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Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine

The Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine consisted of peaceful protests that eventually turned into civil war-like fighting between protestors and police from late November 2013 to February 2014. The outrage that protestors felt was initially a result of then President Yanukovich's decision to postpone signing an association agreement with the European Union which would have abolished trade barriers between the two and required Ukraine to undergo political and economic reforms on November 21, 2013. (Grätz 2013) Not long after postponing, it became clear that he had no intention of signing the agreement and instead made a deal that would mean joining Russia's own Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. (Grätz 2013) Ukrainians saw their futures tethered with the EU and viewed the mandated political reform as a way to combat the corruption in Ukraine; for them, the EU was their only hope for better government and protection of civil rights. (Grätz 2013) The same day, several hundred activists and students gathered on Ukraine's main square to protest the decision and to encourage him to reconsider. The people demanded that Yanukovich and his government resign. Activists named the movement "Euromaidan" to express their desire to identify Ukrainian society with Europe. (JSIS Washington) Euromaidan is also known as "The Revolution of Dignity" in Ukraine. Violence by riot police provoked larger rallies. The escalation of the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine can be attributed to immorality of authority and solidarity.

The protestors involved were opposing three authorities. They were contesting President Yanukovich who was already distrusted after he rigged a presidential election in his favor years earlier. It is understood that governments are supposed to provide services for their people and him not signing the EU deal, which was a must-have for many citizens, was the first violation of this in the conflict. Protestors unfortunately had to fight the police; once the police began using

force, they became the enemy but, in the beginning, they were not seen as the oppressors. Also, they fought against parliament because they had passed laws that would restrict civil liberties and therefore oppress Ukrainian's freedoms. While governments can push you, they are still expected to protect and abide by norms and rules.

Prior to the Euromaidan Revolution, Ukraine already ranked last among European countries according to the index of confidence concerning governments. The confidence in the Parliament was 1.99 on a 10-point scale (last place), the level of dissatisfaction with the government was 2.25, the confidence in the judicial system was 2.26 (last place), and the confidence in the police was 2.50 (the last place). Likewise, public confidence in the Yanukovich regime was at all-time low and these polling results tell us that, the authorities in Ukraine had already lost its legitimacy. (Shveda and Park 2016)

After Berkut, the Ukraine Special Force, had brutally beaten the peaceful protesters on Maidan Nezalezhnosti (translated as "Independence Square"), the student protest quickly evolved into a mass action of a national scope against the existing power. The rapid and dramatic expansion of the civil resistance was due to the extremely critical attitude of the people about the policies that were being implemented by those in power, as well as the authoritarian use of power. Berkut acted in flagrant violation of the social contract which produced a sense of social outrage and injustice. They violated the prevailing conception how a human being ought to be treated and violated rules/norms. Every culture has some definition of arbitrary cruelty on the part of those in authority and the police were acting cruelly. A necessary condition for rebellion is for people to feel that authority is or has become immoral, unjust, and illegitimate. In the documentary, *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom*, you see a protestor kneeling down and turned away from the police trying to help his friend who had been shot, and the police shot

him. That is why Ukrainians spent only the first eight days of their protest fighting for the choice of Europe. After that, the mass protests were about a rogue state that featured a horrendously high level of corruption and a lack of respect for human rights. (Kurkov 2014) For example, a journalist, Tetyana Chornovol, who had accused Yanukovych of corruption, was run off the road by a black SUV, dragged out of her car and beaten by men presumed to be government agents. (Diuk 2014)

Another reason for the revolution was solidarity. While the protestors were primarily students, everyone protested. In *Winter on Fire: Ukraine's Fight for Freedom*, it is shown that there were people from all ages, all religions, all class groups, etc. that were involved at least in the initial peace protests earlier in the movement. Everyone stood together to fight so that the future generations are able to enjoy a Ukraine that is a part of the EU. When people stand together they feel more able to fight together and outraged when things happen to their fellow mates. When the first person was killed by the police, it was a motivation to fight harder. When Yanukovych promised to hold elections the next year in hopes of stopping the protests, protestors said that they did not lose their best friends to take a deal from an untrusted man and they would continue to fight until he stepped down. If they were not unified and if they did not agree in feeling and in action, they would not have been successful in their movement.

In the aftermath of the Euromaidan Revolution in Ukraine it can be seen that the escalation can be attributed to the immorality of the authorities and Ukrainian solidarity. To date there are arguments about whether or not the revolution was worth it. They were successful in making change and gained the birth of civil society, the Ukraine-European Union Association Agreement, visa-free travel in the EU and a reform program began. However, they lost a lot of people and after the president fled, violent conflict erupted with pro-Russian groups in certain

parts of Ukraine and then Russia came in militarily to annex Crimea. Unfortunately, violence continues today. By late 2017, more than 10,000 people had been killed and an estimated 2 million forcibly displaced. Nevertheless, the Euromaidan revolution has resulted in democratic and social gains.

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