

TRANSCRIPT

"THE MAIDAN, CRIMEA, AND THE EAST: EVOLVING HUMAN RIGHTS CHALLENGES IN UKRAINE"

A Conversation With Oleksandra Matviichuk, Volodymyr Shcherbachenko, and Maksym Butkevych

Moderator: Jeff Goldstein

ANNOUNCER:

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JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Thank you all for coming. We are unfortunately down-- one of our panelists. (FOREIGN LANGUAGE)-- because she's been doing so many traveling-- was not able to get an American Visa on time. Another of our panelists, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) is on the way from Dulles where, unfortunately, he appears to have gotten called into a secondary inspection-- delaying his arrival. But we hope to have him for the end of the program. It's honestly been a very historic six months-- in Ukraine.

I was in Kiev-- in early December during the O.S.C.E. ministerial. And although obviously there was quite a bit of excitement after the first big demonstration with Maidan (?), I don't think anyone at that time-- foresaw things-- deteriorating to the point that they are now. I had the opportunity to have dinner with our guests last night. And one of the interesting things that we discussed were differences between what took place on the Maidan-- over the last few months, and the Orange Revolution-- a decade ago.

And I think-- they pointed out that one of the more interesting differences is that then-- people came out because of the calls of political leadership. Whereas this time around, most of the people who came out to the Maidan were individuals-- civic

activists, people who came out on their own. And I think that that-- new sort of breath of-- willingness to engage on the part of ordinary Ukrainians-- had a lot of potential for-- positive developments in the country over the long term.

Unfortunately, however, the Russian authorities-- decided that they could not-- afford to let Ukraine go. And the result is that we now have the annexation of Crimea, and-- fairly-- (UNINTEL) handed efforts by the Russians to stabilize the situation in eastern Ukraine.

For those of you who haven't-- been on the news in the last few hours, including-- an assassination attempt on-- the mayor of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, today. And a bunch of people in camouflaging the forms of baseball bats, breaking up-- a peaceful pro-Ukrainian march in Donetsk today. So-- we were taking advantage of the fact that some of our partners from Ukraine were coming to the United States briefly-- to-- give them a chance to speak today about their impressions on the ground. On Maidan, Crimea, and eastern Ukraine, and particularly human rights problems and implications, and everything going on today.

So-- our first speaker will be Oleksandra Matviichuk, who is chairman of the board of the Center for Civil Liberties in Ukraine. She's also a member of the-- Rada's (PH) Human Rights Advisory Council. And the coordinator of the Euro (?) Maidan S.O.S. Movement. We will then have Volodymyr Shcherbachenko, who is from Luhansk in the east, where he's the chairman of the board of the East Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives, and one of the organizers of peaceful civic protests-- in Luhansk.

We have asked each of our-- speakers to start off-- with a presentation about the events, and then we'll get into their recommendations for what the rest of the world-- particularly the U.S. and the U.S. government should be doing. And then we will open this up for questions and answers.

Because it is being recorded, I would ask that-- if you have a question, please raise your hand. One of my colleagues will bring the microphone by-- and-- for the purposes of recording, do please speak into the microphone. State your name, your affiliation, and your question or comment. So with that—

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: MATVIICHUK HAS DIFFICULT ACCENT.* * *

OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK:

Thank you-- thank you very much for having me here. I represent the Civil Initiative here on Maidan S.O.S., which was created on November 3rd last year, following the route of this person, of peaceful protestors on Independent Square. During the entire Euro Maidan period, we worked 24 hours a day to provide-- legal help to people suffering from persecution.

We helped hundreds of Euro Maidan protestors in Kiev, and other regions, who had been beaten, arrested, tortured, as well as their relatives of those killed or missing.

We still continue our work in Crimea and eastern regions. Euro Mайдan (UNINTEL) was assisted by hundreds of people from all over Ukraine. They helped find lawyers for people beaten and detained, and to (UNINTEL) court hearings.

They kept guard in hospitals, looked for people in police stations, and morgues. The vast majority of these people had never been enrolled in formal human rights work. However, for all of us human rights and freedoms were not simply (UNINTEL) and our sense of human dignity made it impossible in such a critical time to stand alone. Euro Mайдan was essentially evolved as struggle for human rights, and for that reason the largest demonstration during those months were clearly in defense of human rights.

For example, on December 1st people came out not only in support of European integration for Ukraine, but against the violence of barcode (?) police officers who had brutally beaten students. The protests on January 19 this year against the repressive anti-protest laws, were in defense of hu-- fundamental rights and freedoms which had been trampled.

There were numerous attempts throughout the entire Euro Mайдan protest to give the seal of resistance a fascist face. And to present the protesters as anti-Semites and xenophobes. This is particularly cynical, given the fact that Mайдan was officially supported by national communities and associations. It's participants took on the task of guarding Jewish religious buildings, and there were representatives of various-- national minorities in the protests, including the Jewish Zealot Defense Unit (?). The total violence and (UNINTEL PHRASE) during these recent months in Ukraine reflect general worrying trends in the post-Sovial-- Soviet space where a real battle has taken place between forces in support and those against Democracy.

However, if for some Ukraine's choice is a question of sheer politics, for us is a question of human rights. One hundred-- 33 people died during the Euro Mайдan period, and around one-- ten more possible cases are being checked. Euro Mайдan S.O.S. is still looking for 93 people who disappeared at the time. The number of deaths is unfortunately also rising.

On April 20, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) died after had enduring, which he bought on February (UNINTEL). Like many other, he lives in (INAUDIBLE). It's only several weeks since the gunning down of protester in the center of Kiev. Therefore in speaking of all this-- threats to civil society in Ukraine, we need to rely on this situation that was unstable and diverts markedly from one region to another.

At present however, Ukraine is facing military occupation in Crimea, and active interference by Russia in east and south of the country. In view of (UNINTEL), we can identify the following weighing dangers for the development of civil society in Ukraine. First is crussian (?) or independent civil society in Crimea. Crimea's presently under the armed dictatorship instilled by Russian federation armed forces, following an illegal so-called referendum, (UNINTEL) with rifles pointed at people.

This is a widespread obstruction of generals trying to carry out their work, and attack on present and (UNINTEL) staff. All Ukraine and television channel are removed

from air. Peaceful protests against the occupation are brutally dispersed by armed vigilantes groups, which were partly formed from several thousand Cossacks brought in from Russia.

Similar organization report that activists are facing beating harassment damage to the organs. Threats and intimidation in connection with their republic activities. Several dozen activists have been abducted, and their whereabouts (UNINTEL) are still unknown. There is a real danger of interacting conflict between the aggressors and so-called self-defense vigilantes. On the one hand, are the Crimea (UNINTEL) on the other.

