

Lurching westward

BY STASH LUCZKIW

Ukraine is making slow tumultuous progress in its quest for European integration. While the post-revolution government is generally viewed as more of the same, many people recognize that it is probably better than the alternatives.

Like most couples, Bohdan Boychuk and his wife Oksana have their agreements and disagreements. Over dinner in their small Kiev apartment, they reflect on the local elections held on October 25. Both are originally from western Ukraine and both were enthusiastic supporters of the protests on the Maidan, as Kiev's Independence Square is called, which led to the ouster of President Viktor Yanukovich. But they disagree about the direction in which the country is headed.

Bohdan is 88 years old and one of Ukraine's most influential living poets. Born in a region that was part of Poland before World War II, he was taken as forced labor to Germany during the war. Afterwards he lived in displaced persons camps until 1949, when he emigrated to the United States. He settled in New York, where he got a degree in engineering and combined the life of a rocket scientist and poet until his retirement, after which he devoted himself fully to literature. He was one of the most prominent members of what is known as the New York Group of writers and artists, which drew together émigrés in the 1950s and for decades produced art steeped with Western modernist influences that was unimaginable in post-World War II Soviet Ukraine. After independence in 1991, Boychuk came back to Ukraine, spending most of his time in his beloved Kiev, but also returning regularly to the New York that informed much of his intellectual and artistic sensibility.

Boychuk's opinion of Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko's achievements in the year and a half since he took office is one of reserved approval. "He's good at diplomacy and maintaining relations with the West. And he managed the war well, keeping it at a low-intensity level, then moving to negotiations at the right time. After all,

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if Russia had wanted, it could have taken us in a matter of days."

His wife Oksana, on the other hand, has few kind words for the President. Unlike Bohdan, she has never lived in the West for more than a few months at a time. (They met after Bohdan had returned to Ukraine.) "Poroshenko is like the others, only interested in his own wealth and that of his family. Whereas the rest of the nation is choking. Pensions have fallen, prices are rising, and the same criminals are in power."

When Bohdan tries to ease his wife into a broader perspective on Ukraine's situation, she retorts, "It's easy for you, because you have a pension coming from America." In many ways the Boychuks' divergent opinions reflect their nation's current dilemma: To what extent are Ukrainians willing to accept the difficult

and often unpleasant aspects of increased Westernization in their path toward achieving a dream that seemed so attractive while it was merely hypothetical?

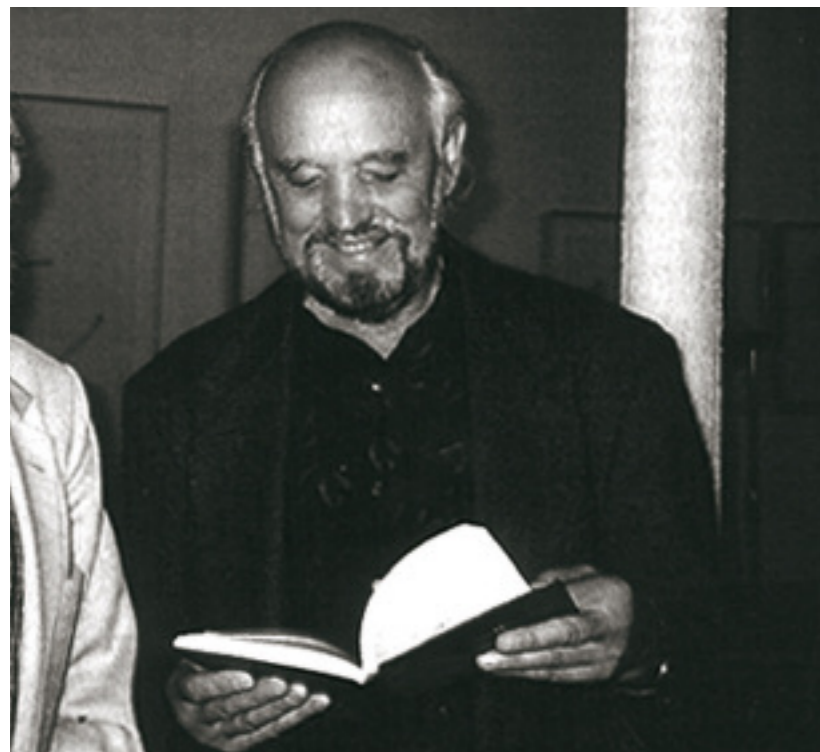
Two full years have passed since Ukrainians took to the streets to demand that their government sign a much-anticipated association agreement with the European Union. The protests led to a violent revolution, which spurred Russia to execute a long-planned land grab in Crimea and to foment a war in the eastern part of the country. After more than a year of fighting, in which over 9,000 people were killed, the conflict has been effectively frozen and Ukrainians are assessing whether the upheaval has brought them closer to their initial goal of moving toward Europe.

