

Building an Independent and Democratic Ukraine

By Mykhailo Horyn

After only a short period of time, Ukraine has taken great strides on the road toward a rebirth of national consciousness. A large part of Ukraine has been subjected to a process of russification by the Soviet empire, yet today we are witnessing an unusually rapid pace of national rebirth. National rebirth goes hand in hand with the construction of a Ukrainian national state. We are building a Ukrainian state, but our state is democratic. We are building a Ukrainian society, but our society is a civil society. We are establishing a civil society founded upon international agreements which proclaim the principle of human rights.

Ukraine is very varied in its ethnic composition. Out of a total population of 52 million, there are 11 million ethnic Russians on the territory of Ukraine. Five and a half million others speak only Russian. Thus the nationalities policy we promote will determine the success of the construction of our state.

We proceed from the assumption that all ethnic groups have equal rights before the law. This democratic principle is built into the structure of our popular movement, which is called *Rukh*. *Rukh* has a legislative body, called the Great Council. In the Great Council is the Council on Nationalities, which represents the entire spectrum of ethnic minorities which are found in Ukraine. This has given us the opportunity of consolidating all the ethnic minorities around the idea of a Ukrainian national state.

We were thus able to avoid the situation which exists in the Baltics. There, alongside the Popular Fronts, have arisen "Interfronts," the fifth columns of the national liberation movements. The Party apparatus in Ukraine has made three attempts at organizing an Interfront, but they have achieved nothing. In January, an organization called the "Union of Workers" was formed. It collapsed. In a few months, a similar organization called *Rus* also collapsed. One month ago, a "Forum of the Fatherland" was formed. It is collapsing.

There are no grounds for the formation of an Interfront organization in Ukraine. I regard this as an achievement of our nationalities policy. The very situation in which Ukraine currently finds itself helps us consolidate many ethnic groups into one movement.

Exploited by Empire. Ukraine today is a colony. Some 88 percent of its production is sent to Moscow. We tell our people that no colony in Africa has ever experienced such a high level of exploitation. Until recently, we sent 95 percent of our production to Moscow. Gorbachev has thus "democratized" our level of exploitation by 7 percent. Should we bow to him because of this? When we tell our people that our economic situation is very harsh, this is confirmed by the empty shelves in our stores. People believe us.

A serious problem is the aftermath of the Chernobyl catastrophe. Every citizen of Ukraine knows that Chernobyl was the result of imperial policy in Ukraine. The empire cannot protect us from new Chernobyls. A common line in Ukraine is: "We all, regardless of ethnic background, live under the sky of Chernobyl, drink the same poisoned water, eat the same poisoned food, and therefore our future can only be seen in light of the creation of an independent state, which can be the only means of our livelihood." An independent state is

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needed not only by Ukrainians, but by all who live in Ukraine and hope to share with us a common future.

Parliamentary Opposition. I would like to discuss the work of the Supreme Soviet, our parliament. For the first time ever in the history of our Ukrainian Soviet republic, we have a parliament with an opposition. *Rukh*, the largest non-Party organization, led a campaign to elect democratic candidates to this parliament. We were able to elect 118 of our candidates as deputies to the new parliament. This figure represents about 27 percent of the total of 450. But this is not a constant figure; it fluctuates. Not long ago, before the closing of the parliamentary session this past year, 29 deputies quit the Communist Party and joined the ranks of the Democratic Bloc, as represented by the National Council, or formal opposition group within the parliament. Now we have 147 votes. We only need four more votes in order to block any reactionary legislation aimed against us.

Although we are in the minority, we were able to have adopted three very important laws which were anti-communist and anti-imperialist in their spirit. They are the Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine, the Law on Economic Independence of Ukraine, and the resolution that all Ukrainians serving in the Soviet Army be stationed on the territory of the Ukrainian republic.

I consider the Declaration on State Sovereignty as a very prominent document of our nation. The Declaration states that Ukraine is a sovereign state which does not delegate any functions to Moscow. In this respect, our Declaration differs from the declaration of sovereignty of the Russian republic, which sees the continued existence of the Soviet Union and relegates to the central government such functions as defense, diplomatic responsibilities, trade relations, even such things as the laying of pipelines.

If you were to ask me how the minority was able to defeat the majority, I would be hard pressed to give you an answer. This is an example where David defeated Goliath. I believe that an important role was played by the change of attitude of the Ukrainian nation toward the need for an independent Ukrainian state.

Great Victory. We, the opposition forces of the National Council and *Rukh*, are believers in rapid evolutionary change leading to an independent Ukrainian state. Each battle we win is one step on the road to independence. The adoption of these documents was really a great victory. Only one detail remains — realizing these documents in reality. This will create a lot of problems for us. But we have tremendous support from below, from the people.