The-- relentless flow of people forced to move from their Crimea to the other areas of Ukraine. The second dangerous trend is radic-- radic-politization of civil society in eastern regions. Because-- the recent active political interference by Russia in the east of Ukraine, under the guise of artificially created similar organizations and movement. The activities of such initiatives are aimed to create in the idea that specific oblasts wants to join Russia.

Despite the fact that the electoral preference of this residence-- or this oblasts indicates that such organization are not supported by the majority of society, the demonstrative leg of response from the law enforcement body-- and aggression of and violence from these groups, created an atmosphere of pressure and terror, with respect to members of civil society.

There have been cases where peaceful demonstrators are dispersed, and participants beaten up, journalists harassed, and the property dam-- damaged. Activists took as hostages, tortured, and even killed. Some activists has been forced into hiding with their family sent to-- to the other oblasts. The situation will also seriously hamper radical reform in the country, and free movement in the declared direction of European integration. We have seen for the first time-- time in more than 70 years, that the part of sovereign state has been seized by force and joined to Russia.

The question now is not only what Ukraine should do, it's also what Democratic states should do in the world. When (UNINTEL PHRASE) annexation has been breached. Because there is a thing which had no state borders, and human rights are one of such things.

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: SHCHERBACHENKO HAS DIFFICULT ACCENT.* * *

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Hello everyone. My name is Volodymyr Shcherbachenko. I'm-- working for an N.G.O.-- East Ukrainian Center for Civic Initiatives, and-- but here I represent not this-- this N.G.O., but-- civic sector of-- (FOREIGN LANGUAGE). It's a gathering of civic activists to endure representatives-- which during recent months-- gathered together protest peacefully, trying to support uni-- unity of our country, our military

forces and to establish dialogue with-- pro-Russian protesters and also trying to control our new government on-- local level.

So my role here is-- explain you the situation in our region, and to-- I would be happy to do so. So-- you know, that to understand the situation-- I explain the situation, I can additionally divide the population of our Luhansk and Donet-- Donetsk region in three parts. So-- it's-- pro-Russian supporters, it's a majority of people-- who do not support-- Russian vectors of-- future of this territory, but who are freely and active, and to waiting for something good happen.

And-- another part-- one more-- part of population it's-- supporters of-- pro-- pro-Ukrainian vector of-- few chance supporters of European vector of-- of Ukrainian-- of Ukrainian future. So-- it's-- pro-Russian-- protesters or supporters, it's about-- between ten and 15% of-- population-- those people who are, like, not active and want to stay in-- in Ukraine, probably a little bit change Ukraine. Not like now, it's about-- 75, eighty f-- 75-- 70-- 80%, and-- those who support-- Euro Maidan ideas-- it's also about ten-- 15%

The difference between-- those groups and pro-Russian active groups, or Russian into pro-Ukrainian, or Ukrainian is that the Russian part-- they are really aggressive. They believe that their time is come, and to-- they are willing to use-- weapons-- in order to-- represent their ideas and to, like, implement their vision of Ukrainian future. So what happens-- in our part of the country now, it's-- like-- with the strong support of Russia, of their military forces-- this small part of-- of our population, pro-Russian trying to--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Yeah, enforce their vision of our future-- to the whole country, into the whole region. And to-- so-- what do they do for this? In several cities and towns of Luhansk and-- Donetsk region, the state building city-- halls-- were taken over, and today under the control of-- militarized forces.

Local people with some-- military officers from Russia. And in my-- in my city is a state security service building is also taken over, and they control a block around-- around this building. And-- so-- they're all of-- the Ukrainian state-- and the Ukrainian government is weak. And to-- is especially weak in our region-- because-- political elite-- is-- tied and actually comes from the previously ruling party, party of region.

They don't want to lose their power, and they use this Russian forces into-- Russian involvement to continue to rule, and to preserve their corrupt practices. And to-- so-- and actually they could control the local militia-- not local militia, but militia-- we don't have local militia. It's a part of-- kind of national-- internal forces we call it.

But-- those people who work in this-- militia, they do not-- actually represent-- a

vision of central government. They actually-- in many cases support this as Russian separatists, and-- people-- who represent another vision of future, where regions they cannot-- be under the protection of any forces, actually. They can be beaten, they-- they-- they so many times beaten. Several peoples who represent-- this Ukrainian vector of policy were killed, and-- we do not expect to-- any positive changes.

I wouldn't want to say that, but-- the situation is really difficult. And-- if-- it wouldn't be a strong internal involvement, I would say we may expect more people will be killed. And-- it will be the right of peaceful protest, or just a presentation of-- you will be severely violated. And so the election which should-- happen in a month-- may be under the threat to be-- collapsed-- in our region. Which is really important, which we-- we want to-- we want election happen, we want-- new government, new president-- we want stability in our country.

And the majority of population doesn't want to join Russia, they want just to-- kind of normal life. Prosperity and-- so-- and-- the role of Russian media is also very important. They brainwashed-- local people, and-- people-- all this-- majority of population, they will not able to explain what they really want. They kind of do not have clear vision what kind of country do they want to have.

They want probably more prospect to Russian language, and at the same time there is no violation of-- pro-Russian-speaking population. They want more power at a local level-- and they call it federalization, which is not always the same thing. Yes, and to-- my strong belief that-- the situation became worse and worse, and-- we Ukrainians will be-- we are able to find-- to create a dialogue between all these three parts. But-- this dialogue prevented to be happen by strong Russian involvement.

And unfortunately our country and our government too weak to cope with this strong Russian involvement. And we need help from international community-- to protect our country. To protect people from-- being killed, from-- for the human rights violation, and that is why we-- we are here.

We-- we need support from the United States government, from the-- the American people. And as Oleksandra said, it's really important-- help us to-- to have a peaceful election-- to cope with Russian government, and we'll talk later about what we actually suggest and ask to do to. Thank you.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Thank you very much. I'm glad to see that Maksym was able to make it here, in spite of the best efforts of American customs. Would you care to say a few words to the group?

MAKSYM BUTKEVYCH:

Yeah, thank you. Now, mention-- my (UNINTEL) has been delayed. I didn't expect to spend so many hours at the airport, and trying again and again to explain what is

the purpose of my visit. To-- to talk about Ukraine to a number of our partners-- counterparts, those who are interested in the U.S.-- doesn't seem to be a good reason for Ukrainian national nowadays to arrive-- to-- to the U.S.