The Minsk 2 Accords, signed in February, stipulate that both sides were to have taken certain steps by

January 1. Both were to remove heavy weapons from the line of control – which, apart from a few contested sites, has largely been implemented. Ukraine was to have enacted a constitutional reform giving the rebel regions "special status." Although the Ukrainian parliament did amend the constitution, the wording was vague and the contingencies enough to serve as cover for parliamentarians who reluctantly voted for the highly unpopular measure. Meanwhile, the Russians were supposed to return control of the border to the Ukrainian government and remove all its troops, which has not yet happened.

Poroshenko has been trying hard to hard to paint this frozen conflict as a success – or at least not a defeat: Ukrainians are no longer dying on the front; they gave the Russians a bloody nose and fought off a full-

An attentive audience at a performance of *The Merry Widow* operetta by the Austro-Hungarian composer Franz Lehár at the Donetsk State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre.



Ukrainian poet Bohdan Boychuk at a book reading.

on invasion; Ukrainians are more unified than ever; the West continues to uphold sanctions against Russia; and Ukraine is firmly on the road to Westernization. The October 25 local elections were a test for the President's Solidarity Party, also known as the Bloc of Petro Poroshenko (BPP). The results were mixed. While it did better than all the other parties in most regions, its share of the vote slipped to just below 20%, compared to 22% in the parliamentary elections that took place exactly one year before.

Meanwhile, the Opposition Bloc – many of whom were allies of the overthrown former president Yanukovich, now living in exile in Russia – got 11% of the votes, mostly in the eastern regions. Other members of Yanukovich's now-defunct Party of Regions formed the Revival Party (5.4%), which won big in the eastern city of Kharkiv, and the Our Land Party (4.8%). Still others switched over to Poroshenko's bloc. In fact, according to the *Kyiv Post*, an English-language weekly, an analysis of the party lists in 11 regions published before the election shows that of all the parties the BPP now has the most politicians from the old regime in its ranks: 120.

Meanwhile, the People's Front – the more hawkish, though still rather moderate party of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk – has begun to hemorrhage in the wake of corruption accusations. In the run-up to the elections it was polling at less than 2% and decided not to stand in the elections, largely folding itself into the

BPP. Some are predicting the Prime Minister's imminent resignation after a year of public sniping between him and Poroshenko's camp, but Yatsenyuk has often flaunted predictions of his political demise with deft survival skills – resisting even an attempt to physically carry him out of parliament, an incident which led to yet another parliamentary fistfight.

Former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's party saw a respectable showing of 12%, although media reports in the West about her political comeback are somewhat exaggerated. At most, she could play an important role as kingmaker in the future.

On the hard-line nationalist end of the spectrum, Svoboda, which had formed a loose alliance with the Right Sector just prior to the elections, got 6.7% of the vote, mostly in western Ukraine. The populist Radical Party – which recently split from the government coalition over the constitutional amendment on “special status” for the breakaway regions, thus angering Poroshenko – fell to 6.7% (compared to 7.4% last year).

In a moment of high political theater a few weeks before the election, Viktor Shokin, the prosecutor general, who is chosen directly by the president, stood up before the parliament and played hidden camera footage of a key Radical Party member, Ihor Mosiychuk – a particularly unsavory character even among nationalists – accepting bribes. In a scene that stretched the limits of procedural legality, the parliament immediately voted to strip Mosiychuk of his immunity and he was arrested on live television. The Radical Party, which had so consistently decried Ukraine's culture of corruption, was disgraced – at least for the time being.

