Ischenko, Volodymyr, [Interview: Ukraine's Fractures](#) [10], *New Left Review*, issue 87 (May/June), 2014

Assessment by a Marxist sociologist in Ukraine who demonstrated in 2000 against the Kuchma regime. Topics include: the role of the far right in Euromaidan (he argues that an organised and effective minority was promoting nationalist slogans); the changing of the social composition of protesters; the *interim* government; the cultural roots of the eastern Ukrainian uprisings for independence, and the election of President Poroshenko.

Kurkov, Andrey, [Ukraine Diaries: Dispatches From Kiev](#) [11], London, Harvill Secker, 2014, pp. 272

Account by an enthusiastic Russian Ukrainian novelist, best known for his surreal *Deat of a Penguin*, who was a sympathetic observer of protests, and stresses popular anger at the systematic corruption of Yanukovytsch regime and the spontaneous self-organising nature of the Euromaidan movement.

Marples, David R. ; Mills, Frederick V., [Ukraine's Euromaidan: Analyses of a Civil Revolution](#) [12], Stuttgart and Hannover, Ibidem Press, 2015, pp. 304, pb.

Collection of essays edited by two historians at the University of Alberta. Topics cover the role of nationalism, the issue of the Russian language, the mass media, the motives and aims of the protesters, gender issues, and the impact of Euromaidan on politics in Ukraine, the EU, Russia and also Belarus. The Russian annexation of Crimea, and the creation of pro-Russian republics in the east of Ukraine and ensuing wars are covered in an epilogue.

Popova, Maria, [Why the Orange Revolution Was Short and Peaceful and Euromaidan Long and Violent](#) [13], *Problem of Post-Communism*, Vol. 61, issue 6, 2014, pp. 64-70

Focuses on the lack of institutional channels to resolve the crisis and politicisation of the judiciary, and argues that the violence used strengthened the role of the far right.



Sakwa, Richard, [Frontlinhe Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands](#) [14], London and New York, I.B.Tauris, 2015, pp. 220

A book by long-term academic expert on the Soviet Union/Russia, which situates coverage of Euromaidan and the subsequent local rebellions in Crimea and other parts of eastern Ukraine within a context of different cultural and ideological strands in Ukrainian society, and within the wider context of Russian-Western relations. Sakwa is very critical of Western policies after 1991 and, more recently, towards Putin, and also challenges the bias of much western reporting on the evolving Ukrainian crisis.

Wilson, Andrew, [Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West](#) [15], New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2014, pp. 224, pb.

British academic expert on Ukraine (author of books on the Orange Revolution) covers both the Euromaidan protests, which he witnessed (stressing variety of protesters and arguing that the far right played a minor role), and the subsequent developments in both western and eastern Ukraine. He concludes with a discussion of Russian policy. Wilson also wrote brief assessments during the course of the Maidan protests, for example: '[The Ukrainian #Euromaidan](#) [16]', by the European Council on Foreign Relations, 5 December 2013.

A film on the demonstration in the Maidan by Ukrainian Director Sergei Loznitsa (duration 134 minutes) was released in London in February 2015.

Source URL (retrieved on 20/09/2024 - 02:41):<https://civilresistance.info/section/d-resisting-authoritarianism-post-communist-and-post-soviet-regimes/d-ii-electoral-12>

Links

[1] <http://www.bbc.co.uk> [2] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/maidan-uprising-separatism-and-foreign-intervention-ukraines-complex-transition> [3] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/how-ukraine-ousted-autocrat-logic-civil-resistance> [4] <http://www.opendemocracy.net/civilresistance/peter-ackerman-maciej-bartkowski-jack-duvall/ukraine-nonviolent-victory> [5] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/ukraines-big-three-meet-opposition-leaders-helm-euromaidan> [6] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/euromaidan-ukraines-self-organizing-revolution> [7] <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/article/euromaidan-ukraine%E2%80%99s-self-organizing-revolution> [8] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/we-were-so-naive-and-optimistic-ukraine-euromaidan-protesters-tell-us-whats-changed> [9] <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/21-sp-ukraine-maidan-protest-kiev> [10] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/interview-ukraines-fractures> [11] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/ukraine-diaries-dispatches-kiev> [12] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2015/ukraines-euromaidan-analyses-civil-revolution> [13] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/why-orange-revolution-was-short-and-peaceful-and-euromaidan-long-and-violent> [14] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2015/frontlinhe-ukraine-crisis-borderlands> [15] <https://civilresistance.info/biblio-item/2014/ukraine-crisis-what-it-means-west> [16] http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_ukrainian_euromaidan230