And fortunately at the end of the day-- Jeff, now they have your phone number. They-- they-- they've written it down-- just to get in touch if anything. So-- yeah-- I-- I was supposed to be here from the very beginning. I was not-- and if I will repeat something which has been already said by my colleagues, I apologize in advance. Just to-- you know, to-- to make few initial comments in a way.

First-- me, as well as my colleagues, we were part of-- Maidan-- as you know, Maidan movement. Maidan is a phenomena-- from-- starting from 30th of November in very different capacities. And-- of course it makes our testimonies and our-- our statements-- a bit more vulnerable, because we are biased. The good thing about it is that we have very good reasons to be biased. We've been there, we've seen that-- and-- it's not, we-- we do not take our information from the press. Only and from something which was told to us by someone.

So to-- to me and my colleagues, and to many other people whom I know-- not all of them, but most of them-- the vast majority. Of course it was-- a civic movement-- not divided by regions at the time. And it is, I don't believe, it-- it is really divided now. Which-- had at its very core, the demand for-- respect, for civil liberties and for human rights.

I mean, it sounds quite, you know, these big words. But this is what it was. And-- it could be seen also in the way-- more and more general public inmodelized (PH) to take part in the protest. With every next governmental step-- violating more rights of protesters than of N.G.O.'s, than of civic groups, than of different various groups of population.

With all-- these steps, more people were involved because they realized that their rights are under-- under attack. At Maidan itself, there was no division when it came to language-- which is supposed to be a big issue in Ukraine, but it was not. At least not at Maidan. I've heard Russian being spoken as often, or maybe even more often sometimes than Ukrainian. No difference when it came to ethnic-- allegiance, or religious beliefs. The-- the quarrel was about-- right to protest, was about corruption, was about an-- in the first place, accountability. That is accountability of those who are in power.

You will recall what it-- the whole thing started with. It started with the-- a Ukraine and U.S. cessation agreement (?). That first big wave and different wave of protesters coming to the streets. They went there after the violent dispersal of the protesters in early hours on the 30th of November. And those who went-- next morning to these streets, they went there because they realized that police officers and those who make orders will again be-- unaccountable. Will enjoy impunity for severe, cruel, and absolutely-- having no reason. Beating of peaceful-- protesters.

And of course the exclamation which was provided by-- at that time authorities-- to protesters. It has shown the treatment, the attitude of those in power towards the

protesters. The authorities explained that they had to disperse the peaceful protest in such a violent manner, because they wanted to-- install a Christmas tree in the center of Ukrainian capitol. And this is why they had to clear-- the-- this group as well.

It's like one (UNINTEL) drop which in a way affects the ocean. It's affected the whole attitudes of the previous regime towards the citizens, and this is what's sparked initial protest, and then (INAUDIBLE). So-- to us-- it is about of course human rights and civic liberties. When-- what happened later-- what happened next of course involves many factors. I mean, next after the fall of the regime-- and-- I can just-- I could not agree more with-- with them regarding-- Russian media influence.

It was huge, and it's still huge in-- in-- entire regions. Information about what goes on in Kiev was received rather by Russian media channels than by Ukrainian ones. And-- first to people in Kiev, it was laughable. But then it became-- sinister. And then it just-- it fed this feeling of-- injustice and war-mongering.

But of course-- at the time, everyone hoped that this is just a usual informational war, it will not develop into actual military aggression. And at some point, this is exactly what happened. On the-- structural problems of the events, is that-- literally between the fall of the regime and the beginning of military intervention of Russia in Crimea, we've had five days. Or maybe-- maybe four days of time when-- civic activists together with those activists who are-- who are interested-- started to not only make plans, but also trying to implement the first steps.

To make their country anew, and very different foundations. It was all-- I-- I can just-- recall experience of my organization I work at. It's a small N.G.O. based in Kiev, and we usually deal with-- issues of discrimination, non-discrimination. And-- assistance to refugees and asylum secures-- among other things.

So straight away we started to-- produce the roadmap. How to finally make proper asylum system in Ukraine, because what we had before was rather a joke. And refugees were quite often under threat, political (UNINTEL) if they came from Russia, for instance. All from central pos-- post-service (UNINTEL PHRASE). And the same happened in all other sectors of civil society. Those who worked with police brutality or police impunity, started to produce road map-- what to do with police forces.

How they should be reformed totally-- reformed of course in totally different crowds. The same was about all other-- sectors of-- of-- of the state management. And then it all changed in one day-- in few days, basically-- because of course when you have-- military intervention in new country, you do not-- well, it's really difficult to make structural changes in the station-- in-- in war-monger situation.

And second it is very difficult to-- or much more difficult to criticize the new leadership when you are at war-like situation. You know, when we are at war, leadership should do what it should-- should-- what should be done-- and this, of course-- extremely limited (UNINTEL) maneuver, which we've had. And-- also this old card played many times before, mostly by-- pro-Moscow-- Ukrainian politicians language division, and regional division.

It never went so well. It all looked like a myth to everyone, both in the west and east,

and south and north. Of course-- Russian-speaking population would prefer to-- have an opportunity to use Russian in different sectors of every day like and in institutionally. But this is an opportunity which was there all of this time, including Crimea in the first place. In Crimea, 90% of-- for instance-- school kids, they studied in Russian. Seven percent in Ukrainian, and 3% in Crimean (INAUDIBLE). So it's really difficult to say anything about persecution of Russian language in Crimea, where there was effectively no other language but Russian in use.

But all methodology-- excuse me, not methodology-- mythology of course. Mythologically (PH) implemented by Russian propaganda machine, regarding-- these mysterious fascists occupying Kiev, and trying to persecute Russian-speaking population. It might sound surprising, but with the assistance of the well-oiled-- oiled propaganda machine-- the Russian media-- it influenced many people in the south, and in Crimea in the first place.

And to much less extent, people in some eastern regions. Just to wrap up this initial-- initial part of my-- I just would like to make maybe two or three points-- more practical ones. First one is that-- the whole developments afterwards, they did not influence the agenda of-- civil society organizations and their partners.

Up to now-- in my very subjective view, most important things which are done in Ukraine when it comes to a Democratic reforms-- or when it comes to very practical issues-- humanitarian needs of every day life like-- they are done by civil society organizations. Due to the weakness of the government, but also due to the extreme, unseen-before level of mass-mobilization of society. When people for a few months are just basically given what they could, in order to assist others-- assist in very different ways.