Another newcomer to Ukraine's political scene reflects an ongoing battle among oligarchs over control of the government and economy. One of the most powerful and prominent oligarchs in Ukraine, Ihor Kolomoisky, who had been appointed governor of the vital Dnipropetrovsk region just as the wave of separatism had begun to flare up in the east (before Poroshenko had been elected), formed the UKROP (Ukrainian Association of Patriots) Party. The name, which means “dill” in Russian and Ukrainian, is a play on the pejorative term separatists used to refer to Ukrainian troops. Kolomoisky came to loggerheads with Poroshenko earlier in March over control of a gas company and was forced to resign as governor.

This spat is now beginning to resemble a mafia war. Only a few days after the election, Ukraine's security services arrested Gennady Korban, the UKROP candidate for mayor of Kiev and a close associate of Kolomoisky, on very vague charges of corruption, extortion and complicity in kidnapping. Several days after the arrest, during an emergency meeting at the office of Prosecutor General Shokin, a sniper reportedly fired three shots into the office, although they didn't



manage to penetrate the bullet-proof glass.

In countering opposition from all directions, Poroshenko has tried to co-opt and absorb much of the old power elite into his ranks. In the Dnipropetrovsk mayoral election Poroshenko gave tacit support to Oleksandr Vilkul, a former Yanukovich ally who had been deputy prime minister up until the revolution. Vilkul was running against Borys Filatov, Kolomoisky's right-hand man and the winner of the election. Such tactical alliances by Poroshenko should come as no surprise since he was actually one of the founding members of Yanukovich's disgraced Party of Regions in 2001 (although he jumped ship a year later to ally himself with Viktor Yushchenko, the eventual leader of the Orange Revolution).

Clearly Poroshenko is using his position as president to consolidate power in the ever murky waters of Ukrainian politics, where alliances shift as easily as money can be transferred between off-shore accounts. One of the President's principal weapons is control over the judiciary. Shokin is the tip of Poroshenko's spear in this matter, launching investigations into the President's rivals and turning a blind eye to his allies, such as Poroshenko's chief of staff Borys Lozhkin, who is being investigated in Austria for links to a money-laundering scheme. Moreover, the President has come under severe criticism for stalled investigations against

many former Yanukovich allies who fled Ukraine after the revolution. Shokin is the third man to hold the prosecutor general post since Poroshenko took office and there is already a “Shokin must go” movement brewing less than a year into his tenure. Even though the Ukrainian parliament has adopted a law to limit the immunity of judges, which received the approval of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, the President's critics consider it mere window dressing, and accuse Shokin of undermining Ukraine's anti-corruption efforts. After a protracted struggle, Shokin finally appointed Nazar Kholodnytsky of Lviv to serve as the top anti-corruption prosecutor in the newly formed Anti-Corruption Bureau. This organ has been touted as a key to tackling Ukraine's endemic corruption, but it is still too early to tell whether it will be effective, or just an additional bureaucratic entity serving to muddy the waters beneath which the graft takes place.

More ominously, Poroshenko can make use of the Security Service of Ukraine (the SBU, known as the KGB in Soviet times). After a ten-day visit to Ukraine in September, Christof Heyns, United Nations Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, claimed that the SBU “has been the subject of widespread allegations – and seems to be above the law.” Heyns also points to an “accountability vacuum.”

Radical Party deputy Ihor Mosiychuk was arrested after a video surfaced of his offering services in exchange for cash.



Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko signs the guestbook during a meeting with his Lithuanian counterpart at the presidential palace in Vilnius, December 2, 2015.

Ukraine has been somewhat successful, according to an Atlantic Council report, “Ukraine: From Evolutionary to Revolutionary Reforms,” in certain economic areas. The energy industry has always been one of the biggest sources of large-scale corruption, and many of today’s oligarchs (as well as politicians such as Yulia Tymoshenko) made their fortunes in shady gas deals. Since the revolution, Ukraine has managed to significantly diversify gas imports. In 2013 92% of its gas came from Russia; this number dropped to 74% in 2014 and is expected to fall further to 40% by the end of 2015. Parliament approved a new law on the natural gas market in line with the EU Third Energy Package, introducing market pricing mechanisms into Ukraine’s heavily subsidized and inefficient distribution, and limiting state involvement in the wholesale segment of the market, which will allow for demopolization of the gas market.

