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“Transcultural Impacts and Perspectives on the Future”

Perspectives from Armenia, Canada, France, Georgia, Germany, South Africa, Sweden, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

The Irresistible Soft Power of Ukraine

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LESSONS FROM THE UKRAINE – FOR THE FUTURE

The history of humanity is a story of continual survival. There are no reasons to believe that its future will be different. In that sense, Ukrainians have a valuable experience, because they are champions of survival.

Being conceived from various nomadic and settled tribes inhabiting the territory of modern Ukraine as early as the 4th century A.D. and having established an enlightened European Princedom around the beginning of the second Millennium, Ukrainians subsequently have lived through centuries of foreign oppression. Mongol Tartar invasions were followed by local wars against Turkey and Poland until the Moscow dominance settled in for many years stretching into the Russian tsarist empire and the Soviet Union.

With the exception of bright glimpses of relative independence during the Cossacks republic and right after the turmoil of the World War I, Ukrainians have never before lived in their own sovereign state until the collapse of the USSR in 1991. Yet, despite many natural and man-made calamities (suffice it to mention the Stalin-orchestrated Great Famine and the abhorrent communist rule culminating in the Chornobyl nuclear disaster), Ukrainians have preserved their language and culture and are building up their political and economic clout as a dynamic 47 million nation.

This phenomenon of “survival despite oppression” can be explained in many ways, some of which are worth rendering here as useful lessons for the future.

Ethnic and Religious Tolerance

There are over 100 different ethnic groups residing currently in Ukraine. It has always been the land both very attractive and very tolerant to foreigners. Probably, the latter explains the first. For

centuries Ukraine has had a very strong Semitic, Greek, Tartar, Romanian, Hungarian, Polish and other Slavic presence. In recent years, due to enormous migration pressure, we hosted many Asians and increasingly also Africans.

A peculiar feature of this cultural blending is that all arriving population integrates fairly easily into the pan-Ukrainian cultural and (to a certain extent) language context. One might venture a conjecture that an inborn non-violent nature of Ukrainians paradoxically coupled with sharp witted humor about themselves and all other ethnicities or religions (something that would be labeled as politically incorrect statements elsewhere) are exactly the two indispensable ingredients, whose *mélange* give valve to hidden bias and help transform potential animosities into jokes and peaceful co-habitation.

Democracy

Another telling characteristic of Ukrainians is their inherent acceptance of democracy as a natural form of governance. Decades of Soviet rule spawned around a myth that all former Soviet republics are necessarily autocratic, or that all Eastern Slavs are serfs subjugated to their beloved dictators. In fact, the communist regime was an aberration rather than a norm for all the peoples inhabiting one sixth of the globe. At present, further disintegration of “old-type” political ties and decadence of the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) prove that all these new nations are very different, have always been very different, and they are gravitating now to different power poles.

Ukraine has had a significant European tradition long before it was eventually drawn into the Kremlin’s orbit. As mentioned before, Ukrainian (or old Rus’ as they were called at that time – an ethnic definition later “borrowed” forever by Moscovia) Great Princes of 10 to 12th centuries were highly educated, respected and welcome guests in many other European capitals.

Many of the existing European monarchies have Ukrainian blood in them. The brightest example was Anna, daughter of Kyiv Great Prince Yaroslav the Wise, alias granddaughter of King Olaf III of Scotland and Sweden, she married Henry I to become Queen of France and mother of King Philippe I. A part of her dowry was a Ukrainian bible from her father’s library later used by all subsequent French kings to take their oath when ascending to the throne. Anna was one of few literate *noblesse* in Paris of those times who could use her real signature instead of a little cross.

The European vocation of Ukraine was later carried on by the Cossacks, whose military organization of self-governance could be called a genuine representative democracy. Throughout the 15th to the middle of the 18th century, when the rest of Europe was ruled by self-appointed royalties, Ukrainian military chiefs were elected at a general assembly of all Cossacks whose votes counted regardless of their social hierarchy or property status.

In 1710, some 70 years before the French revolution and the US Declaration of Independence, one of Ukrainian Cossack leaders Pylyp Orlyk wrote the first ever democratic constitution in Europe. The text may be called imperfect by modern scholars, but it envisaged the election principle for all major “governmental” positions, as well as distribution of power between the legislative, executive and judiciary branches, with respective checks and balances. (*Apropos*, the Paris airport Orly was named after the father of Pylyp Orlyk – Hryhoriy (George) – who owned a village in the area to become later eponymous for the airport).

The intermittent continuity of democratic traditions in the history of Ukraine reached its apogee in the phenomenon of the Orange uprising in 2004, which in fact has no precedents in the world history for an event of this magnitude and spirit. As one of the US journalists aptly put it, those dramatic developments in Ukraine were like a mixture of the fall of the Berlin wall and the Woodstock festival. Millions of people in the streets around the country protesting against election fraud: not a single window smashed, not a single person beaten, crime level plummeted, not a single case of flu reported during 17 days of non-stop standing out in the cold. When rumors spread that the

then government was contemplating the use of military force and gunfire against civilians, the number of protestors doubled. The world was a witness to the quintessence of democracy – direct will of the people, as opposed to the mob rule, transformed the country almost overnight from a post-Soviet republic into a mature European democracy. This is something futurists can rack their brains about indefinitely.