Taking them out of the fire line (PH), treat their wounds, or maybe assist in resettlement of those who had to leave occupied territories. Of course there is a certain-- level of tiredness among those who for almost half a year now dedicate everything they have to-- attempts to make things better. But-- everyone whom I know, they are as dedicated as before to continue the same way, and to remake our country anew. This is a massive task, given modern history of Ukraine.

We all understand that. But basically it looks like now there is no other way, and no one can even think about all the sacrifices made in all these month in-- in vain. It is not possible. And to those people who were in the streets, it is not possible. So-- of course it is a breakthrough in modern history of Ukraine. This is point one.

Point two is that in a few recent months, we encountered in Ukraine-- issues and problems Ukraine has never had in its modern history. And the modern-- starting from 1991 at least-- one of the most recent ones-- is issue of occupied territories and internally displaced Protestants. How to-- construct the relationships with those who remain on the occupied territories, but want to stay Ukrainian nationals. But don't want to leave Crimea, because it's their homeland, because they don't want to give it up to the occupiers.

But on the other hand, of course they are extremely vulnerable. They are basically

now targets in the situation of law-- a lawlessness, which is in-- in-- in Crimea. Where all actions are arbitrary, defending only upon the will of commanders of-- prior military squads, and Russian occupying forces. Internally displaced persons is also something I am unseen before. And-- short-term efforts, assistant efforts are undertaken by-- again, mostly civil-- civil society organizations.

But-- there is an understanding that we need to hope for better. Of course we need to hope that there will be soon a situation when these people will be able to go back. But we need to-- build our strength, which is-- coming from the negative perspective.

So we need long-term strength to sustain the (UNINTEL) how internally displaced persons might integrate in their new environment-- how they might be-- might continue their life despite horrible things which happened to them. And three-- of course we continue-- feeling this-- massive effect of-- well, to say it lightly, of Russian propaganda machine. I'm a former international (UNINTEL) journalist myself-- and I went in several difficult places. My Russian police-- like in (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) during-- Georgian-Ru-- Russian war in-- 20-- 2008.

I've-- at that time where I did see how they work, and what their purpose of work is. It's-- it's huge, I mean as a machine it's huge. We encounter the traces of Russian propaganda in international media, in foreign language media a lot. But somehow we should be able to cope with that, I'm not sure we can. At the moment it looks like we are-- if I can say anything, like, we-- we are losing information on (INAUDIBLE).

So on-- point one, on point two, and on point three-- of course we need broad cooperation internationally with anyone who-- might be-- might understand how important communication in Ukraine now is. Not only for Ukraine, but for the whole system of international security. Basically in-- in our view, what happened changed the whole system of international security. It's again-- might make (UNINTEL) principle being in the first place.

It's again nostalgia for nuclear weapons in Ukraine, which was caused by-- by events-- recent events. And many other things which changed the whole international security landscape. And also we need best practices internationally. How people coped with similar situations. Of course there is nothing that can be just transferred. But we need those practices, and-- and lessons in how to implement best of the best in Ukraine with-- assistance of those who would be willing and able to help. Thank you.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Sascha (PH)-- Vovic (PH), do you have any thoughts being here in Washington about things that-- that you think need to be done by people here in the United States to help?

SASCHA:

We call-- all independent Democratic states, and-- United States of America to raise the issue of situation in Ukraine as a matter of urgency. Because violence escalation, forced disappearance, tortures, killings in-- enter minorities under stress. All this call for immediate reaction from international community.

Since my first point, or-- we-- make sure that Ukraine government is effectively supported and undertaken, independent and transparent investigation into human right violations, with (UNINTEL) throughout the country since November last year. Because it's not a matter of-- revenge, it's a matter of-- justice. It's a matter of prejudice-- it's a matter of prevention of human rights violation.

Second, a request from the Ukrainian government to provide a plan of their reforms, in regard to-- to the respect of the rule of law, the independence of judiciaries and control of law enforcement agencies. And the (UNINTEL) of corruptions-- we as a civil rights-- organization, and civil-- civil society, we understand that we have a window of-- of possibilities, and we try to influence-- and to push our government to provide such reforms. And we need help in-- in this issue.

We ask-- to continue as regularly visit Ukraine, it's regions, and support, empower, and protect human rights defenders in Ukraine. Especially keep-- attention the un-civil society in Crimea, eastern and south regions. Because if these people didn't feel help, they-- they can't-- can't struggle for human rights and for Democracy.

Also-- we need to provide-- it's needed to provide the assistance and ensure basic security. Any assistance to Ukrainian Army, military, or logistical supplies would be clear signal to Russia that United States of America is not giving up on Ukraine. And special assistance for law enforcement, but to protect electoral process in the dangerous eastern south regions is also very important.

It's-- very-- very important-- financial support of reforms of Ukraine. But with respect to looming default, some financial assistance may be needed even before the I.M.F. package. And also we appeal to journalist, never use Russia official media as a source of fact verification. Especially in developments on the ground in Ukraine. But aware that just as in the Soviet times, this is an integral part of the military campaign waged by the Kremlin. Maybe Vovic would like to add something?

VOVIC:

No, just agree and-- complete. But to answer questions would be more fruitful.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Well, let me take advantage of the fact that I'm up here to ask the first question. Right now, there's a great deal of talk in Ukraine about the need for decentralization-- even today I believe there was an interview with the head of Central Election

committee who said that possibly something could be done at the same time as the second round of elections. What are your thoughts-- well, what are civil societies thoughts about the pluses and minuses-- of decentralization, and-- and what needs to be done to make this happen effectively and not become a disaster?

VOVIC:

Like-- it seems that-- nobody in Ukraine against decentralization. It's-- more an issue and-- a discussion-- or should be Ukraine be decentral-- decentralized? Or become a federation. And-- as according to the sociological survey, the majority of Ukrainians want-- Ukraine-- to be-- continue to be as a Unitarian state, but-- with-- more power on a local level.

Today-- like-- during the whole Ukrainian independent history-- it was an awful situation when the local government doesn't really-- can do nothing on the local level, because they pay taxes to Kiev. And after that receive-- some-- subventions and-- do little things.

And-- it also create-- situation when-- local-- governments-- could blame Kiev that-- we can do nothing, it's all the fault of central government. We are good people, we are expressing, like, Kiev view and to-- we want to do-- we want a better life for all of us. But we can do nothing because-- all of this is Ukrainian government.

So now the central government want to change the situation. And-- it's also-- a wish-- or in a year, which expressed by pro-Russian-- supporters. And there is no disagreement, but some of the-- not some, but many of-- pro-Russian-- supporters-- promote (UNINTEL) they use the word-- and the conception of federalization of Ukraine. And it would be as a first step for-- for collapse of our state, and destabilization in the whole Eastern Europe.