As these measures encourage less wasteful consumption patterns and more fuel efficient infrastructure, Ukraine is expected to benefit in the long term by from its forced weaning off government-subsidized Russian gas.

Another area of reform in the fight against corruption has been to overhaul the loathed municipal police forces in major cities, whose officers had a notorious reputation for randomly stopping drivers and shaking them down for bribes. The new force has rebranded itself from “*militsia*” to “*politsia*,” wears more American-style uniforms, and likes to portray itself as young, fresh-faced and citizen-friendly. A rigorous selection process and training combined with a three-fold increase in salaries is expected to keep the police more honest. So far, the citizens seem to welcome the improvement, although most would admit that it could not have gotten much worse.

Many of Ukraine’s more successful attempts at reform have stemmed directly or indirectly from one of Poroshenko’s more controversial decisions: that of shaking up the government with foreign-born ministers. Two in particular have been making a difference: US-born Natalia Jaresko as finance minister and former President of Georgia Mikheil Saakashvili, who was appointed governor of the Odessa region.

Jaresko, born in Chicago, grew up immersed in the city’s vibrant Ukrainian diaspora community, so she grew up speaking Ukrainian and was familiar with the culture and mentality. Before becoming finance minister, she had been living in Ukraine and working as an investment banker there since 1992. Moreover, throughout the 1990s she worked for the US State Department on economics-related matters in Ukraine and coordinated activities with the US Treasury, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. This experience has been crucial in Ukraine’s successful negotiations with the various holders of its sovereign debt, who ultimately agreed to a significant writedown.

Jaresko will also be a key element in negotiating Ukraine’s effective default on a \$3 billion bond debt with Russia, which came due at the end of December. The bond is rather ambiguous for a state-to-state loan. It was drafted as a commercial instrument under English law, making it susceptible to the writedown already accepted by private debt-holders. The IMF board, however, has recently ruled that it is indeed a state-to-state loan. But Ukraine has placed a “moratorium” on outstanding debt repayments to Russia. Fortunately for Kiev, the IMF had signaled earlier in the year that Ukraine’s default in this case would not necessarily jeopardize its IMF loan.

In such an internationalized context, Jaresko’s connections at the highest echelons of world finance combined with her intimate knowledge of the Ukrainian



Demonstration on December 11, 2015 in front of the Ukrainian Parliament in Kiev to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk during the annual report of his government. The white banner with an image of Yatsenyuk reads: “If a bullet to the forehead, then a bullet to the forehead.”

system (not to mention the fact that she was already wealthy enough to not feel the need to siphon government money into her own personal coffers) have made her arguably Ukraine’s best finance minister since independence.

The other controversial foreigner is Mikheil Saakashvili. The former Georgian president attended university in Kiev and graduated shortly after Ukraine became independent. At university the young Georgian befriended Poroshenko. Throughout the Maidan protests Saakashvili kept a high-profile in Ukraine – especially since he can’t go back to his native Georgia, where he was indicted by Georgia’s new government on multiple criminal charges after he lost the 2012 elections. Saakashvili, of course, claims the charges are politically motivated. Nevertheless, there is little dispute about the fact that, while president of Georgia, he tackled corruption and reform as well as any leader of a former Soviet state. His problem tended to be an almost maniacal exuberance and a willingness to confront adversaries head-on (not least of which Russia in the 2008 Russo-Georgian War), which has earned him no shortage of political enemies.

In May of this year Poroshenko appointed Saakashvili governor of the Odessa region – one of

Ukraine’s most corrupt regions due to the massive port in the city itself – replacing a Kolomoisky ally. So far, the Georgian has been extremely vocal in sacking functionaries and attempting to streamline a bureaucracy so overloaded with middlemen that it only serves to facilitate graft. In the process, he has become one of Ukraine’s most popular politicians, according to polls. More recently, he has been gunning for Prime Minister Yatsenyuk and Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, Yatsenyuk’s party ally. In a recent National Council of Reforms meeting Avakov hurled water at Saakashvili after an exchange of accusations and insults.