Denuclearization

Likewise, they can wonder what prompted Ukraine to voluntarily renounce its third largest nuclear stockpiles at the beginning of the 1990s – again, an unprecedented historical fact. Against the background of the currently re-enforced arms race and ardent desire of several powers to procure weapons of mass destruction, the act of Ukrainians looks as an incredulous sacrifice. It was not an easy decision. There was a heated debate in the society and among political elite. Ultimately, a combination of various factors played in to favor the non-nuclear option including simple sound reason, the dreadful legacy of Chernobyl, political image and, to a lesser extent, economic dividends. Whichever basic motivation can be discerned behind the act, it did happen thus making Ukraine a tangible contributor to international peace and security.

Healthy Faire

The last chapter in this concise country profile is free of political implications. It is about Ukrainian culture, and more specifically and maybe unexpectedly – about food culture. Not only shortages of food, but also healthy diet belong to immediate challenges of the future everywhere. It is not a mere trifle to talk fearfully of new generations being raised on hormones, additives, preservatives, colorants, emulsifiers, BHA and other “flavoring killers.”

Many tourists coming to Ukraine would shun caviar as too salty, cream cheese as too fatty, pork sausage as too calorie-loaded... so they would gulp down hamburgers, peanut butter and Cola... something Ukrainians don't quite understand – trading good food for junk. A theory goes that, in addition to fast-food chains, the ubiquitous low-fat and non-fat food abounding in many advanced democracies nowadays is the primary cause of obesity. Because a 95% lean pork or beef tastes like paper and can not satiate your stomach in moderate quantities.

That is why Ukrainians welcome those foreign food companies that invest in Ukrainian domestic food industry with respect to our organic food culture.

I have just enumerated four areas where my nation and its culture could be of some use to humanity – ethnic and religious tolerance, democracy record, denuclearization and healthy cuisine.

GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUTURE

From a geopolitical point of view, Ukrainians instinctively favor a multilateral world. The above description of Ukrainians' nature shows that they are averse to any kind of tyranny or dictatorship, or unilateralism. The future will probably see Ukraine as a classical European pluralistic democracy, a hub of humanitarian studies, with outward-looking, multi-lingual and dynamic youth.

Such a Ukraine will be fully integrated into the Euro-Atlantic structures and remain a significant player in global politics. The Orange revolution testified to the huge potential and allure of Ukraine as a so-called soft power, whose mere example can promote democracy in the region. With a stable and democratic Ukraine it will be easier to forge coalitions of like-minded and value-sharing democracies to meet the challenges of continuously changing global political environment.

Besides, bearing in mind the legacy of Chernobyl, Ukrainians have since been very sensitive about environmental issues. Despite Soviet history of resource-wasting economic development and areas of heavy industrial production, the Ukrainians at large try to live in harmony with nature, and

this is their educated opinion and perception of a safe and prosperous future. We have a good tradition of parks development, and our mountain and sea resorts are mostly free from pollution.

With the very fertile soils (black earth), it is possible that in future Ukraine will not only re-confirm its status as the breadbasket of Europe, but also become one of the leading producers of ethanol and other bio-fuels. With proper management and investments, the vast agricultural landmass will suffice for both food and energy.

Yet another experience of Ukrainians, which may have positive repercussions elsewhere though it is probably not unique, is our preference for homeopathy. People in Ukraine have a long tradition of herbal medicine that helps supporting the health of the nation.

In short, Ukrainians' perspective on the future is a politically multilateral and co-operative, ethnically rich and diverse, and ecologically friendly humanity living in peace with itself and exploring space and nature without detriment to its own survival and progress.

POINTS FOR THE CLASSROOM (send comments to forum@futuretakes.org):

- *The Ukrainian experience of cultural blending and assimilation differs profoundly from the experience of various nations in Western Europe. Furthermore, both differ from the US experience. Minister-Counselor Aleksandrovych identifies two characteristics, an “inborn non-violent nature of Ukrainians” and their “sharp witted humor,” that have been indispensable in transforming potential animosities into “jokes and peaceful co-habitation.” In other nations, what factors influence the experience of new immigrants – that is, peaceful coexistence, cultural clashes, or deculturation – now and through the next decade? Furthermore, what are the implications for nations that are culturally heterogeneous now, and for those nations that are more culturally homogeneous?*
- *As the author indicates, survival against oppression has had a substantial role in shaping the Ukraine experience. How will anticipated economic, environment, etc. hardships shape future nations and cultures between now and 2025?*
- *Ukrainians try to live in harmony with nature, as Minister-Counselor Aleksandrovych indicates. Various Native peoples throughout the world have done likewise. To what extent will these examples – together with economic and environmental necessity – shape the global economy of 2020? Will this lead to a new economic utility function that captures long-term costs and consequences of near-term choices?*
- *The article contrasts the traditional and healthy food culture of Ukraine with the “junk food” culture of visiting tourists. “Junk food” has migrated elsewhere, too – especially to parts of Europe and Asia. Considering other relevant drivers – for example, the imperative for fast food (and even eating at one’s desk) in fast paced parts of the world, environmental considerations (that is, the food capacities of farmland vs. ranch land), and cross-flow of health and nutrition information among cultures – which type of food will win the “food fight” by 2015? Furthermore, what are the long-term implications to diet habits around the world?*
- *Minister-Counselor Aleksandrovych points out that the nations of the former Commonwealth of Independent States (immediate successor to the Soviet Union) have gravitated to different power poles. In 2025, will the constellation of world power be more multilateral as Ukraine favors (considering all instruments of national power as well as the growing role of non-state actors), or will it be more unilateral or bilateral?*

- *How do hardships, such as foreign oppression, influence literature, music, art, and theater?*
- *What characteristics have given other cultures the means to survive foreign oppression? Are these characteristics useful in protecting contemporary peoples against threats to their cultures that are less extreme – for example, cultural clashes, deculturation, and assimilation?*