Because-- as we can see with example of Crimea, we have only one (UNINTEL) republic, and-- actually-- what Russia do? They cause this beast first (?), and-- probably they use this idea-- of federalization in future. And-- and what-- and it's not clear what they want, but-- we definitely don't want this federalization. Because it-- it will be the first step to, like-- to put-- at least our part of the country in a civil war. And-- we may become a gray zone like-- south (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) or (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) and-- and what-- unfortunately, our center of government do not explain people and local elites. What really happened if-- if it-- if it-- this idea of federalization will become-- area-- it would be disaster.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Thank you. The floor's open for questions. The young lady--
(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

LINDA KINSTLER:

I'm Linda Kinstler with the New Republic. I was just wondering if you could speak to what you think the presidential candidates could do-- for civil society, or if there are any particular presidential candidates that you-- are most hopeful about? Like do you think Poroshenko has promise? And what do you think of the field in general?

* * *TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE: VOICES ARE IDENTIFIED WHEN POSSIBLE.* * *

SASCHA:

You see it's-- it's a great difference between Orange Revolution and Euro Maidan, that Euro Maidan wasn't led-- led in by politics-- politics. It was a desire of people, and-- this is why they have no political leader or leaders. But-- answering on your question, I-- I must admit that Euro Maidan is (UNINTEL) and this international of Ukraine, and to another human rights organizations sent for all candidates-- for president elections.

Question there-- which devoid is the issue of human rights, and when we receive-- when we receive the answers, we will see what-- what the place of human rights and Democracy are in their program. Is it-- is this-- it's important for us, because it's our work.

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

I would like to add that-- Poroshenko is not ideal candidate. And to-- but in this situation in which we are right now, it would be-- I'm sorry, it would be great just to elect this person in the first round, and-- what our country needs is stability. And-- if we will be able to elect-- (UNINTEL) reliable president which seems Poroshenko can be-- as a president, it would be a possibility to stabil-- stabilize the situation, and after that move to other reforms.

MAKSYM BUTKEVYCH:

Well, on-- on-- quite a subjective note as well but-- also reflecting, I think, quite a popular idea now may be-- may be regional, so the-- the first question and the second. It is really popular-- to-- think how less authoritarian the rule in (UNINTEL) can be in Ukraine. So when it comes to a shift of power to regional-- local level, or even to (UNINTEL PHRASE) in some ways.

In the same way to avoid the situation when one person, one small group of people can deserve the power in-- in the whole country as it happened just in front of our eyes. So-- those who would like to see that happen, and I mean transfer of powers, maybe to the Parliament. Or maybe just-- at least installing different system of checks and balances.

Of course that logically leads us-- or them, or us to thinking that ideal candidate would be a candidate on a good societal mission, in a way. The president who will-- whole-heartedly do everything possible to limit presidential powers in Ukraine. And this is quite-- quite a difficult task.

In my personal opinion, presidential elections are less important now than-- what civil society does. And then Parliamentary elections, which will hopefully come next. Because the Parliament is still the same-- we have now-- as we've had few months ago. And same Parliament which voted for all these incredibly-- I have many, many adjectives here-- laws which we witnessed in all of these month. Especially in January. The same Parliament now adopts new laws with totally different color. It just basically means that-- these people do not represent will of population or anything. They represent the survival instinct, which is maybe good for them but not for the country.

MEGAN BUSKEY:

Hi-- my name is Megan Buskey-- I used to be on staff at the Open Society Institute working on-- Russia and Ukraine programs. I was wondering if you could just talk a little bit more-- about the-- about the sort of political mentality right now in the east.

What would-- a Poroshenko presidency look like for Eastern Ukrainians? Would it be something that they would accept, or would be-- you know, happy about? Are-- Eastern Ukrainians in general-- participating or planning on participating in the presidential-- presidential elections? And finally, I was also wondering about-- what the party of regions-- the future of the party of regions in the Ukraine. Was the party discredited by the violence that was perpetrated under (FOREIGN LANGUAGE)? Thank you.

VOVIC:

Probably (BACKGROUND VOICE)-- yeah, either-- cities and south eastern Ukraine-- sorry, it was a lot of questions. Would-- would be Eastern Ukrainians happy with Poroshenko? I don't know that they would be happy with any-- any other president. But-- he looks like a compromised figure, and-- they would be more willing to vote for him-- and he will be able to collect more votes as (UNINTEL) candidate. And-- kind of compromise figures and anybody else.

And I-- I would say-- other question was if-- local people want to participate in election-- as I-- as I told, it seems-- it's not it seems, but the majority of people, they really want a stable country. They-- if-- if-- it wouldn't be more provocation and destabilization from Russian side-- it definitely the majority-- the majority of people will come and vote. They may vote for different candidates, for-- pro-Russian, pro-Western. But they definitely want stability, and-- they accept-- elections. What else?

MEGAN BUSKEY:

The par-- the party of regions. If it's been discredited-- if it was discredited by the violence.

VOVIC:

Yes-- I would say it's not by the violence, but-- by the previous policy. The people-- like-- (COUGH) our two regions in Crimea were totally controlled by party of regions. And-- the (UNINTEL) of Russian language and to-- kind of pro-Russian vector of policy. But-- now people who-- even their previous supporters they-- they don't believe-- in them anymore.

They-- during these gatherings-- pro-Russian gatherings, meetings, they just-- blame them. They don't want to hear them. They don't-- could (UNINTEL) some of them were beaten. Not, like, severely, but just to-- they don't want to listen them. And to-- somehow it's-- kind of-- it's not a bad situation. But-- like a few months ago this-- party, they hold the whole country 45 minute in their hands.

And in few months, they-- they lost everything. And what they face-- what they should expect-- in the future, it's really a big question. And this is-- people who have money, who had power, and-- probably it's those who are-- can be blamed in destabilization in the part of the country is some kind of supporters of-- this pro-Russ-- Russian actions in our part of country.

OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK:

I would like to add that-- separatists-- announced that they will persecuted people who were voting-- voting and to-- to take part in presidential election. So your question is better transform-- how many people are-- can risk with their health and even with their lives, and-- and to take part in the electoral process.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Doug.

DOUG WAKE:

Doug Wake (PH), no current affiliation, but former-U.S. government and O.S.C.E. official. If I may, two questions. One has already been touched upon with-- the last answer about elections. But I'm wondering in the regions where administrative buildings have been taken, and there is a presence of-- these armed forces. How likely is it that the-- Ukrainian government and its election commission will have the pure administrative capacity to organize the election effectively throughout the

territory of-- the oblasts in Eastern Ukraine?