Saakashvili’s contribution is also important because he has brought with him a host of young protégés from his Georgian government, who have practical experience in implementing reforms in a post-Soviet context. Most notable is 37-year-old Ekaterina Zguladze (incidentally, the daughter-in-law of recently deceased French philosopher André Glucksmann) who was appointed Ukraine’s deputy minister of internal affairs and was responsible for the transformation of the municipal police departments.

One ancillary effect of Poroshenko’s choice of both Jaresko and Saakashvili is that these figures offer him more channels into US centers of power, as both have

Rumbles in the Rada

When fights break out in Ukraine's parliament, the rest of the world wonders whether they're ready for democracy. But recent events have shown that they definitely have a puncher's chance.

Whoever first uttered the phrase, "Politics is a full contact sport" most certainly did not mean it literally. Still, anyone following Ukrainian politics in recent years might be inclined to think otherwise.

On December 11, a session of the Verkhovna Rada (Supreme Council), as Ukraine's parliament is known, came together to discuss, among other matters, a confidence vote on the current government. When Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk took the rostrum to address questions from other parliamentarians about the performance of his government, Oleh Barna, a member of parliament from President Petro Poroshenko's Solidarity Party, approached Yatsenyuk, handed him a bouquet of roses, then proceeded to lift him up off the ground (the technical wrestling term would be a "high crotch take-down from behind"). Before Barna could carry Yatsenyuk away from the rostrum, the not very athletic-looking prime minister grabbed onto the cornice to thwart any attempt to take him away from his position – a fitting symbolic gesture, as many in parliament have been calling for Yatsenyuk's resignation over corruption accusations targeting members of his National Front Party.

With the Prime Minister still gripping the rostrum, a couple of his more zealous National Front colleagues ran to his aid and pummeled Barna with haymakers and hammer-fists in an all-out brawl accompanied by tie-pulling, headlocks and, one would assume, a healthy dose of Russian invective. (It's well known that Ukrainian nationalist parliamentarians, even the Russian-speaking ones, give political speeches exclusively in Ukrainian and curse exclusively in Russian – even those nationalists who refuse to otherwise speak the Muscovite tongue.)

In most other countries, a physical assault on the prime minister would lead to criminal charges. In Ukraine, though, as in many other countries, the lawmakers enjoy parliamentary immunity (hence everyone even remotely relying on crime or graft to wield power wants to be in parliament). At the least, such behavior would create a scandal. But when the bench-clearing fracas was over, Yatsenyuk simply turned to Parliament Speaker Volodymyr Grossman and said, "Come on, Volodya, let's continue this question-and-answer session." Grossman called everyone back to their seats. "I understand you all have physical strength, but let's calm down. Please." Yatsenyuk took the microphone and urged everyone to continue the session. "I won't comment on what just happened because there's nothing to comment about," he said.

The Prime Minister simply brushed off the episode as if it were a common occurrence. That's because such brawls in the Verkhovna Rada are indeed a common occurrence. And not only in the parliament. Only three days after the incident with the bouquet of roses, at a meeting of the National Council of Reforms presided by President Poroshenko, Interior Minister Arsen Avakov, a Yatsenyuk ally, responded to accusations of corruption coming from Odessa Governor Mikheil Saakashvili, a Poroshenko ally. Avakov insulted Saakashvili, who became indignant and called the interior minister a thief. Avakov, who was sitting seven places to the right of Saakashvili, hurled some hearty Russian curses along with a plastic cup full of water at him. Fortunately no brawl ensued, though one could easily assume it would have had the incident taken place in the Rada hall, under the eyes of its scrapper denizens.

Since independence in 1991 there have been at least 30 documented fistfights in the Ukrainian parliament, many of them in the corridors leading to the main hall. At various times they involved smoke bombs, thrown furniture, chains and flying eggs. Even the women get involved. Anyone interested can go to YouTube and search Ukrainian Parliament Brawl (or Бійка у Верховній Раді for those proficient with the Ukrainian Cyrillic alphabet, who want more variety).