Immediately after the adoption of the resolution on the service of Ukrainians in the army, our young men began leaving their units in other republics and returning to Ukraine. Some of them were put in prison, but it will be difficult to imprison 500,000 young men. We regard the transfer of military service of our young men onto the territory of Ukraine as the first step toward the formation of a national Ukrainian army.

By taking an evolutionary path, we hope to achieve success along the lines of the Czechoslovakian model, and not the Romanian one. We are making every effort so that our road to independence will not create economic anarchy. That is why we have sent groups of deputies to all the republics charging them with laying the groundwork for the signing of horizontal trade accords, avoiding vertical contacts with Gorbachev and the central government.

Our economic ties with the other republics are characterized by a high level of cooperation. Very often factories in Ukraine are merely assembly plants, all the parts for which are obtained from other republics. For that reason, safeguarding trade relations with other republics makes it possible for our economy to avoid chaos.

Seeking Diplomatic Ties. As the result of negotiations with other republics, we have the first, very important, document signed by the Democratic Bloc of the Russian parliament and the National Council of Ukraine. In this document, two republics, the Russian Federation and Ukraine have recognized themselves to be the subjects of international law. They have expressed the desire to establish diplomatic ties at the ambassadorial level. For the first time in the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations, the U.S.S.R. is recognized as an empire, and the existing regime a totalitarian communist regime.

We hope to sign similar agreements with other republics in the near future. We will thus preserve horizontal economic ties among the republics, bypassing Gorbachev. In this fashion, under the structure we are developing, Gorbachev will become superfluous.

I am often asked if it is possible that a reactionary movement will try to turn the wheel of history backwards. I would propose that there are several obstacles to that in Ukraine or in Russia. The process of the demoralization of the Communist Party is developing very quickly. Hundreds of thousands of communists are leaving the Party. Marxism-Leninism as an official ideology has completely lost its authority and the Party apparatus is falling apart before our eyes. This is a factor which would prevent a reactionary turn.

I would mention two additional factors. The position of Boris Yeltsin is very important. If Yeltsin were to build a national Russian state, which is very much needed by the Russian people, our road to freedom will be peaceful and even relatively calm.

Another such factor is the attitude of the U.S. President toward the events unfolding in the Soviet Union. If President Bush were to announce himself in favor of the maintenance of the centrally oriented policies of Gorbachev, we would have certain difficulties, but it would not halt the process of collapse of the empire.

We well understand that President Bush may not interfere in the internal matters of a state with which the U.S. maintains official ties. But already today we can place some accent marks. America has a long tradition of democracy, and it should emphasize the importance of democratic principles which are found in international law.

Disintegrating Party. We have currently in Ukraine a situation where authority is simply slipping from the hands of the Party committees, which are disintegrating, and our representatives of the National Council pick up the authority off the ground. The democratic forces are growing into Party structures and eating them away.

Let me provide you with a concrete example. In Lviv, the local government has passed into the hands of representatives of the National Council. The Lviv *oblast*, or regional council, has adopted a number of decisions such as preventing the heads of major enterprises and collective farms from coming to attend Party meetings during working hours. Also, it forbade the directors of these enterprises from giving Communist Party organizations reports on the activities of those enterprises. The flow of information from these enterprises has stopped. The Party is losing authority.

I believe that the time has come for the leading figures in the United States, representatives of government, to more clearly set forth their attitude toward the events taking place in Ukraine. I believe that today commercial interests from the U.S. should start joint ventures, investment firms, and take part in the improvement of the economic situation of our country.

Business Opportunities. American business leaders regard such opportunities with wariness. They would like to have guarantees. In reply, I say to them, "Have you ever seen a successful businessman who is afraid to take risks?" The capacity for taking risks and the ability to correctly assess a given situation are two features of businessmen who are successful.

We are slowly developing commercial ties with the rest of the world. A number of tractors for use on small farms were delivered by China to the Lviv *oblast* in western Ukraine. Many Japanese businessmen are in Ukraine today. I tell Americans, "Don't be too careful, because you may arrive too late." This is a joke, but I believe in the close cooperation between business circles in the U.S. and Ukraine, which is rising to its feet.

I believe that in one year's time, if fate allows us to meet again, I will be able to tell you that Ukraine is in a totally different situation. The uncertainty that exists between Yeltsin and Gorbachev, between Ukraine and Moscow, cannot remain for long. This is certain. I believe that the world's last empire will step down from the world stage peacefully, and for eternal rest. Thank you for your attention.