And if I may, a completely separate question. I wonder if any of you would-- have any comment-- despite all of your-- intense-- extremely busy efforts over the past-- months-- within Ukraine, on your-- ability to work with counterparts and colleagues-- in civil society in the Russian federation. Which-- of course-- is itself under-- considerable-- pressure, but in many cases has been quite focused on-- showing solidarity with-- with-- Ukraine civil society.

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Okay-- so the ability of our government to-- proceed election, or to-- (BACKGROUND VOICE) con-- conduct the election-- so like in my-- I live in a city or town about-- 500,000 and-- actually the-- destabilized situation, it's only one block in the center of the city. The rest of-- city lives-- its ordinary life. People go-- smile, you know, like-- they really worry about situation, but-- it's totally-- if it wouldn't be a direct-- kind of action from Russia side, and to-- directed by them-- military forces-- the election-- will be, what-- conducted.

The situation is a little bit different in some cities-- and some towns. In Donetsk region, for example, (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) and (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) it's-- town about one hundred-- 100,000 people. So they are kind of occupied and controlled-- by this pro-Russian-- forces, and lo-- local people and to-- probably-- the center of government will not be able to control those territories. But it's only a few towns. And-- so if the sit-- situation at least-- will become-- will still-- still be-- be like today-- there is no threat-- election to happen.

SASCHA:

I-- I try to answer at your second question. We as-- Euro Mайдan S.O.S. closely work with Russian human rights organizations. And because now we are working in Crimea and eastern region, and in Crimea it's no necessity in lawyers. Because-- there is no-- legal space for-- for Ukrainian lawyers to work with and to-- to help people. And-- I-- I-- I can give an examples-- briefly.

When-- when one-- (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) is a leader of Crimea, Euro Mайдan called to-- to his colleagues that he is captured. And-- they-- he is in detention of police in the railway station. And after ten minutes, our mobile group (NOISE) went to this railway station, went to this place of detention, and ask police-- "Where is this person?"

But the police said there is no such person in detention, and-- it's begin-- it's-- it's took place before referendum. If it can be now, I think that they will capture it-- our activists also to those detentions, because when a released-- or when (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) was released, I spoke with him in hospital. And he described how severely tor-- he was tortured, and what he was asked. It was-- he can suffer it-- he

and his colleague who-- who were in this-- in this-- situation, and he exactly was in this detention place.

So lawyers can't help in such situation. But-- we ask our-- Russians colleg-- human rights-- organizations, or colleagues from these organization-- to help with more into our situation. Because-- now, there is no mobile group-- our mobile group in Crimea, because of danger. Because we're not prep-- we're not-- prepared to work in such conditions.

And for example, we-- we teach-- we-- we teach-- the experience of mobile groups in (FOREIGN LANGUAGE), how they work in (FOREIGN LANGUAGE). And-- human rights colleg-- Russians-- organization provides that training for us. And to be-- we-- will work together in peninsula (?).

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

In the back row please.

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Oh may I add something?

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Please.

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Yeah, we're talking about what can be done by international community to help us-- election-- to be conducted. So there are several pla-- places around the world when the election pulls through under the threat. For example-- recent examples from Afghanistan, and-- but election actually happened.

So we need this-- kind of experience to be some kind of shared with our-- internal forces. And with our government to help-- each to-- actually to protect-- people who are willing to hold and to protect-- this right of-- of majority of Ukrainian population. And this is one of the things which can be done to-- to protect future of our country.

PEARSON SHERR:

Pearson Sherr (PH) from the Stoneson Center (PH). I spend-- a good deal of time in the Jewish community in the United States. It's incredibly difficult to explain to the Jewish community why Ukraine is important. And it's difficult because as everyone knows, Ukraine does have an extremely unfortunate history of Anti-Semitism. I am

totally convinced-- I've been following the events very closely, and I'm totally convinced that-- 99% of the recent event-- or provocations arranged by the Russians-- they have all of the-- of the hallmarks.

When I go through Saint Sophia Square in Kiev, there's a statue. And it's a statue of Bogdan Khmelnytsky. Bogdan Khmelnytsky is known for a couple of things, first of all the Treaty of (FOREIGN LANGUAGE), which united Ukraine with the Russian empire. And secondly, for being the greatest mass-murderer of Jews before Adolf Hitler. Has there been any discussion-- or is it just premature or silly to think about removing that statue? That's my question.

MAKSYM BUTKEVYCH:

Okay, probably that's to me, Jeff. The short answer no. There's been no discussion-- specifically about removing the statue, and I don't really think that such discussion will come about in next-- quite long time. What really-- has been started, at some point of time quite recently-- first in quite narrow circles of historians, and then it started to expand and involving more and more-- civic activists, and just people who cared. Was discussion about-- historical memory and relationships between different ethnic and religious communities in Ukraine throughout its history.

Because of course for-- Ukrainian community with its historical memory, let's not-- not go into how it came about this way, et cetera. Bogdan Khmelnytsky is-- the leader-- rather the leader of national liberation war, which resulted in quite an unfortunate agreement with Russia-- in the first place. For Jewish community of Ukraine, Bogdan Khmelnytsky led-- massive movement, which resulted in this-- as you described, an incredible number of deaths of Ukrainian Jews.

But unfortunately, Ukrainian history-- and the history of borderlands were-- as supplied to mid-20th century, (UNINTEL PHRASE) families we described-- (UNINTEL) had so many points like this between different ethnic communities, which still live in Ukraine.

One of the most recent ones, when it comes to mid-20th century, is (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) and conflict between ethnic posts, and I think Ukrainians in those lands. Which was also a tragedy of-- of incredible scale, even-- even when it comes to second World War circumstances. And there are many more relationships between Ukrainian (UNINTEL) and Ukrainians, which are now on the same side-- have never been easy until some point of time.

So-- discussion about-- taking history, and have different takes on history, and try to represent it in whole variety of Ukraine ethnic, religious, et cetera. These discussions started to take place some time ago. Of course just to keep in mind, not-- not to say outwards, you know, for you he's a hero, or she's a hero-- and for us he or she is a murderer. So you should shut up and take our point of view, because our point of view is more important.

But of course to include, at least to an extent possible, at the first stage-- views and

memories of different groups which reside in Ukraine. And this is also quite-- (COUGH) provides quite-- another-- I-- how to describe it properly-- dangerous turn when it comes to the current events. You know? The whole discussion of-- complexity-- of-- the second World War events-- in central and western Ukraine. At least leaving alone the whole territory.