While many of the scuffles have been spectacularly vicious (though disappoint-

ingly lacking technique), one memorable brawl in 2013, while the Maidan protests were taking place, saw recently retired heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Kitschko – at the time a parliamentarian, and currently the mayor of Kiev – standing aside, almost bored, with his hands folded across his chest, watching his colleagues go at it like drunken schoolboys. Clearly some unspoken protocol prevented him from unleashing his world-class "iron fists" and showing the amateurs how things should be done.

To most outside observers, such a fiasco is testimony that Ukrainian society is not quite ready for democracy. But for anyone familiar with the more absurd works of Nikolai Gogol, who was born about 200 kilometers from Kiev, such behavior and logic should come as no surprise. Ukrainians, as the author of *Taras Bulba* so often illustrated, are passionate people – and they obviously enjoy a good fight. Until Vitali Kitschko's brother Vladimir was dethroned as heavyweight champ on November 28, no less than four Ukrainians held championship belts in professional boxing, including: Vasyl Lomachenko at featherweight, Viktor Postol at light welterweight, and Oleksandr Usyk at cruiserweight. And in the past two years live Rada sessions on TV (Ukraine's equivalent of C-SPAN) have gotten unsurprisingly good ratings.

Many Ukrainians would beg to differ with those who point to such melees as reflecting a deficient sense of democracy. To them the parliament is a forum – not unlike NHL hockey, to continue the sports analogy – in which fisticuffs are tolerated, if not encouraged, perhaps just to generate more interest and entertainment. Some would even go as far as to say this is pure democracy in action – but in the tradition of the Cossack Hetmanate (a state that was precursor to the current Ukraine), which existed tumultuously from the mid-17th to the mid-18th century and could be described as a military democracy, in which the hetman was elected by a rowdy council, or *rada*. Moreover, one would be hard pressed to find any other ex-Soviet republic (excluding the now thoroughly Europeanized Baltic states) enjoying so much freedom of expression in the halls of their respective parliaments.



maintained contacts in Washington and understand the American mentality. Jaresko is still a US-citizen (notwithstanding the fact that by Ukrainian law, in order to take office as a Ukrainian citizen, she was required to renounce her US citizenship) and she worked for the State Department. Saakashvili, for his part, studied post-graduate law at Columbia University and has longstanding contacts in the US intelligence community, although Poroshenko is now facing the risk of seeing the Georgian's exuberance backfire on him.

The Atlantic Council report concludes by stating that, despite limited progress, the Ukrainian government needs to follow through on its ambitious reform agenda, lest increasing public dissatisfaction undermine an already unstable situation. "There is no time for slow evolutionary changes. Radical and revolutionary reforms are the only way to success."

While this may be a bit of rhetorical cheerleading from a think tank deeply interwoven with the US government establishment (Atlantic Council members have included figures such as Richard Holbrooke, Susan Rice and Chuck Hagel), it hints at a deeper frus-

tration that Western governments have often expressed about resistance to the kind of reforms that would help transform Ukraine from an oligarchy to a free-market capitalist system based on rule of law.

Nevertheless, there is one area in which Ukraine has implemented revolutionary reforms, thanks mainly to its own initiative, though also with "non-lethal" support from the West: i.e., the military. When Russian Federation forces took over Crimea after Yanukovich fled in February 2014, Ukraine had an estimated 6,000 combat-ready troops. Now it has a standing army of 240,000 troops – bigger than any EU country – many of whom have been battle tested over the past 20 months. Ukraine's new military budget accounts for 5% of GDP (most NATO countries can't manage to break the recommended 2% threshold). While most analysts believe the 5% of GDP military spending is unsustainable, it reflects how necessity has forced the Ukrainian military to overhaul itself. Corruption and waste is still a problem, but nowhere near as bad as before the revolution.

Over the past year NATO has been training Ukrainian troops, while individual contractors from the US,

A deputy from the Ukrainian President's political party attacks Arseniy Yatsenyuk during the annual report of the government in the Ukrainian Parliament on December 11, 2015 in Kiev.



Finance Minister Natalia Jaresko attends a parliament session in Kiev, September 17, 2015.

Israel, Georgia and other countries have been hired to teach specific skills. One former US marine was engaged to teach reconnaissance and scouting near the line of control during the fighting. Since a tenuous ceasefire has taken hold he has switched the focus of instruction to counterinsurgency: “weapons trafficking and proliferation, stopping pro-Russian bombings, finding and stopping contraband.”