Now is-- for many people replaced with propaganda slogans. Those who-- instead of understanding what was national liberation movement in its-- I-- I just don't want to say positive and negative, because every group has its own positives and negatives here. But-- but in its different aspects-- during second World War in western Ukraine, instead to understand in this complexity. Now we have again clichés, you-- you are (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) and I am against (FOREIGN LANGUAGE). (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) means fascists. Everyone who is pro-Ukrainian is fascist.

And you have again this Soviet-like approach to history, black and white, us and them. And this is a dangerous set-back when it comes to processes which have evolved in historical community in recent years in Ukraine. So about statue, probably no. About understanding the complexity, yes. It has been started, but purely political events which we witness now-- and I am afraid not from-- the (UNINTEL) can be huge set-back to this healthy discussion which has been started.

SASCHA:

I just-- small, or briefly-- added that-- during Euro Maidan events, we lost-- more than 100 people in this-- cold sky-- sky hunt?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

SASCHA:

Heav-- Heavenly Hundred, and one of these-- Heavenly Hundred was from Jew-- Jew-- Jew-- Jewish self-- self-defense union.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Up-- front here please. (BACKGROUND VOICE)

GEORGE ZIDESKY:

Hi-- I'm George Zidesky with U.S.A. I.D. I have two que-- questions. The U.S. government obviously and U.S.A. I.D. are trying to cobble together some kind of package of assistance-- given that-- what's going on now. Even though it's being done under the threat of imminent-- or maybe not so imminent, you know, con-- confrontation. But-- if-- if you had, like, a blue sky idealistic-- or carte blanche, like,

where would you emphasize?

Where-- where should America-- United States assistance be focused? On civil society? On, you know, media to counter this mess, this information that's going on by the juggernaut of the-- the-- Russian propaganda? That's-- that's my first question, where should we put our money?

And-- second question is-- is-- probably plagued a lot of people. I mean-- I lived in Kiev from 1999 to 2004. For 22 years, there seemed to be kind of a tolerance, a strained tolerance, a little dance going on between Russia and the-- and Ukraine. Ukraine never wanted to be a part of N.A.T.O.-- they made that clear. They understood where-- you guys understand where you are, in-- in the scheme of things, and who you're bordering.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE) and all the other presidents attacked a little bit to east, and then they attacked a little bit to the west and-- they played that game very cleverly. And then in 2004, there was the Orange Revolution and you had-- a so-called-- it-- it turned out badly, but you had a Democratically-elected president. And-- who was more pro-Western, had a western wife-- American-- Ukrainian-American wife.

So-- what was it that triggered Putin now, in this particular instance to become bellicose, to grab territory and to threaten a wider conflict? I mean, for 22 years there's been some kind of-- détente, if you will, or uneasiness. But I-- I-- what's your best guess at this? I mean-- you know-- I'm not so clear about the-- like, the optics here. What's-- why now?

OLEKSANDRA MATVIICHUK:

I-- I just start and ask my colleague to-- to aid it. So-- as I understand your first question is on what kind of support have concentrate United States America. I just remind that United States America was one of the sider (PH) of Budapest Memorandum who guarantee Ukrainian territor-- sovereign ter-- territor-- integrity and sovereignty. So and-- I-- and now that we-- we ask-- United States of America some kind of supports, a briefly it's-- it's-- cont-- it's-- oversight that-- independent and transparent investigation into human rights violations during Euro Maidan. It's-- it's a request from Ukraine government to provide a plan on their needed reforms, which were needed to be done in law enforcement bodies, in-- jud-- independence of judiciary, et cetera.

And-- we-- we-- needed assistance in-- in-- insuring basic security. Modernization of our army-- to help assistance teach-- law enforcement body how to provide election in-- in such difficult circumstances. Like in eastern regions, et cetera. And your second question was-- as-- as I understand-- about-- that we-- we have-- not-- it's not the first Maidan in-- in our country, as I understand.

GEORGE ZIDESKY:

Yeah, well, basically-- quickly, I-- I-- I-- the-- is this because (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) was actually-- I mean (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) was actually overthrown and fled the country, and this was gonna set a terrible example for people in Russia and (UNINTEL) that you could actually run somebody out of power that's supported by Putin. Okay-- my question is why now? Like, after 22 years of independence, and are-- and-- and even-- some more pro-Western leaning-- presidents.

That-- that-- what-- what was the-- the tipping point this time? Was it the ousting of (FOREIGN LANGUAGE)? That-- that he fled the country, and this was a terrible example for other-- for possible dissidents and-- or-- or you know, anti-Putin forces? And he had to-- smash this down?

SASCHA:

So I will-- answer as I understand your question. If I not understand correct, my colleagues aid it. But I'm-- I'm-- look-- young-- woman, but I'm-- took part in first-- Maidans, in my country. I was a member when I was a student. And for Orange Revolution, I remember-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) and now Euro Maidan, and (UNINTEL PHRASE) are not guaranteed that Ukraine not need another Maidan.

But we-- we strongly believe that this-- this-- situation-- which we have now, it's-- it's-- cost-- for us a very-- big cost. Because of-- deaths of people, of relatives, of colleagues of-- and we-- we take responsibility. Not for politicians, not for parties. But by-- by others-- by ourselves. We-- we-- created as-- (UNINTEL) a lot of initiatives.

How civil society can oversize and form some different sphere, for example. We created reanimation package of reform, and pressed-- our parliament to adopt it in necessity role. And-- so we not-- rely upon our government only. But by our own fort-- force.

MAKSYM BUTKEVYCH:

I can-- maybe I can just add to the second question. Oh there-- there are two parts for me here. First is-- guesses, which I think are well-based actually, but they are still guesses. And another one is-- is rather fact. A fact is technical. It was-- it was the most brilliantly chosen moment of weakness. There was never such a moment in Ukrainian history, when-- literally in days when-- there was no proper-- like, the whole-- power infrastructure collapsed in front of our eyes.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE) was overthrown. It dedicated any of its predecessors. Many years into constructing the system when everything in the regions was ruled from Kiev. And you know-- manual regime. So when suddenly in Kiev, everything collapsed, regions became disoriented.

Of course it would be fixed and restored in very short period of time, but that moment was the best for any-- proper aggressive intervention. So that was the best moment to pick. When-- when it comes to-- reasons why to do that in (INAUDIBLE), well-- I mean, on one hand try-- yes it was really bad example. Orange Revolution did not overthrow anyone, it prevented (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) from taking power. Which (UNINTEL) left peacefully with guarantees, and the whole thing looked very legitimate, et cetera.