With respect to the military – as everywhere else – Poroshenko has been walking a tightrope. By cutting his losses and suing for peace whenever the Russians went on the offensive, Poroshenko managed, for the most part, to avoid an irreparable defeat. By maintaining a ceasefire, he has been able to undercut the steadily rising influence of various volunteer battalion commanders who had been gaining popularity by portraying themselves as heroically fighting against Russian aggression. With the guns relatively silent, the commanders are forced to fight in the political arena, where, in Ukraine at least, it is practically impossible not to get tarnished. On the other hand, the decision to support a ceasefire involves tacitly agreeing to a frozen conflict, which may come back to bite the president in the future.

In general, nobody – neither Ukrainians, nor Western governments, nor Russia – is enamored with Petro Poroshenko. But what they all have in common with re-

spect to the President is that they acknowledge him as a known entity, one they can work with and accept to a greater or lesser degree. Ideologically he is pro-capitalist (indeed, the tsar of a chocolate empire), but he is a veteran of post-Soviet politics and knows how to move through the shark-infested waters of Ukraine’s oligarchic system. More importantly, he is a realist with regard to Russia, in the sense that he recognizes Ukraine cannot change its geography, and that gratuitous anti-Russian rhetoric is counterproductive.

As a result of his malleability, Poroshenko is fast losing support among people like Oksana Boychuk, who believe he is only interested in enriching himself, his family and his close associates. “He’s simply killing off the common people,” is how she puts it. This accusation is hard to refute when, according to a ranking published by Russian weekly magazine *Novoye Vremya* with the help of the Dragon Capital investment bank, among Ukraine’s ten wealthiest individuals Poroshenko is the only one to have increased his net worth between 2014 and 2015: he is now worth almost \$1 billion and is currently Ukraine’s sixth richest man.

As his popularity fades he will need to further consolidate power, which may stall reforms. By the time the next presidential elections are scheduled in 2019, Poroshenko will have either neutralized any viable ad-



A Ukrainian armed forces military unit marches at Kiev’s Independence Square, on Ukraine’s Independence Day.

versaries, or public discontent with the slow pace of reforms will lead to a changing of the guard – in the best-case scenario through elections, in the worst case through another upheaval.

Yet despite all the continued rhetoric about revolution both from nationalist firebrands calling Poroshenko a pro-Russian stooge and Russian propaganda warning of a new fascist overthrow of the already fascist Kiev junta, the likelihood of another revolution or even of a hardline nationalist coming to power is slim. As the poet Bohdan Boychuk points out, “Ukrainians would never have voted Stepan Bandera into power,” referring to the World War II-era leader of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, lionized by nationalists as a hero and reviled by Soviet historiography as a Nazi collaborator. “Ukrainians are practically impervious to such leaders.” In fact, given their deep distrust of any government, bred by centuries of occupation and oppression, most Ukrainians are simply too cynical about politicians to believe anyone could be so altruistic. In such a context, a true altruist, in order to rise up, would need to be frighteningly ruthless.

A more likely progression would see a continuation of Ukraine’s centuries-long oscillation between Russia to the east and Europe to the west. At this stage, however, Ukrainians, despite a having overthrown a corrupt gov-

ernment in the name of European integration, recognize, to their credit, that they have a long way go before they are ready to integrate with Europe. And to Poroshenko’s credit, he recognizes the reservations that the EU and US have with regard to Ukraine’s dysfunctional government and economy. So he has decided to take a multi-pronged approach to Westernization. Rather than rely solely on governments and transnational organizations, he is trying to infuse his own government as much as possible with a more Western approach – not an easy task when you’re fighting adversaries who cut their teeth in the post-Soviet “wild east.”

But if you look at Kiev along with Ukraine’s other major cities and compare them to how they were two decades ago, just after independence, there is no doubt that they look and feel more Western – especially if you talk to younger people who can’t remember Soviet times. Getting the inner workings of society to follow suit, however, is more complicated, but it is happening – though not without fits and starts. Nor, of course, without the often spiteful resistance of suspicious neighbors.

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