(FOREIGN LANGUAGE) was overthrown, it was revolution in-- I mean, in this sense-- and-- of course this example was, and still is, very dangerous for some and inspiring for others. And-- the more we will know about reasons for (FOREIGN LANGUAGE) actions, the more probably we'll understand how closely he was-- he was tied to Kremlin.

And-- and to Putin and to his aids. So it was not only overthrow of-- authoritarian ruler, but it was-- overthrow of pro-Moscow authoritarian ruler. On the other hand-- you know, how the-- of course as-- as you might have mentioned, we receive a lot of inquiry-- media inquiries-- from western media about the Far-Right at Maidan. My organization deals with discrimination, and monitoring of the firing groups for years. So we received a whole lot of-- whatever happened in Ukraine, the regime has fallen. Recent inquiries about the Far-Right at Maidan, Russian military and convention started. We received inquiries about the Far-Right at Maidan, then Crimea was occupied, then-- and next, we received inquiries about the Far-Right at Maidan.

Then we had first (UNINTEL) displaced persons, then troubles in the east-- we continued to receive these inquiries. But the issue is that in Ukraine, we might identify this or that rather marginal political leader as the biggest nationalist-- ethnic nationalist in Ukraine. In Russian, the biggest ethnic nationalist is Vladimir Putin.

It's his ideas, it's his background, he declared it several times. His favorite philosopher is (UNINTEL), and his views are-- concerning Ukraine whenever views, and so and in-- an equal part in the state and nation. So I think why to do that-- goes deeply into his vision of the world, and role of Russia. But the moment was just chosen ideally.

And-- and for just-- very briefly on the first-- question, where to invest money? I think that-- Oleksandra is absolutely right. Of course they would be a better presented to civil society. Not saying that you should invest in civil society. But it has also good reason. We've seen during this month how important it is. This is-- this is who's done the whole-- I don't mean N.G.O.'s only, I mean civil society. Even in rather (UNINTEL PHRASE).

You know, they-- network of-- of citizens-- who's done-- the most essential things. On the other hand, of course we see that all programs which were implemented, they-- many of them were stalled for this period of time. And people invested everything they had-- both emotionally, physically, and financially. So civil society will need support.

And of course reforms are needed, but-- I mean, investment in reforms. But it should

be rather accountable entrance pairing procedure when it comes to the government, with-- in cooperation with the international electors and Ukrainian (UNINTEL) government electors.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

SASCHA:

I just briefly added that if we're talking about assistant, we need to-- we need to-- conduct and-- big-- big-- project and-- big-- activ-- direction of activity-- to-- to-- make a dialogue between majority of-- population of eastern regions. Because as this-- these groups are only-- the-- the all-- majority of projects-- of-- educational projects are focused only on use, or social active people in eastern region. But only Russia works with majority, and we need to work with them in-- in very simple form, very simple ways. But it's-- it's work-- what needed to be done.

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

Our guests-- have one more engagement (UNINTEL). So I think-- one more, if we could keep it brief. Please or maybe-- these-- two hands have been up there-- two-- just ask your questions back to back.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

KURT HEGMAN:

My name is Kurt Hegman (PH), I work for the Center of International Private Enterprise, but I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Eastern Ukraine from 2010 to 2012, as (UNINTEL) knows. And I guess my question is-- having lived in-- in the east for two years, I never really got a sense of-- a desire for separatism, or a desire to join Russia. I always got the sense that the east-- you know, they were happy being Ukrainian, but also liked these connections that they had with their family and friends in Russia.

So I guess my question is, what exactly is the eastern public opinion towards these-- towards the takings of these governmental buildings, and the-- and the-- Ukrainian security buildings? And to what extent are these efforts-- indigenous? I know that there's pretty much-- a global consensus that-- Russia is-- it's responsible, but what's the Ukrainian-- involvement as well?

MATTHEW KUPFER:

Hi, Matthew Kupfer, Carnegie Endowment. My question's (UNINTEL) Mr. Shcherbachenko. There are a lot of-- in heavy industry, there's a lot of heavy industry in the east and a lot of ties with Russia. To what degree do you think this will

influence the-- the-- the ultimate ending of this situation in the east? To what degree could the severing of these ties influence the east? Obviously it would be a lot of revenue-- lost. But at the same time-- Russia is also dependent on Eastern Ukraine.

And also if you could just clarify your statistics on the different divisions of opinion in East Ukraine. When you talked about ten to 15% that was pro-Russian, did you mean that actually supports the separatists? Or that just has a very pro-Russian orientation?

VOLODYMYR SHCHERBACHENKO:

Okay-- yes, thank you for questions. So about-- who'd ask-- what is the public opinion about taking over this building by separatists? So (COUGH) the majority of people-- see this as a destruction of their-- not happy, but normal life. And they don't kind of understand that they don't really want this to happen. It's-- their-- there are no such examples in-- in a life of-- of a people who lives-- they don't remember such examples.

I know probably from the second World War-- so they do not support this. But-- they have-- philosophy of their lives is-- kind of paternalistic approach. They expect that-- somebody come and solve this problem. And-- what they ready to do, in majority of cases, is just to come to election poll.

And-- but they not ready to protect the state buildings from the-- pro-Russian-- forces, or aggressive part of-- of this population. Because majority people just-- they-- they didn't get anything from the state. It steal from them for many years, and they do not see reason to protect the-- this state buildings-- from-- from-- from Russia, which many of them still see as-- want to see as a friendly country.

About the question-- on which my-- how I-- on which my opinion on divisions. So it's mainly based on-- statistics-- so-- so-- sociological (UNINTEL) ways. Many of them were conducted recently, and-- they show that the-- absolute majority of-- population of Eastern Ukraine doesn't want to join Russia. They want to be part of Ukrainian state. Different state, with respect to their cultural and political differences.

But-- and to-- about those pro-Russian protesters-- many of-- of those people who are actively involved in protests, they beat the people with-- with a very simple education, I-- I would say. With a very simple-- income, and-- they usually don't-- able to express their vision of future and of current political situation.

So-- they don't actually able to explain what in their vision is-- federalization of Ukraine. Or-- it doesn't necessary means that all these ten or 15% want to join Russia. Probably they want-- like, many of them want-- more power to their-- to their local level. And to kind of protection of the Russian language. And to-- they want to--

JEFF GOLDSTEIN:

I'm afraid I'm going to have to cut it short. But I hope you'll join me in thanking our guests for a very interesting discussion. (APPLAUSE)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *