
The Ukraine through the eyes of Germany

Pictures and perceptions of a country on the move

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Preface

Perceptions do not reflect the truth. Instead, they are the result of subjective interpretations - the mixing of things which have been experienced, remembered, felt, and constructed. Perceptions are strongly characterized by the time and the circumstances in which they are formed.

If, for instance, in the framework of this study on Germany's perception of the Ukraine, a discussion partner should point out that "we talk a lot about the Ukraine, but not with her", you can trace back this impression asking how it has originated and whether it is correct or misleading. However, finding the truth has not been our objective. Instead, we wanted to find out which similarities are revealed by different perceptions of different persons, which contours the pictures of the Ukraine display, and which profile or which distortions can be recognized.

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Thus, we are able to trace two consistent basic lines. The first line: the view on the Ukraine is considered too narrow, the relevant knowledge too sketchy, the attention too fleeting, and the assessments not sufficiently substantiated. This perception may surprise against the background of the many-faceted cooperation links between the Ukraine and Germany. Our results include a number of plausible and less plausible reasons for this fragmentary debate with the Ukraine. It becomes clear that this is not only a "problem of representation" on the part of the Ukraine, but that the distorted perception is mostly generated by the observer.

Another basic line, apparent in every discussion, is the profound desire that Germany and the Germans should address the Ukraine more often and more intensively. This hope is explained by several motives: by Germany's historic responsibility, by the Ukraine's cultural diversity, by the country's economic potential, by the need to create stability in Eastern Europe or by a possible stimulus for the future development of the EU.

The most conspicuous motive, however, was the enthusiasm for what our discussion partners discovered during their own approach to the Ukraine. Irrespective of the actual situation, i.e. shifting the Ukraine into the focus of their attention, most of them initially emphasized "a blank page" which, however, soon turned into "a colourful canvass".

Methodologically, the study on "The Ukraine through the eyes of Germany" was carried out analogous to the GIZ's studies of perception entitled "Germa-

ny through the eyes of the World¹". It is our key interest to find out how the Ukraine is perceived in Germany with regard to her international relations and her interior development, where her specific strengths and weaknesses are seen, and what is expected from the country's future against this background.

To serve this purpose, personal interviews with 44 selected experts of the Ukraine from Germany were conducted in autumn 2017. A list of these 44 discussion partners will be found in the appendix together with a detailed explanation of the methodology of this study.

The text chooses three different perspectives in order to acquaint the reader with the Ukraine: The introductory prologue deliberately adopts the standpoint of a historical and political, western-style analyst, because such a perception and interpretation appears to be most familiar to the reader. Here, the most important milestones of Ukrainian history in the 20th century will be traced intending to place the subjective perceptions of our discussion partners into the historical and contemporary context.

The main part is completely devoted to the statements and impressions of our interview partners. Their perceptions have been condensed to core statements in a multi-stage process - a procedure which is called "intersubjectivity" in qualitative social science. Through this method, a collection of cumulated and weighed subjective perceptions is generated which, piece by piece, eventually form an overall picture - without, however, claiming to be objective or even true.

Structure, arrangement and dramaturgy of the text have been deliberately chosen so that the resulting overall picture emerges before the reader's eyes preferably remaining as a fragmented mosaic. Although each chapter stands for itself, it can be matched and joined with other chapters to form completely different, many-faceted overall pictures. Depending on the (optional) chronological sequence each chapter is read, different narratives about the Ukraine will be the result. Thus, the author's hand will remain in the background; instead, the raw material, owing to the many quotations, can be arranged and interpreted by the reader himself/herself.

1 Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Hg.), Deutschland in den Augen der Welt. Zentrale Ergebnisse der GIZ-Erhebung „Außensicht Deutschland – Rückschlüsse für die Internationale Zusammenarbeit“, Bonn/Eschborn 2012 (Download: <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/de-deutschland-in-den-auge-der-welt-2012.pdf>); Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (Hg.), Deutschland in den Augen der Welt. Zentrale Ergebnisse der zweiten GIZ-Erhebung 2015, Bonn/Eschborn 2015 (Download: <https://www.giz.de/de/downloads/giz2015-de-deutschland-in-den-auge-der-welt-2015.pdf>). The third GIZ study on Germany will appear in the first quarter of 2018.

Finally, it should be mentioned that this study is characterized by a decidedly German view on the Ukraine - really no surprise, given the selection of our discussion partners. We have chosen this highly selective approach for two reasons: firstly, because Germany is a key partner of the Ukraine on her way to a self-determined European future. Secondly, because the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) (an enterprise of the Federal German Government) is obliged to adjust itself to the changing framework conditions in order to remain effective and to find approval.

Consequently, this study on perception does not only contribute to the debate on the Ukraine's future, embedded in a newly-formed European political order. It is also meant to show how the picture of the Ukraine has developed since the events on the Maidan in Kiev in 2013/2014 and how people's lives in the Ukraine are being viewed from a critical external perspective.

Andreas von Schumann, Kiev

Prologue: *Caesuras in
the perception of the
Ukraine*

When, in 1990, I travelled to the West for the first time - more precisely: to the USA -, I had some real difficulties in explaining to my discussion partners which country I came from. Of course, I considered myself a Ukrainian. I even had a relevant entry in my Soviet passport. After all, there was such a thing as a "Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic" - with its own government and its own parliament, and it was even a member of the UN - a decision that far-sighted Stalin had made in 1945. Consequently, my answer to the question: "Where are you from?" was: "From the Ukraine" - undeterred and entirely unsuspecting.

My discussion partners, however, were not impressed at all. "Sorry?" the more polite asked. "What?" the others tried to call up their accumulated TV-knowledge. "Bahrain"?

"No", I corrected patiently. "The Ukraine".

"What's that?"

"One of the Soviet Republics."

"Oh, Russia!", the Americans nodded enthusiastically believing to have hit the jackpot.

"No", I tried to muster as much patience as possible. "Russia, too, is one of the Soviet Republics."

This statement left them completely puzzled. Russia, one of Russia's Republics? Someone must be crazy here. No doubt, who.

At the end of my trip, I met a man who was not in the least perturbed by my explanation.

"Which Ukraine", he reacted in a matter-of-fact voice.

"The Russian one or the Polish one?"

Now, it was my turn to be embarrassed. I simply muttered:

"The Soviet one. So far"¹.

¹ From: Mykola Rjabtschuk, Die reale und die imaginierte Ukraine. Essay, Frankfurt: edition suhrkamp, 2013, S. 11-12.

With that teasing humour, so typical of the region, Mykola Rjabtschuk, Kiev writer and journalist, describes his country's eternal dilemma: It does not leave any mental imprint, it remains practically without any perception of its own, and it has been - as long as contemporary generations can look back - in the shadow of its powerful eastern neighbour, Russia. It is already the country's name that assigns to the Ukraine a position at the periphery of great empires; the old East Slavic word *ukraina* means "border region" (i.e. to the Turkic horse-mounted nomads along the so-called "wild field", the steppes of today's Southern and Eastern Ukraine).

It seems that there are only two ascriptions when the Ukraine is perceived as an object in terms of history and international law: either as a projection surface of the power politics of major regional powers (Habsburgs, Poles, Germans, Russians, Osmons) or as a country historically and culturally torn between East and West. And this is why Europe's second-largest country at best plays a subordinate role in public perception and does not leave behind a visible footprint in terms of the history of civilization.

Apparently, the Ukraine only steps out of her shadowy existence if she becomes a pawn in the hands of the neighbouring powers with their geopolitical ambitions; and it is quite telling that the Ukraine appears much more conspicuously in the narratives of those neighbouring powers than in the context of her own historiography: Thus, the formation of the modern state in 1917 was only possible as a result of the decline and military defeat of czarist Russia (supported by Germany). This independence, however, ended as early as 1922 - after the factual conquest and occupation by Trotsky's Red Army - with the complete integration of the Western and Eastern Ukraine into the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Whereas the western European historical awareness with regard to the Ukraine only regained momentum with the German Reich's assault on the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941, the collective Ukrainian memory has continued to focus - until today - on a completely different event: the so-called "Holodomor" which signifies the millionfold death from starvation of the Ukrainian rural population at the beginning of the 1930ies, caused by the forced collectivization of the agriculture

under Russian Soviet rule. The German genocide researcher Gunnar Heinsohn once called the death from starvation of the Ukrainian population “the fastest mass killing of the 20th century and possibly in history, directed against a single ethnic group.”¹ It remains controversial whether Stalin and Molotov had intended to torpedo the Ukraine’s aspirations for independence or if the widespread deaths were caused by a chain of ruthlessly enforced collectivization measures, confiscation of harvest and periods of bad weather. It is a fact that, on the eve of the German assault on the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian population represented a society on the verge of social and economic collapse.

Hitler’s Eastern Campaign, primarily aiming at the conquest of Ukrainian settlement areas and at the subjugation of the country as a colony for raw material, not only led to a far-reaching destruction of Ukrainian cities and infrastructure, but also to an almost complete extinction of the Jewish population. In their camps, the SS killed around 1,4 million prisoners; the mass-shooting of Kiev Jews in the battle of Babyn Jar, in September 1941, belongs to those horrible sights which have left an imprint on the collective memory of the German post-war generations.

The reconquest of the Ukraine by the Red Army, in October 1944, not only led to the country’s factual conformity (despite a formal status of autonomy and an independent UN founder membership); once again, the population had to put up with mass repressions

(“collaborators”), deportations (intelligentsia) and resettlement measures (West Ukrainians with a nationalistic attitude, ethnic minorities). When Stalin died in the spring of 1953 and Nikita Khrushchev came into power, the Russian repressions against the Ukraine came to an end; it was Khrushchev himself who, having grown up in the Donbass, incorporated the Crimean peninsula (which had belonged to Russia for 300 years) rather abruptly to the Ukraine in May 1954.²

During the Cold War, the Ukraine was not only the Soviet Union’s granary, but also its armoury and advanced base of the USSR’s strategic forces. It was here that the Soviet military had deployed the bulk of its nuclear medium-range forces, had stationed large units of its nuclear-armed navy in the prohibited military zone of Sevastopol on the Crimea, and had deployed combat-ready divisions all over the country aligned towards the West.

Only a few people in the West were aware of the fact that the Ukraine, in association with the USSR, played a major role as a garrison and industrial backbone. It was only in April 1986 that the public became aware of the Ukraine when in Chernobyl (Northern Ukraine), near the town of Prypjat, block 4 of the nuclear power station sustained severe damage. This was the first nuclear accident classified as MCA - Maximum credible Accident - on a seven-stage international scale. Today, this accident is considered the key incident in the decline of the Soviet Union, because it makes clear how ramshackle the

1 Gunnar Heinsohn, *Lexikon der Völkermorde*. Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt 1998; Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europa zwischen Hitler und Stalin*, München: Beck 2011.

2 Gwendolyn Sasse, *The Crimea Question. Identity, Transition, and Conflict*, Harvard University Press, 2007

country's infrastructure was, how carelessly the Soviet authorities handled the incident, and how little the regime was able to cope with the consequences. Thus, the catastrophe of Chernobyl became a symbol of a system which entered into an accelerated process of decline.

After the abortive Moscow-putsch in August 1991, the Ukraine, as the first of the big Soviet core states, declared herself independent on 24th August, thus separating herself from the socialist state association following the example of the Baltic States, of Armenia and of Georgia. Mykola Rjabtschuk interprets this separation as a "double emancipation" — i.e. the emancipation of the civil society from the state and the emancipation of the nation from the empire".³

After the referendum on independence on 1st December 1991, Leonid Krawtschuk, former Secretary of the Central Committee, was elected, with an overwhelming majority, as the first president of the independent Ukraine; this election ensured the continuation of an elite which not only led to an "unfinished revolution" (Taras Kuzio), but also - as should become clear very soon - laid the foundation of a thoroughly corrupt political system. For post-communists and nationalists formed an unholy alliance: as the forces striving for independence finally wanted to realize the separation from Russia, they agreed on a cooperation with the nomenclature that - as yet - exercised power in the country with the help of state bodies and informal networks. The more so, because - after the ban of the Communist Par-

ty in 1991 - a power vacuum had developed which was quickly filled by personal affiliations and cliques.

In Rjabtschuk's opinion, this alliance helped the forces of a new beginning "to slow down the development of a genuine multi-party-system for many years." According to Rjabtschuk, "they are responsible for the fact that the oligarchic project, realized in the Ukraine by the post-communist nomenclature, formally received the name and the tokens of a democratic, nationalistic project."⁴

In contrast to the Baltic States where, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the civil societies took over the control of the state apparatus transferring the authoritarian-centralistic system to a pluralistic, liberal-democratic system, the Ukraine largely remained within her traditional power structures. Even though the old elites did not completely succeed in subjecting the forces of an emancipated civil society to their authoritarian claim to power, the civil society, for its part, was unable to implement the Baltic option. What was left, was an "enforced pluralism" (Lucan Way) and a hybrid democracy with increasingly authoritarian features. Or, as the magazine *East European Reporter* put it once: "Authoritarianism with a human face."⁵

The western perception of the Ukraine during the transition from Leonid I. (Krawtschuk) to Leonid II. (Kutschma) - provided that any attention was paid to this country between East and West - was that of a benevolent

3 Mykola Rjabtschuk, *Die reale und die imaginierte Ukraine*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp (edition suhrkamp 2418) 2005, S. 88.

4 Mykola Rjabtschuk, *Die reale und die imaginierte Ukraine*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp (edition suhrkamp 2418) 2005, S. 93f.

5 Mykola Rjabtschuk, *Authoritarianism with a Human Face*, in: *East European Reporter*, Vol. 5 (November/December 1992), S. 52-56

authoritarianism. At any rate, the West was focused on the states of Central Europe which had just liberated themselves from the clutches of the Soviet Union. In December 1997, the European Council in Luxembourg decided to begin admission talks with ten states from central and Eastern Europe including the three post-Soviet Baltic States.

Such a rapprochement was hardly an issue with regard to the Ukraine or to Belorussia: as post-Soviet core-states with close historical, social, economic and cultural ties to Russia, an intrusion of Western institutions into Russia's Cordon Sanitaire was absolutely inconceivable. Let alone the fact that both the Ukraine and Belorussia co-founded the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in December 1991 aiming to establish a common economic and security region in succession to the Soviet Union. In any case, the West was less interested in the Ukraine's democratization or economic modernization, but more so in her nuclear disarmament.

This eventually materialized with the conclusion of the so-called Budapest Memorandum which was signed between Russia, the USA and the UK on 5th December 1994 in the Hungarian capital on the fringes of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Referring to the final act of the Helsinki Convention, the delegates agreed in three separate statements to respect the sovereignty and existing borders of Kazakhstan, Belorussia and the Ukraine in return for their relinquishment of nuclear weapons. In terms of international law, the Budapest Memorandum is not binding, but rather a declaration of intent - a fact which was to assume far-reaching significance for the Ukraine's sovereignty

and integrity in the course of the annexation of the Crimea and of the war in Eastern Ukraine.

Towards the mid-1990ies, after the conclusion of the Budapest Memorandum, the Ukraine practically disappears for a decade from the public perception of the West. At most, western headlines appeared to commemorate the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl (which had its 10th anniversary in April 1996) along with the question of reconstructing the protective concrete shell ("sarcophagus") around the damaged nuclear reactor. In any case, all the attention was focused on Russia's future which, during the 1990ies, plunged into a severe economic and social crisis and, under Boris Yeltzin's weak and erratic leadership, found it difficult to maintain the unity of the Russian state (cf. the first Chechen War).

This wallflower-existence of the Ukraine only ended when, in autumn 2004, the presidential election campaign for Leonid Kutschma's succession began. The election campaign was overshadowed by an attempt to poison the liberal presidential candidate Wiktor Juschtschenko - a crime that has never been solved. A plot taken from a Hollywood movie with apparently clear-cut, archetypal roles: power-hungry Russia as a cold-blooded hegemon, and the freedom-loving Ukraine as the victim. Overnight, the events in Kiev filled the title-pages of the big daily papers and of the tabloids.

During the election campaign, Juschtschenko not only stood up for a consistent anti-corruption course, but he also made no secret of his anti-Russian and pro-European attitude. Although Juschtschenko, owing to the poison

16 attack, had to stop his election campaign four weeks prior to the election, he managed to place himself, after the first ballot, in the runoff election against Wiktor Janukowytsch, the acting Prime Minister and Moscow's protégé. Janukowytsch won the runoff election on 21st November 2004 by a tiny margin, but when allegations of electoral fraud became more and more substantiated and public protests escalated to the "Orange Revolution", the Ukrainian Superior Court of Justice ordered a repetition of the second ballot. On 26th December 2004, this second ballot was won by Wiktor Juschtschenko who collected just under 52% of the votes.

With Wiktor Juschtschenko and the belligerent-charismatic Julija Timoschenko who became Ukrainian Prime Minister in January 2005, the Ukraine finally seemed to open up and to begin anew - after a decade of authoritarianism. This hope, however, soon scattered, because Juschtschenko and Timoschenko quickly used up their political capital due to a never-ending battle for prestige. Already the parliamentary elections in 2006 ended in favour of Janukowytsch's "Party of the Regions", and Janukowytsch, surprisingly, became Prime Minister. One year later, however, after early parliamentary elections, he had to hand over his office to Julija Timoschenko again who carried out the official duties of the Ukrainian government until early 2010 - now in clear distinction from president Juschtschenko.

Retrospectively, it seems as if, in the years from 2004 to 2014, the Ukrainian political elite was almost exclusively occupied with internal battles for favourable positions.

However, there was more at stake: within the country's political institutions there raged, for the first time, an open power struggle about the Ukraine's alignment between the East and the West. Whereas Wiktor Juschtschenko clearly pursued a Westerly course approving the Ukraine's accession to the EU as well as to NATO, positioning himself expressly against Moscow (e.g. during the Georgia-crisis in 2008, a stance which - according to many observers - led to Moscow's "cold sanctions" such as the reduction of natural gas supplies), Prime Minister Wiktor Janukowytsch did not want to lead the country away from Moscow so completely: although he opted for a cautious approach to the European Union, he did not consider a NATO-membership which seemed out of the question for him.

Given the disappointing record of the reform forces, the presidential election in February 2010 resulted in a restoration of the traditional power structure: Wiktor Janukowytsch's victory against Julija Timoschenko in the runoff ballot moved the Ukraine, once again, towards the East. And the country became somewhat more authoritarian: in order to divert the attention from his own corrupt dealings, Janukowytsch first of all turned against his former political opponent and took legal action against Julija Timoschenko for suspicion of corruption. As neither the legal proceedings nor the conditions of imprisonment corresponded to the human rights principles and those of a constitutional democracy, Brussels temporarily suspended the negotiations with Kiev on an association agreement with the EU. At the same time, Janukowytsch pursued an increasingly contradictory seesaw policy between Moscow and

“The German picture of the Ukraine is quite unstable - it varies between enthusiasm (after the Maidan-revolution) and disillusionment (owing to political stagnation and reform deadlock)” (534) ¹

¹ The figures at the end of the highlighted quotations refer to the coding of the individual core statements within the study's data material.

Brussels which dramatically reduced his scope of action, both at home and abroad.⁶

When Moscow used economic sanctions to put pressure on Kiev because of its approach towards the EU, thus forcing the Ukraine's accession to the Eurasian Customs Union, the Ukrainian government under Prime Minister Mykola Asarow suspended rather abruptly the signing of the association agreement with the EU on 21st November 2013. This marked the beginning of mass protests on the Kiev Maidan. After a siege of the Kiev Maidan which lasted for weeks, special units of the Ukrainian Interior Ministry proceeded against the demonstrators with brute force on 18th/19th February 2014. 80 people fell victim to the barrage of gunfire by the Berkut-units.

Immediately afterwards, events followed in quick succession: while Wiktor Janukowytsh, after the Maidan massacre, escaped to Moscow via Donetsk, his home-oblast, Putin tried to recover as much as possible of Russian interests in the Ukraine. After removing the legitimate Crimean government from office and following initial outbreaks of violence in the Crimean capital of Simferopol, Russian troops occupied Ukrainian military bases in a surprise attack as well as important hubs of the infrastructure on the peninsula. Hastily, Putin made the puppet regime organize a referendum for 16th March 2014 to let the population of the (autonomous) Crimea vote on the annexation of the peninsula to the Russian Federation. Only two days after the referen-

dum, a treaty was signed in the Kremlin on the Crimea's accession to the Russian Federation (including the city of Sevastopol). This treaty was eventually ratified by the Russian Federation Council on 21st March 2014. This was immediately followed by the concealed intervention of Russian militia in Eastern Ukraine aiming to extricate the country's eastern part from the Ukrainian state federation.

It was clear to all participants that this meant the end of the European security system laid down in the Paris Charter in 1990. However, it remained unclear where this escalating violence would end. Most recently, European history had developed with such dynamics in October and November 1989 when, after months-long protests in East Germany, the Berlin Wall was brought down resulting in a collapse of the SED-regime.

Today, four years after the Euromaidan, the Ukraine is a geopolitical no-man's-land between the East and the West. Moscow, admittedly, has not reached its military and political objectives in Eastern Ukraine, but it can be sure that the West will not support Kiev militarily if the conflict in Donbass should escalate. Thus, each further escalation of this low-threshold conflict threatens to turn into a drawn-out proxy-war between Russia and the West.

At the same time, there is a growing fear both in the country and in the international community that the impetus for reforms

⁶ See: Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What it Means for the West*. Yale University Press, New Haven 2015, S. 73-76. See also the investigative online-platform: <http://yanukovychleaks.org/en/>.

will abate and the population's high expectations with regard to the country's structural changes will increasingly be disappointed.

Against this - rather sobering - background, 44 discussions took place with Ukraine-experts in Germany between September and November 2017. Their view on the East European country does not only reflect its decade-long struggle for reorientation, modernization and self-determination against the

background of profound cultural and social tensions. At the same time, the analyses and opinions of our interview partners represent a snapshot of Europe's and "the West's" current status quo. The question which direction the Ukraine will take will depend on both an active civil society and an interested European public. Germany, as well as the entire European Union, will not remain unaffected by this trend-setting decision.

1. Pictures
of the Ukraine:
*the Crimea, war,
crisis, corruption*

In Germany, the interest in the Ukraine is extremely volatile, the picture of the Ukraine is interspersed with stereotypes and general ascriptions. While the public awareness vacillates between indifference in times of apparent uneventfulness and dedicated solidarity in times of crisis, the stereotype picture of the Ukraine is located along the “four Cs”: the Crimea, Confrontation, Crisis, Corruption. The overall tenor is: “Germany perceives the Ukraine primarily as a country of crisis and war. Other news hardly manages to reach the German media. Except, perhaps, corruption and reform deadlock. But you do not learn anything about successful achievements and new scope for the young generation’s creativity.”

In any case, “the knowledge in Germany about the Ukraine is characterized by many misunderstandings”, a young East Europe expert explains. “They range from the Russian claims to power with regard to the Crimea to the sinister reports on fascist influences in the country.”

“The discussion in Germany is much too preoccupied with problems. If you turn the tables and focus on the enormous potential of the Ukraine, which is predominantly pro-European, we then talk about a country on the move which could boost the EU considerably.” (856)

“The majority of the German population continues to assume that the Ukrainians live all over the Ukraine - except in the East and on the Crimea where the Russians live. This is more or less the degree of awareness on the part of the broad majority”. (879)

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Such distorted pictures date back to the Russian media- and propaganda policy in the years 2014/2015. Insofar, Russia had successfully managed to spread disinformation and to exercise illegitimate influence, a Berlin media professional believes. Consequently, the majority of the German population continues to assume that “the Ukrainians live all over the Ukraine - except in the East and on the Crimea where the Russians live.”

In any case, it is the impression of our interview partners that the Germans display a high degree of ignorance: “Whenever the Ukraine becomes the subject of conversation”, says one of them, “I am often confronted with quite undifferentiated perceptions. Frequently, clichés are drawn, and quite often the Ukraine is still seen as part of Russia or the former Soviet Union.” Another complains: “The Germans know very little about the Ukraine, her history and her problems. Nobody here is aware of the size of this country which possesses more nuclear weapons than Russia. For Germans, the Ukraine is quite far away”, says one of the interviewees. “After all, many Germans take Tchaikovsky for a Pole” - all in all eloquent

examples of the wide-spread ignorance, according to several interview partners.

Primarily, Germans appear to approach the Ukraine via Russia. “For the ordinary German, the Ukraine is an unknown country which is frequently seen as part of the Soviet Union, and later of Russia. Ukrainian language and culture are considered local variants of Russian culture.” Thus, the perception of the Ukraine as a country independent from Russia is by no means a commonplace. “It takes quite some time for Germans to realize that the Ukraine is not Russia.” Admittedly, most Germans are aware that “within the Ukraine, a kind of battle takes place between the East and the West”; nevertheless, some people here in Germany would like to see a neutral Ukraine between Russia and the EU. “Quite often, there is a lack of understanding for the Ukraine’s desire to be independent and responsible for her own development, just like any other country.”

Some interview partners reveal an insight into their own, step-by-step approach to the Ukraine as an independent subject under international law - a fact which previously would

“Germany perceives the Ukraine primarily as a country of crisis and war. Other news hardly manages to reach the German media. Except, perhaps, corruption and reform deadlock. But you do not learn anything about successful achievements and new scopes for the young generation’s creativity.” (661)

have hardly been conceivable even for them: “When talking about the Ukraine back at school, I did learn something about agriculture and Europe’s granary, but I did not perceive the Ukraine as an autonomous country until I had started my professional life.”

A middle-aged politician expresses her sentiments in a similar fashion: “Until the mid-1990ies, I did not perceive the Ukraine as a nation of her own. Those expressions of nationalism which I heard in Kiev felt rather uncomfortable. However, this changed considerably; the ‘Orange Revolution’ and the events on the Maidan aroused my emotions very much.” Also, there must have been different perceptions of the Ukraine between East Germans and West Germans. “What strikes me”, a media professional from Berlin who is married to a Ukrainian said, “is the fact that frequently older people from the former GDR are fervent Putinists and sympathizers of Russia. They regard the Ukraine as a radical right-wing, nationalistic country which would have never adopted a European perspective but for the Euromaidan.” And yet another discussion partner shares with us her very different

‘experience of enlightenment’: “When I was in Lviv for the first time, I had the impression as if post-Soviet people were walking through Austria.” It is always the look through one’s own glasses or a distorted prism that constitutes people’s view on the Ukraine; you scarcely encounter unbiased, neutral observations.

In any case, what dominates the general perception is the stifling notion of a sobering, post-Soviet lack of perspective - due to the political and economic stagnation and the sluggish reform efforts (decentralization, anti-corruption, the legal system, the police - and health system etc.). Moreover, the opinion is voiced that “most of all, it is the corrupt and unreliable decision-makers who spoil the Ukrainian image abroad.” This negative imagine reaches as far as the question whether the Germans would even be prepared to support the Ukraine in her struggle for independence with military equipment if necessary: “If the Ukraine was as transparent as Estonia, it would be much easier to argue in Germany in favour of supporting the Ukraine with defensive weapons.”

Ultimately, the Ukraine-experts whom we interviewed expect more solidarity and attention for a country whose stability and integrity is threatened: “The attitude [of the Germans] towards the Ukraine is more sceptical and less benevolent. After all, you would really expect a different stance towards a country struggling for independence and democratic structures.” This means that the expectations of those who have closely accompanied the Ukraine’s development, suggest “more solidarity.” “What I first associate with the Ukraine, is solidarity - a solidarity she deserves from us Europeans. For the Ukraine is a fascinating country with a great potential in so many areas.” Unfortunately, the Germans’ “sympathy-resource” for the Ukraine is quite limited; “we muster up more understanding for Russia and have too little experience with Ukrainian politicians.” In any case, Brussels currently sees the Ukraine as a financial and political burden, “whose EU-membership would be much too strenuous and complicated.”

Euromaidan: Changing perceptions

The Euromaidan has led to a changed and more differentiated perception of the Ukraine in Germany - it was the association agreement with the EU, after all, which triggered the conflict, and Germany played a significant role in the settling of the conflict. “In Germany, the Euromaidan strongly influenced and even changed the perception of the Ukraine”, a young man describes his impressions. “In the meantime, people distinguish between the Ukraine as an autonomous country and Russia.” And another one adds: “The relationship to the Ukraine has changed in the aftermath of the Maidan - now it seems to be of interest what kind of country the Ukraine really is.

„My friends used to have many stereotypes regarding the Ukraine. This has changed after 2014.“ (499)

“For me, the Euromaidan, along with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, was the greatest political-historical event in my personal experience.” (686)

People have begun to perceive the Ukraine as an independent unit.”

However, the Kiev events in the winter of 2013/2014 have not only changed the picture of the Ukraine here in Germany; they have also shaped the people themselves. This is what a woman explains: “The first political events that will be remembered by my children will not be the Federal Election in 2013, but the Euromaidan and Putin.” And an interviewee from Munich adds almost euphorically: “For me, the Euromaidan, along with the collapse of the Berlin Wall, was the greatest political-historical event in my personal experience.” Another man happened to be present on the Maidan during the protests; the impression left on him by what happened cannot only be read between the lines: “What has shaped me incredibly were the events of the ‘Orange Revolution’ and particularly my presence on the Maidan in January and February 2014. I stood amongst the barricades.”

For a long time, these events have moved the Ukraine into the focus of media coverage. Moreover, “the widespread efforts to uphold

the discourse through increased travel activities by foreign ministers, presidents, politicians and mayors have shifted the Ukraine sustainably into people’s awareness.” Altogether, “the media picture of the Ukraine has clearly become more diverse and more informed. With regard to the general population, however, people have remained badly informed in a most obvious way.” And the discussion partner from Berlin adds - quite disillusioned: “However, this observation probably holds true for most of the countries...”

And yet, although the Germans, in the opinion of many interviewees, are better informed about the Ukraine, draw a more differentiated picture and recognize the EU’s and Germany’s responsibility for the Ukraine, this perspective could fade again soon. For the delays of the reforms in the Ukraine have a disillusioning effect: “When, in September 2015, I went to the Ukraine for the first time, I basically had a sympathetic attitude on account of the Maidan events. However, in the aftermath of my talks, I became disillusioned - because of the many difficulties to change the country.” This is the more surprising as the association agreement

with the EU seems to be a chance to turn the “revolution of dignity” into a success and to modernize and to transform the Ukraine.

The result: The interest of the media - and thus the attention of the German public for the Ukraine - diminishes continually. “The Ukraine has ceased to play a significant role in the media.” In the short term, the Ukraine may still represent herself as a victim thus hoping for international support. This, however, may not last long enough: “What is needed is a positive image - and this can only be achieved by open communication.”

“In Germany, the Ukraine is often identified with war and crisis. Owing to the news, people ask how one can fly to the Ukraine at all and if one has to wear bullet-proof vests during one’s stay. Most people are not aware that the war only takes place in a small part of the country” (872)

Donbass-Ukrainians deserve more solidarity

Some of the talks focused on the situation of the people in Eastern Ukraine – that part of the country which has been governed by separatists since spring 2014 and whose population has been suffering from military conflicts until the present day.

Any view on this region is characterized by resignation, but also by a high degree of solidarity for the distressed population. According to a discussion partner from Berlin, it may be correct that the Donbass is ruled by “a criminal regime”; however, it seems important “not to criminalize” the entire population. Obviously, not everybody was aware “that in the East the same people would exist sharing the same interests and the same aspirations.” Instead, “these people would be pushed over to the Russian side” suggesting that they were not genuine Ukrainians. And the same would hold true for the people on the Crimea.

It is frequently heard that people in Eastern Ukraine “were afraid of Kiev” fearing repressions if the Ukraine should reunite at any time in the future. However, “Kiev’s the aggressive policy is bound to result in an increasingly stronger rupture.” What is needed to maintain the country’s unity is the exact opposite: “The border territories in Eastern Ukraine must be promoted economically more than other regions. They should become shop windows towards Russia and the separatists.”

An academic from Berlin shares the view that the conflict in the Donbass cannot be resolved militarily, but only if the Ukraine offers the more attractive option; after all, the Ukraine is facing a “competition of living standards” with Russia. This could “take a very long time”.

In reality, however, Kiev is not interested in the situation of the people in Eastern Ukraine – a fact which, sooner or later, will have consequences for the country’s internal unity. “As long as Kiev does not care for the people’s quality of living in Eastern Ukraine, those people will remain indifferent to the question by which corrupt elite they are governed. Why should the East of the country be motivated to follow Kiev’s ambitions with regard to a Western alignment if this does not change their living perspective at all?”

A similar experience was made by an academic from Hamburg when he travelled to Eastern Ukraine: “I talked to the people of Kramatorsk and Slovjansk”, he said. “The overall tenor was: ‘It is all the same to us if we are Russians or Ukrainians. We only want to live in peace.’ After all, they only wanted to lead a normal life.”

The fact that this region is about to turn its back to Kiev, can also be explained by Kiev’s economic policy during the last decades: “The Donbass has always been more exploited than promoted,” says an observer from Berlin. >

In contrast, another observer criticizes the continuing focus on the situation in Eastern Ukraine talking of a "Donbassization" with regard to the debate on the Ukraine's future. Clearly: The Minsk Agreements are certainly important, but "the reforms are even more important for the country's future. Both developments must run parallel." The Kiev government should no longer use the war in the Donbass as an excuse for delayed reforms which are urgently needed.

From the interview partners' point of view, all this illustrates the fact that the country lacks an active internal debate on the future of the Donbass within a unified Ukraine: "I found it totally disturbing that most of the intellectuals in the Western Ukraine did not realize that some kind of communication had to be attempted with the population of Eastern Ukraine."

Instead, there has been - ever since the Orange Revolution of 2004 - a debate on a possible separation of Eastern Ukraine, especially in the West of the country: "Within the intelligentsia, there are discourses which amount to a renunciation of the Donbass. However, such an option appears totally inconceivable on the grounds of solidarity and also in view of the death toll. This would be perceived by the population as betraying one's own people." And yet, these perceptions describe underlying phenomena: for quite some time, there has been an (inofficial) discussion on the question whether a division of the country into a (Rus-

sophil) eastern part and a (Europhil) western part would not be the best solution.

For, after all, the country is drifting apart more clearly than at any other time in recent history. The country appears to be "internally divided into one part which has been drawn into the war, and another part which has been spared from this fate." That part which lives in peace does not sufficiently face up to the war, according to a politician from Berlin. "Whoever does not know the war, does not understand the current situation the country finds itself in." Given such a situation, the development of a national identity seems almost impossible. When Petro Poroshenko became president in 2014, there was still talk about a unified Ukraine, says a young expert on Eastern Europe from Munich. However, the division of the country has advanced rapidly ever since. His assumption: "The mobilizing force of the war does not seem to be strong enough to overcome the elements of separation."

Other observers, such as an academic from Eastern Germany, believe that the war has accelerated further the country's separation: "In the 1990ies, the Ukraine was a country more unified."

Such statements reveal a profound insecurity with regard to the prospects of a unified Ukraine - a kind of insecurity which expresses itself as sheer cynicism with some commentators: Kiev should "be pleased", says a journalist from Berlin, "that the country's future will no longer be determined by the pro-Russian regions." Only >

a few observers believe that a division of the country could also bring about some advantages - if at all, it would only benefit the Western part of the Ukraine.

There is quite a bit of hope that the nightmare in Eastern Ukraine could one day end

peacefully - even at the price of the loss of the Crimea: "In ten years from now, the scenario will be that Russia is no longer involved in Eastern Ukraine and the Crimea is no longer autonomous, but an independent state," says a journalist from Berlin. ■

The role of the German media: more quality, more topics, please!

In the opinion of several interviewees, the German media play a decisive role with regard to generating pictures of the Ukraine in the German public.

Knowing quite well that the media are driven by events and that the journalistic credo "Bad news alone is good news" applies even today, many interview partners address the role of the media as social opinion makers.

It is a media professional from Berlin who pointedly articulates his perceptions: "The year 2015 was an open window providing an opportunity for more attention from Germany." This window has already closed again. Such a development, however, should not make us wish that something bad must happen in the Ukraine to generate more attention in Germany." And another commentator says: "It is only in times of crisis

that Germany receives any news about the Ukraine."

During the Maidan, the German media had no correspondents of their own in Kiev; instead, the Ukraine was mostly covered by correspondents who had their offices in Warsaw and Moscow. Initially, this had shaped the picture which was drawn of the conflict. Even today, four years after the events on the Maidan, only two correspondents work in the Ukraine. "Unfortunately, they find it difficult to place any articles in the print media, as there is no interest in this country." As the bulk of the news coverage continues to be masterminded from Warsaw and Moscow, the circle closes: in the course of daily reporting, the Ukraine is bound "to be at a losing end."

Whereas the Maidan, the annexation of the Crimea and the subsequent war in Eastern Ukraine represented the highlights of media coverage in Germany, this wave is flattening

“There are only three Ukrainian topics which arouse any attention in Germany: Chernobyl, the 1941 mass-killing of Kiev Jews in Babyn Jar, and the war in Eastern Ukraine. Other topics do not meet any interest or they are difficult to communicate.” (705)

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out more and more. According to a widespread perception amongst the interviewees, today nobody in Germany shows any interest in the Ukrainians’ economic and social situation.

There are, after all, “only three Ukrainian topics which arouse any attention in Germany: Chernobyl, the 1941 mass-killing of Kiev Jews in Babyn Jar, and the war in Eastern Ukraine. Other topics do not meet any interest or they are difficult to communicate.” After the conclusion of the Minsk Agreements which at least contained the conflict initially, the interest has abated once again.

One interview partner goes as far as to allege that the Germans ultimately show an attitude of indifference towards the fate of the Ukrainians: “If, in the winter of 2014, the Berkut-units had shot dead as many as 5000 people on the Maidan, the West would have scarcely reacted differently; ultimately, even such a massacre would not have aroused much interest.” The following assessment, even though less cynical, points into a similar direction: “For the last 18 months,

the Ukraine has largely disappeared from the media. The news does not even cover the Ukrainian people’s disillusionment about the delayed reform process.”

However, when the German media do cover news from the Ukraine at all, the quality of the coverage has become considerably higher in the meantime; consequently, there is hardly any news today which is based on unverified propaganda, as was the case in the years 2014 and 2015.

Meanwhile, the bigger media concerns have employed experts on Russia to verify the facts, and professional expertise with regard to Eastern Europe is promoted on a wider scale. Today, the coverage in Germany on the Ukraine appears to be “broad and well-balanced”, says a young academic from Frankfurt/Oder. According to him, there is even enough room for the Russian perspective - reaching as far as the so-called ‘sympathizers of Russia’ such as Ms. Krone-Schmalz.”

In any case, the influence of the Kremlin-controlled media, such as Sputnik or

Russia Today, seems grossly overestimated. “After all, their appeal and their effect are rather limited; this fades out quickly again,” a young media professional from Berlin believes. Such media tend to be mere “platforms for world conspirators.”

However, it is still regarded as a problem that the coverage with regard to the Ukraine continues to be masterminded by correspondents who have their offices in Moscow or Warsaw. “You may as well stay in Berlin”, says a discussion partner pointedly. Thus, the German media draw a reduced picture of the Ukraine which mostly appears to be crisis-driven: “Who, for instance, reports any stories on the successful migration of internal fugitives from Eastern Ukraine? Or about Ukrainian labour-migration to Poland?” - asks an interview partner rhetorically who works in the media industry himself. “German correspondents in Moscow or Warsaw simply lack the focus on the Ukraine.” Therefore, “the Ukraine will have to ponder on the question how to reach the media in Germany more effectively.”

“If, in the winter of 2014, the Berkut-units had shot dead as many as 5000 people on the Maidan, the West would have scarcely reacted differently; ultimately, even such a massacre would not have aroused much interest.” (707)

2. Identities and cultural diversity

Practically, all interviews raised three issues which, better than any others, can describe the country and its people: the Ukraine's cultural diversity, her beautiful landscape and the many-faceted identity of her people. In the opinion of the interviewees, these features represent the greatest capital for shaping the country's future; however, they also represent a historical burden.

However, one should not overestimate this diversity - similar to the often schematic assignment patterns of "East or West", "EU or Russia". The only decisive question is whether the Ukrainian society will succeed in transforming the regional and cultural diversity and the different paths of history into a joint effort to shape the future with the help of a vibrant civil society and a dynamic elite. So far, the Ukraine tends to appear as "a frustrated country", which, again and again, becomes entangled in endless repetitions of protests, renewal and failure - without reaping the fruit of its labour.

Given the general diversity and, in particular, the diversity of languages, the rich cultural her-

"For me, the Ukraine is a 'Europe en miniature'. She could well be conceived as a model country for Europe - given the diversity of languages, the different historical development of the individual regions, and the pluralistic character of the country. If the chosen path is successful, the Ukraine could well become a model country within Europe." (322)

itage, the manifold historical currents and the pluralistic character, the Ukraine could well be conceived as a portrayal of Europe. The country resembles a “Europe en miniature”, in that it incorporates all that signifies Europe. “If the chosen path is successful, the Ukraine could well become a model country within Europe” - at least this is the hope of some interviewees.

Other observers, however, choose to align the Ukraine into her Central- and East European context perceiving her in the tradition of the Polish-Lithuanian kingdom. Others, again, consider the Ukraine as deeply shaped by the Cossack-Hetmanate which, during the 17th century, revolted against the Polish-Lithuanian despotic rule and have, ever since, managed to defend their settlement areas - located in today's Southern Ukraine - against the onslaught of invaders.

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Bilingualism

Looking at the present Ukraine, it is the people's bilingualism that strikes you first of all. Practically all Ukrainians, in their daily lives, speak both Ukrainian and Russian - with different intensity, depending on the region and the personal origin. Moreover, many people in the Ukraine have a command of a foreign language - mostly English or German.

Even considering that bilingualism has always belonged to the Ukraine, one can still identify a change over the past years: back in the 1990ies, one could hardly hear Ukrainian spoken in the streets; many people simply perceived it “as a Russian dialect”: “If one used to walk through Kiev, one only heard Russian spoken; this has changed considerably. Meanwhile, one hears quite a bit of Ukrainian.”

“During the 1990ies, Kiev seemed to be yet another post-Soviet city - everyone spoke Russian.” (824)

“Today, the Ukrainian language is more popular than in the early 1990ies. Meanwhile, bilingualism is taken for granted in society. There are neither conflicts nor a division of society with regard to languages.” (2)

In the wake of the Orange Revolution in 2014, this pattern has changed altogether. It was particularly in the West that a “Back-to-Europe” mentality asserted itself when people began to remember their own cultural identity.

Once again, the events in winter 2013/2014 on the Kiev Maidan as well as the war in the country’s east have provided the Ukrainian language with a new function: It has become the expression of a collective identity. The result: Ukrainian is increasingly spoken in public life without causing any conflict. Bilingualism has become normality.

Some interviewees, however, adopt a critical position with regard to the Ukrainian government’s efforts to eliminate the Russian language from the schools, the arts, the culture and from daily life. “I know many Ukrainians who like speaking Russian and who have grown up with Pushkin. It is absolutely legitimate to be different. The people who speak Russian in this country do not claim to be Russians, but Russian-speaking Ukrainians.”

A long-standing expert of the country has a firm opinion about this matter - it reads like a warning. “The Ukrainization of the country will founder. Internationally, this exaggerated strategy of nationalization is being observed with a great deal of scepticism. By eliminating everything Russian, the Ukraine is likely to create problems for herself. One should come to terms with each other, because one cannot simply forbid cultures and identities which have been growing over centuries.” Bilingualism, however, is widely regarded as an asset. There is a general consensus amongst the interviewees that the country is heterogeneous and bilingual - “and this will not change in the future.” Not even decrees will be able to alter this fact.

Although it is understandable to strengthen the country’s national identity in times of war, the ensuing picture of an increasingly nationalistic society remains dubious. Even if the Ukrainian nationalism has been overestimated in Europe, it is bound to play into the hands of the Kremlin: “Forbidding the Russian lan-

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guage and culture is neither democratic nor pluralistic. The anti-Russian attitude is tantamount to a payment into the Russian account, as it destabilizes any efforts to democratize the Ukraine.”

Moreover, the policy of Ukrainization is likely to have effects on the Ukrainian-European-German cooperation. A cultural expert from Germany explains: “Even we are not sure if we should open a local exhibition in Russian or Ukrainian?” And many Ukrainians are worried about losing their jobs or their chance for promotion, because their Ukrainian is not good enough.”

Apart from the economic disadvantages for the country: “The fact that Russians are not allowed any more to enter the Ukraine, has a massive effect on tourism. In Kharkov, the airport is at a standstill, hotels and restaurants are empty.”

According to some experts, it would be a good idea to keep open the communication channels with Russia. Others, however, regard this as a gateway for the Kremlin’s propaganda in times when Moscow has an obvious interest in the country’s division.

In any case, the overall consensus is reflected by the following statement of a discussion partner from Berlin who sums up the discussion about bilingualism or Ukrainization: “The Ukraine can only succeed if she perceives her bilingualism actively as a creative potential avoiding

to turn it into an ideological issue. At the end of this war, the Ukraine would wish to have good economic, political and social ties with Russia.” (178)

Cultural landscapes

In the course of our interviews, several discussion partners addressed the Ukraine’s cultural and regional diversity; the country had generated a cultural landscape influenced in many ways by neighbouring people via common historical experience. “There are places in the Ukraine with an almost mythical aura, such as Andrijivskij Uswis¹, the Lavra Monastery, the Kiev chestnut blossom season, the Potemkin Stairs in Odessa. If one wrote a new travel guide describing these places - this would be a fascinating story for many people.”

Irrespective of this beauty and the fascinating landscape, a grey veil of morbidity is hanging over the country: “The Ukraine is a fine piece of Europe boasting many beautiful places and cities which, however, tend to be associated with the negative stereotypes of Eastern Europe - idle, depressive, backward.” Another interview partner sums up this phenomenon in almost the same words: “In the regions, there are beautiful landscapes, pretty villages - but they are frequently dull, with a broken infrastructure, and with forsaken and depressive people.” However, the people’s motivation to change this situation and to tackle the problems often comes to naught because of the strong distrust in society. In the end, everyone only looks after him-

¹ Andrijivskij Uswis, frequently called „Montmartre of Kiev”, connects the upper city with the business quarter of Podil.

“The Ukraine can only succeed if she perceives her bilingualism actively as a creative potential avoiding to turn it into an ideological issue. At the end of this war, the Ukraine would wish to have good economic, political and social ties with Russia.” (178)

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self or herself. It is only the close family structure that continues to work; it is still regarded as the most important social tie in the Ukraine.

The classic tradition and the cultural life of the present

Whenever famous Ukrainians are listed, it is frequently the Klitschko-brothers who are mentioned first; followed by the names of artists, writers, musicians and other cultural professionals. Such a list does not include any politicians or heads of state. “In Germany, the Ukraine is perceived via the Klitschko-brothers, but increasingly via Shakhtar Donetsk, too². I believe this comes first to people’s minds in Germany with regard to the Ukraine.” (874)

The conscious perception of the Ukraine by many Germans possibly began with the country’s successful performance at the Eurovision Song Contests and also when the Ukraine hosted the European Football Championships

in 2012 - “these competitions have lifted the Ukraine into the Germans’ mental map.” (570)

Irrespective of the simplistic knowledge about the country’s culture and identity, the Ukraine, according to several interviewees, possesses a visible soft-power-potential - i.e. the ability to position herself (and arouse interest) by means of cultural capital. Here, cultural professionals play an essential role. “For me, the Ukraine is a part of Europe - and this closeness must be shown. It is important for the Ukrainian writers and musicians to make clear what the Ukraine thinks - thereby using the cultural prism. For the country’s correct positioning within Europe is hampered by war and crisis.”

Culturally, the Ukraine is perceived quite differently in Germany: either through representatives of classical literature (Michael A. Bulgakov, Nikolai W. Gogol, Taras H. Shevtshenko) - mostly, however, in the context of Russian high culture -, or through the critical culture of the present (which has been prospering since the Euromaidan) with representatives like

² Shakhtar Donetsk is a Ukrainian football club from the Eastern Ukrainian Donetsk which plays in the first division.

the young writer Serhij W. Shadan (Depeche Mode, Big Măc), the author Sonya Koshkina (Maidan, together with Max Levin), through such unusual performance artists like the Roof-er “Mustang Wanted” or the Rock Band Okean Elzy that was founded in 1994.

All of them are perceived as ambassadors of an alert civil society which is shaping the present unlike any other society in Eastern or Central Europe. “For Germany, Serhij Shadan represents the voice from Kharkov; and many will follow him.” (772)

Although many Ukrainian artists have reached cult status “amongst the hipsters of German cities and although even the sub-cultural groups have discovered the creative aura of Ukrainian culture”, it is difficult at present to win over a larger audience in Germany. What hampers the country’s successful positioning, is primarily its bad image as an El Dorado for kleptocrats and oligarchs: “The country’s image is dominated by deeply rooted corruption, nepotism and oligarchical rule. After all, the Ukraine has two faces: cosmopolitan and post-Soviet.”

“What constitutes the Ukrainian identity? One speaks two languages, there are writers such as Bulgakov or Gogol who were born in the Ukraine - but are considered Russian writers.” (40)

What strikes the interviewees is the motivation of many Ukrainian artists to commit themselves to a national project without being nationalists.” In a country which is considerably divided artists make an important contribution in the search for statehood and identity. To reach this aim, contributions are also made by journalists - such as those from the station “1+1” - who provide sophisticated reports about the country - enriched by regional items, news and good entertainment.

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A chief concern has been caused by an increase of repression and violence against socio-critical artists: in the absence of an official censorship, attacks on artists have become more frequent or even the destruction of works of art without any interest by state authorities to prosecute the perpetrators. “The Ukraine must be strong enough to endure such criticism; and cultural professionals must be protected,” says a young academic.

Religion and religiosity

The Ukraine’s diversity is not only reflected in her (daily) culture, but also in her religiosity and in the diversity of her confessions and churches. Although the majority of the believers still belong to the Greek-Orthodox Moscow Patriarchate, there has been a shift towards the Kiev Patriarchate. During the Euromaidan, many Western Ukrainian churches had withdrawn from the influence of the Moscow Patriarchate, because they had perceived it as “Moscow’s fifth column” (chiefly because of the blessing of the separatists’ weapons in the Donbass). Apart from the Patriarchates, there is a comprehensive and active Roman-Catholic congregation (primarily in the West) and an Islamic parish in the South (Crimean Tatars).

“The country’s image is dominated by deeply-rooted corruption, nepotism and oligarchical rule. The Ukraine has two faces: cosmopolitan and post-Soviet.” (570)

It is important to understand that there is no state church in the Ukraine; religiosity is predominantly a private affair. Nevertheless, religion plays a greater social role in the Ukraine than in, say, Russia - but it is neither instrumentalized politically nor does it show any political bias. “In the Ukraine, religion exercises a much smaller political influence than in the orthodox neighbouring countries.”

It is for this very reason that the churches could fulfil an important function, as the religious diversity and the mutual tolerance among the churches is considered one of the country’s strengths. Churches “are important for the formation of identity. The Ukraine has always managed to cope with religious differences.” And what’s more: “We should seek the discourse with the churches” without instrumentalizing them for political purposes or playing them off against each other. For the churches represent “important discussion partners in the social negotiation of interests.”

Even though “the Ukrainians are more traditional and not as secular as the Ger-

mans”, there is a trend towards secularization within the Ukrainian society. Our discussion partners have observed a decline of religiosity, particularly among the young generation – and they give a reason for this development: “Young people in the Ukraine show little enthusiasm and affection for religion, as they do not regard it as particularly helpful in critical situations.” Another explanation of the growing secularization of the Ukrainian society is its increasing individualization.

Open-mindedness and individuality

Many interviewees emphasize the cordiality and openness of Ukrainian men and women. “Ukrainians are more cordial than Germans, more hospitable, more open.” In Germany, “egoism and individualism” are more pronounced - and “that’s not nice”.

According to the interview partners, the Ukraine is characterized by a stronger separation of public life and private life in comparison with Germany. In the Ukraine, the family still takes top priority. But as soon

“Ukrainians frequently live in blocks of flats or apartments. In most cases, both the facades and the staircases are outright terrible, but the flats or apartments are simply great. In principle, people only look after their own property - this is a kind of Ukrainian individualism.” (380)

as one is invited to a Ukrainian's home, one becomes acquainted with people's cordiality, helpfulness and politeness.

At any rate, "people in the Ukraine are very open-minded, interested and ready to communicate" - particularly "in comparison with other post-Soviet countries." A simple example may illustrate this attitude - eye-contact. "When you walk along the streets looking at the people, they look back", a journalist from Berlin reports. "When you smile at them, they smile back at you. In Moscow, however, people are reserved."

Unfortunately, this open-mindedness tends to be lost more and more. "People want to convey the impression of being efficient, European or American. There is no time left for friendliness any longer." Moreover, the people in the

Ukraine lack trust. "There is a latent feeling of distrust in every personal contact." This is not so much directed against the individual vis-a-vis, but it comes "primarily from the Ukrainians' experience of being cheated again and again. Against this background, their caution is quite understandable."

Broadly speaking, there is a clear trend towards individualization; at any rate, the Ukrainians are more individualistic than the Russians - involving positive and negative implications: positively, "there is a tendency to focus on one's own development and career." At the same time, however, there is a fear of an emerging social cold-heartedness and increasing "elbow-mentality" - "exactly what happens among the Ukrainian oligarchs." After all, this seems to be the inevitable price of the social development

3. Reform-Agenda and social change

Part I:

Determinants of social change

Although the intensity of the German news coverage about the Ukraine continues to decline, the country - four years after the Euromaidan - is primarily perceived in terms of its reform efforts. Here, the perceptions diverge considerably: they range from a favourable description of successful achievements, e.g. the police reform, to bitter disappointment - such as the widespread corruption which reaches as far as the highest public offices.

The interviewees extensively dealt with the prerequisites of successful reform efforts. They emphasize the relevant design and planning potential for the Ukrainian society - provided that the correct political decisions would be made and the problem of corruption could be tackled successfully. Therefore, the reforms must also focus on generating legal security, good governance and the fight against corruption.

According to many interview partners, the European vision continues to have an unabated appeal on the Ukrainian population. Even if an accession to the EU is still

a matter of the remote future (with the EU presenting itself in a rather desolate condition these days), the population's wish for stability and prosperity is primarily associated with Europe. "After all, this transformative appeal is confirmed by the progress of the Baltic States and Poland", one of the interviewees justifies this hopeful attitude. Thus, the prospect of accession to the EU represents an essential drive of the Ukrainian reform-agenda.

Successful reforms and reform deadlock

Depending on the actual perspective, discussions are characterized either by pointing out successful achievements with regard to reform efforts - or by referring to the slowness of the process. Depending on the point of view, the glass is either half-empty or half-full.

The critics among the interviewees only perceive gradual changes in the Ukraine. Many areas lack necessary reforms: "There is a lack of laws regulating the work of the parliament

“We do not want democracy. We do not have any economic competence. So, what else can we do? - Patriotism. This is the logic of the Ukrainian leadership.” (274)

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and the administration, a modern police force and a competitive education system”, says an academic from Hamburg.

A representative of the media is also sceptical with regard to the further development in the Ukraine. “In my view”, she says, “the turning point in this process was the ousting of the ‘foreigners’ from the government.”¹ And she adds: “Possibly, the forces of persistence (or the forces of inertia) in the Ukraine are much stronger, after all.”

A young economic representative from Berlin remarks that she perceives the reform process as “asynchronous and unbalanced”. On the one hand, there are the reformers who are beginning to generate changes; “but on the other hand, there does not seem to be much progress - particularly in the sphere of the oligarchs.” Altogether, there was a “lack of momentum” to create a better society. However, the following verdict by a young academic is seldom heard. In his opinion, “the Ukraine is currently moving into a wrong direction in

almost every area: there is not only a lack of democracy, but also of economic growth.”

The more benevolent observers point out that the reform agenda of the Ukrainian government appears much too ambitious, as it makes promises of a magnitude which cannot possibly be met even under the most favourable circumstances. It is not only a question of random adjustments here and a mini-reform there; what is happening in the Ukraine is a complete transformation of the constitutional order, a re-definition of the role of the state with regard to its citizens, a political-cultural change. This begins with a territorial re-structuring, followed by the modernization of large sectors of public life - such as the police, the legal system, the health sector, and the extension of the infrastructure - and it does not stop at the role of the media and the civil society as guarantors of an open and pluralistic community.

Many observers emphasize the speed of the recent achievements, thus expressing a high

¹ i.e. re-immigrated politicians of the post-Janukowytsch era who were educated abroad.

appreciation for what has been accomplished during the past years: “In the country’s reform process, so many things have happened so fast”, an analyst acknowledges the speed of the reforms. “I believe”, he continues, “that there is hardly any other country in the world which, in such a short period of time, has tackled so much under so difficult conditions. This achievement has not been sufficiently acknowledged by the West so far.” After all, one must understand that the transformation process is a long-term, drawn-out procedure; this is by no means a specifically Ukrainian phenomenon. Each individual progress already accomplished must be considered a great success, e.g. the stabilization of the currency and the banking system or the reform of the tax system. Although, in 2015, one had to put up with a massive currency depreciation of 50%, a hyper-inflation could eventually be avoided. Also, the economic decline has been stopped - despite the internal war, a large number of internal migrants and the fact that the Ukraine, practically overnight, had to compensate for the absence of exports from Russia (including the energy sector). All this requires time and patience.

“The situation in the Ukraine has improved last year: the currency has been stabilized, the labour market has eased, and the internal migrants have been integrated into the daily working routine.” Moreover, the access to the capital market has made the Ukrainian government more independent again from the EU and the IMF, as funds from the capital market are free of any conditions - a fact, however, that may well have negative effects on the dynamics of the reform process.

“With regard to the Ukraine, I tend to think of reform schemes. The country finds itself entangled in almost unresolvable scenarios: a war in the East - first, the war must come to an end - so there is no incentive for sustainable reforms. Plus the fact that the politics of the day are determined by the oligarchs. Unfortunately, the influence of the oligarchs has not changed significantly.” (740)

Other observers emphasize the successes with regard to the country's decentralization. For any progress in the decentralization of government- and administration work would strengthen the country by generating democratically legitimated authorities in the regions who would be permitted to utilize their own budgets on a local and regional level, believes an academic from Berlin.

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In contrast, a political analyst, also from Berlin, appears to be more sceptical: for him, the decentralization reform is “the right instrument at the wrong time”. A weak state will be undermined further by strengthening the regional centres of power. First of all, he explains, central reforms must achieve a strengthening of the state before any regional competences are extended.

However, another discussion partner disagrees, because he is convinced that “the decentralization reform represents the very prerequisite for a long-term success of the attempted innovations in the country.” Decentralization will make the local people aware of their own responsibility to cope with deficiencies and to generate changes.

Some interviewees have an outright positive perception of the newly established Citizens Advice Bureaus. One of the discussion partners stated that he had become acquainted with the local service-centre in Kharkov where around 250 employees try to provide a good service to the citizens of their city: fast, efficient, without any corruption or an excessive bureaucracy.” As far as public procurement is concerned, the introduction of an electronic tendering system (“Prozoro”) and the appointment of ombudsmen have achieved a degree

“For all the reforms, do not forget the Ukrainian people. Long-term changes will not be generated by favourable economic data alone.” (683) „

“Each reformer in the Ukraine who is standing at the forefront, deserves my full admiration.” (290)

“We should strike an honest balance of the reform progress and begin to focus on exchanging views with the local people.” (614)

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of transparency with regard to the allocation of public funds that would have been inconceivable only a few years ago. A young academic from Berlin adds: “Each reformer in the Ukraine who is standing at the forefront, deserves my full admiration.” However, what must now be tackled with particular emphasis is the reform of the electoral law as well as the fight against corruption.

Hangover and growing pessimism in the reform debate

Other observers report a growing disillusionment within the Ukrainian population; many regard the reform process as not fast enough. The changes are implemented too slowly; the majority of the population lacks an understanding of the rational and the practical benefit of the innovations. Whatever, in Germany and in the EU, is considered a progress in the Ukraine’s reform efforts, does not reach the country’s population. For, ultimately, “the population is interested in a palpable quality of living and not in any promises

for the future,” a young academic from Berlin warns.

“We should strike an honest balance of the reform progress and begin to focus on exchanging views with the local people.” The police-reform, however, is explicitly mentioned as an exception. Apart from that, “the reality is characterized by a dwindling standard of living and a high inflation”, a media professional from Berlin adds.

On the other hand, the expectations cherished by the Maidan-movement are regarded as much too high. “Reforms need time”, a representative of the German civil society brings to mind. “In the wake of the Maidan, extremely high expectations have been raised - both with the people in the Ukraine and with the people in Germany. The expectations were so high that they were bound to be disappointed.”

A political adviser from Berlin adds: “The whole reform debate is tiring und causes headaches. For it raises expectations which cannot be fulfilled. The fact that the develop-

ment of institutions needs years and decades is completely overlooked.”

In view of the country’s difficult situation, “the whole debate is geared to crisis management and delivering short-term results”; there is no vision which goes beyond the abstract target of a EU-accession. There is no political determination or political courage to enforce changes even against opposition. However, “the politicians must be strong enough to overcome the painful implications of reforms before they can generate visible and positive effects.”

Others, however, believe that the Ukrainians “slept away” the reforms. They had allowed the establishment of an oligarchic system and a degree of corruption which even exceeds the conditions in Russia. At least, “unlike Russia, there have been social protests in the Ukraine against this political state of affairs.”

All this shows that the Ukraine has continued “to be characterized by a weak state, but by

“In the wake of the Maidan, extremely high expectations have been raised - both with the people in the Ukraine and with the people in Germany. The expectations were so high that they were bound to be disappointed.” (979)

“As far as I am concerned, the reform debate is lacking a vision. How can the Ukraine become attractive to her population? The whole debate is geared to crisis management and delivering short-term results. Thus, expectations are raised which cannot be fulfilled; and this leads to frustrations on all sides.” (941)

strong oligarchs.” “Politics and economics are dominated by oligarchs. They undermine the state and make sure that it will remain weak in the future.”

Power and influence of the oligarchs

Although, ever since the Euromaidan, the influence of the oligarchs has clearly diminished, they have continued to exercise control over practically every social sector: the economy, the political institutions as well as the media. The fact that even President Petro Poroshenko supports the Ukrainian oligarchy hampers the development of democracy and of small and middle-sized enterprises. This means that the new forces “are still far from asserting themselves”, as the traditional forces of persistence (or the forces of inertia) have been too strong until the present day. I tend to perceive “a growing pessimism, particularly among the intellectuals and the Maidan-activists; they seem to think that they will not be able to massacre the hydra of the oligarchs.”

In the opinion of many observers, even Poroshenko himself has meanwhile become “a big

“This country makes me tired. I have a feeling that, after gaining visa exemption, the government has stopped doing anything.” (471)

“As long as the Ukraine continues to be a rentier-state dominated by oligarchs, the political system of the Ukraine will not change. It is about time to negotiate a deal with the oligarchs: exile abroad and impunity in return for relinquishing power and breaking up the power cartels.” (547)

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disappointment.” Initially, he was only supposed to moderate the transition. Now, however, he seems to be in love with the plenitude of power just like his predecessors.” Even if Poroschenko has been perceived differently in Germany so far - e.g. after his appearance at the Munich Security Conference in 2015 - he “soon filled his pockets just as Wiktor Janukowytsch had done previously. Admittedly without any repressions, though.” Poroschenko does not take any action against corruption - only when it concerns his opponents.” As a matter of fact, Petro Poroschenko still belongs to “the old elite and to the circle of oligarchs.”

Consequently, “the influence of the oligarchs is still too big. The country will only be ready for reforms if the old elites have been replaced.” Although it will not be easy to oust the oligarchs from the political system, such a step would be absolutely necessary”, says a specialist for Eastern Europe from Hamburg.

This view is shared by a young academic from Berlin: “My current perception of the country? Admittedly, there is some progress with regard to reforms, but the old political-economic networks have managed to consolidate themselves again.” And yet: the oligarchs’ scope of action has clearly diminished. “Now, they must consider the political demands that come from the Ukrainian population and from the EU”, such as those of the Venice Commission.²

In contrast to such black-and white-painting, other discussion partners view the situation in subtle shades of grey. “The Ukraine, admittedly, is still a state strongly dominated by oligarchs;” gradually, however, they will have to observe the newly developed rules and regulations.” With a touch of irony, another interviewee replies: “I do not share the assumption that the oligarchs will resume power in the Ukraine again. In fact, they have not given it up yet. However, they are losing power increasingly and this

² The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) is an institution of the European Council which gives advice to certain states on constitutional matters. It was established in March 1990 with the objective to give advice to Central and Eastern European states on constitutional matters which “are consistent with the norms of the European status of constitutionality.” See: http://www.venice.coe.int/WebForms/pages/?p=01_Presentation&lang=DE.

has become quite visible. At any rate, it will be a long process which can be realized by a combination of international and civil society pressure.”

One of the discussion partners even makes a proposal as to how the power of the oligarchs could be broken: “As long as the Ukraine continues to be a rentier-state dominated by oligarchs, the political system of the Ukraine will not change. It is about time to negotiate a deal with the oligarchs: exile abroad and impunity in return for relinquishing power and breaking up the power cartels.”

Oligarchy and freedom of press

According to some interviewees, an example of the continuing, if diminishing, influence of the oligarchs is the media landscape which finds itself in a state of transition. On the one hand, there is freedom of press and media pluralism and freedom of speech - marking an essential difference to other countries in the post-Soviet region. On the other hand, the media still continue to be controlled by the oligarchs, an observer from Berlin knows who works in the same line of business. “The oligarchs possess their own megaphone. This represents a big disadvantage for the forming of public opinion and the pluralism of opinions.”

What is lacking is a “respectful debate.” The media, controlled by oligarchs, tend to focus on scandals rather than on substance. The journalistic quality is regarded as “a catastrophe.” Journalists, employed by the oligarch-media, invariably write what the managing editor expects them to write; the managing editor creates a paper or a programme in line

with the owner’s expectations - “journalism on demand”.

At the same time, there is a growing number of options under public law as well as citizens’ media. Several independent journalists are working “ambitiously on a vision of independent media.” Many places witness the development of internet-based media options which form a challenge to the oligarchs’ dominant position in the media sector. Sometimes, this may lead to “struggles of power, influence and distribution” between the capital and the periphery.

So far, it is still safe to work as an independent investigative journalist. The media in the Ukraine are free - “especially in comparison with those in Russia. But the scope of freedom is narrowing and the threat is on the rise.” Again and again, there are attempts to suppress the freedom of opinion and criticism. Journalists, for example, would be vilified as unpatriotic who report critically on the war in the Donbass. This damages the democratic development, as journalists would be curbed in their most important task - to strengthen the civil society.

The Ukraine, after all, possesses “a great potential of professional, investigative, talented journalists and media professionals,” a journalist from Berlin knows. They work under difficult, often life-threatening conditions,” whereas an independent journalism needs “legal protection by the state, trust, recognition and support.”

For, ultimately, functioning media are “the litmus-test for a value-driven democratization.” Here, the West could definitely make

a positive contribution by honouring those journalists who cover politics in a serious and professional manner - “a little bit of reputation through prizes and information campaigns.”

People’s lack of trust in the political elites

The debate on the role of the oligarchy in public life illustrates one thing in particular: within the population, there is a lack of trust in the political elites. According to the perception of several discussion partners, the political class is exclusively interested in the maintenance of power. There is hardly any sign of a disposition for political change.

It was especially “Janukowytsch’s clumsy handling of the Ukraine’s interests” during the Maidan-crisis which created “the correct impression of post-Soviet power policy” in the West: “Political elites protect their claim to power against the interests of the people” a political analyst from Berlin describes. His conclusion: “It would be already a big step forward if the Ukrainians regained trust in their political class.”

“Functioning media are the litmus-test for a value-driven democratization.”

However, even after the Euromaidan it has not been possible to build a relationship of trust between the citizens and the political elites. In large parts of the population, there is “a mixture of anger and disappointment”. Another discussion partner considers it “vicious and deplorable” that “the Ukraine is well and truly run against the wall by its political elites”, and that the people “had not deserved” such a treatment. The political elites are not really interested in a political change. “The government does not want any reforms; the holders of power consider their own interests more than those of the country”, says a young academic. And an academic colleague from Berlin adds: “I think there is not enough political determination to bring about a genuine change and to promote any reform processes. There is quite a strong

interaction between politics and the economy - personified by Poroschenko himself.” Ultimately, the Ukrainian government can only gain trust “by acting rather than by talking. It must make clear through its political actions that it is genuinely determined to promote reforms in cooperation with the population”, says a young woman from Berlin.

A media professional is almost lenient with the protagonists: according to her, the country’s political tensions simply reflect the long-existing conflicts of interest among the regions. This is where “the forces are located which hamper any new politics and any changes.” Under these circumstances, it would be “very difficult to do justice to society and to take into account everyone’s opinion.”

Part II:

Sectoral reforms - a divided response

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If one takes a deeper look analysing the progress of partial reforms within the respective fields of politics, a multi-grained picture emerges. Whereas our discussion partners record some degree of progress with regard to, say, the reconstruction of the police force and the establishment of citizens' Advice Bureaus, there is a deadlock in other areas - e.g. in the judicial system and the health sector.

The following chapter has selected its topics solely in accordance with the selection and emphasis by our discussion partners.

Problem area: the judicial system - so far only a half-hearted mini-reform of the police force

There is hardly any other sector which is mentioned more often as an example of lacking reform efforts than the judicial sector. It is considered as an outright symbol of the seriousness, the credibility, and the determination of reform efforts in general. For, the country's future distribution of power will eventually be decided by the reform of the electoral law or the development of an anti-corruption court -both essential

In my opinion, the biggest problem in the current reform process is the reform of the judicial system. Here, the strongest resistance can be observed." (904)

“What I liked personally, is the introduction of measuring equipment where you can personally control the consumption of gas and heat. The Ukrainians adopt more and more self-responsibility.” (357)

demands by the reformers. Consequently, there is an equivalent resistance by the ruling elites, some of our discussion partners think.

However, it will be decisive whether the principle of constitutionality will assert itself in all public concerns. This, however, presupposes a consensus on both sides - the political elite on the one hand and groups of the civil society on the other hand. Some observers regard the establishment of an anti-corruption court as “a big step forward”; only to realize a lack of political determination to finally install such a court and to recognize it as an independent authority. However, all the discussion partners who have addressed this issue agree that “the success or failure of the reforms will ultimately depend on the issue of corruption.” (612) After all, it is President Petro Poroshenko who will eventually decide on what actions to take. However, driven by selfish interests, “he does exactly the opposite”, says a young academic. And he continues to say that the Ukraine’s central problem is her judicial system. “The reform of the police forces has merely been a token reform which is clearly not enough.”

In the opinion of many observers, a successful reform of the judicial system is also a prerequisite for the Ukrainian economy to gain international access, because a lack of legal security - e.g. in civil law and in property law - would hamper the acquisition of foreign investors.

Energy - a key sector

Apart from the conflict about the distribution of power in the country, the Ukraine, in the decade between the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan, mostly gained the attention of the German public through the gas-dispute with Russia. Once before already, a topic associated with energy had catapulted the Ukraine into the limelight of global attention - the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl in April 1986.

In fact, the energy supply represents one of the central issues in the current reform debate, a discussion partner from the German NGO-scene explains. He even thinks that “the modernization of the energy supply represents the key to the Ukraine’s economic recovery.”

The Ukraine, admittedly, is still supplying herself with nuclear power to a large extent - partly in order to become more independent from energy imports. However, “there are many efforts to use alternative energies.” Monopolistic structures are increasingly broken up and strong efforts are made to diversify the entire energy sector. This applies primarily to the Ukrainian gas-monopolist Naftogaz which has been “particularly prone to corruption in the past.” The problem, however, has largely been solved now through “a professionalization of the corporation’s management”.

Another observer remains more sceptical: in the Ukraine, alternative energies are still underdeveloped - “there is no long-term planning, although generating alternative energies could bring about independence from Russia.”

Another discussion partner knows that currently the Ukraine no longer imports any natural gas from Russia, but from the West. In addition, there may be shale gas from domestic production. If things were tackled efficiently, there will be “favourable conditions for the Ukraine to become an energy exporter within three to five years” - particularly if the country makes progress with its efforts to increase energy efficiency. A discussion partner from Berlin is confident believing in the country’s transformative power: “If you are under pressure and if you are guided wisely, this will boost innovations in the country” - such a momentum will apply to the energy sector more than to any other sector.

New environmental awareness, ecological legacy and environmental crime

In the Ukraine, a new environmental awareness has developed. It is particularly the young gen-

eration who wants an ecologically sustainable Ukraine, some of our discussion partners report. On the other hand, there is an unresolved ecological legacy, such as the damaged nuclear reactor in Chernobyl or the outdated coking plants in Eastern Ukraine. It is also the increasing illegal overfelling of forests that is causing a big headache. In comparison with these deficits, recurring daily phenomena, such as the unlawful waste disposal, appear to be nothing more than trivial offences.

During the 1990ies, there was still no awareness of environmental issues in the Ukraine; this, however, has changed in the meantime, an expert from Frankfurt/Oder confirms: “The young people are well trained and educated and they have begun to work on an operating waste disposal, on waste combustion, and on a reduction of waste. What they want is a ‘green Ukraine’.”

Even though the Ukrainian environmental image continues to be shaped by the nuclear disaster of Chernobyl, there is now “a giant potential to build a clean economy in the Ukraine which may serve as a basis for a positive international image”, a political analyst from Berlin assures.

However, the protection of the environment is still an issue that is “widely neglected.” After all, the country “has more important things to do” - such as fighting a war in Eastern Ukraine. The result is that nobody is prepared to address even such drastic environmental crimes as the large-scale illegal logging in the Carpathian Mountains on the border to Romania. It is here that “Mafia-like networks” are allowed to act unrestrictedly - owing to “a non-existing state-control”. Meanwhile,

“After eating a shashlik, people tend to leave a lot of waste in the forest. If one returns to the forest again, one simply looks for a new spot. For some, this is an expression of freedom - for me, it is nonsense.” (476)

however, there is at least a programme for a sustainable forest management in the Ukraine as well as a German-Ukrainian exchange of young foresters.

As much as these initiatives are welcome - in view of the imminent problems, such programmes are at best apt to create a better awareness. On the other hand, the legacy of Chernobyl remains unresolved with “further environmental disasters” looming ahead. “Only think of the many cokeries in Eastern Ukraine”, a member of the European Parliament remembers. “These are chemical time bombs” which could lead to catastrophes similar to the one in the Indian Bhopal.¹ But so far nobody has taken any notice.

“The State Health System is a catastrophe.”

One of the most important issues in the Ukrainian government’s reform efforts is the

modernization of the health system - it is here that the population would benefit immediately. The country’s health system is outdated, the facilities of the hospitals are insufficient, and the payment is not high enough to have a deterrent effect against corruption. However, there are also such examples as the e-health-model which show that progress can be made in the Ukraine despite a lack of funds.

An expert on the Ukraine reports that, ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union, “the health system has not changed at all”; the facilities of the hospitals have remained at the level of the 1980ies.”

Officially, health care is free of charge, but there is no compulsory health care prescribed by law. The result: although there are good doctors, the hospitals lack the necessary financial resources. “Owing to the budget situation, the state health system is a catastrophe. Only

¹ On 3rd December 1984, there was an explosion in one of the factories of the US-American chemical concern of Union Carbide in the central Indian state of Bhopal - releasing several tons of methylisocyanat, a toxic precursor for the production of pesticide. It is estimated that the accident claimed the lives of between 10.000 and 25.000 people; a further 100.000 - possibly up to 500.000 - people were injured.

those who have enough money, receive any treatment.” A lack of money is also the reason why private clinics attempt to sell operations “which are definitely not necessary.” Moreover, a lack of money is also the cause of corruption and dubious business deals reaching as far as the political circles, an NGO-representative from Berlin reports: “The Ukrainian Health Ministry is totally infested and corrupt. International organizations have taken over the complete procurement system.”

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After all, a functioning health system, based on an efficient health insurance, is “terribly important” for people’s quality of living - this implies that “the citizens must have access to good doctors who do not have to be paid ‘cash-in-hand’.” After all, any changes in the health system are bound to be noticed quickly, thus leading to a more positive attitude towards the government’s reform policy within the population.

However, the assessment of a media professional from Berlin is fairly sober: “The Ukrainian health system will remain bad as long as the people are not able to pay for the health care services.” As soon as the standard of living rises, the quality of medical care will rise, too.”

The initiative to introduce an online-based e-health-system is regarded as a glimmer of hope on the horizon. Equipped with practically no funds, but with “enthusiasm, ability and speed,” a system has been developed disregarding all obstacles and restrictions. Within the available means, a system has been introduced which forms a transparent network between doctors, patients and other health care institutions - similar to the Prozoro procurement system of the public sector.

“The initiative to introduce an e-health-model served me as an example for the Ukrainians’ strength. Equipped with practically no funds, but with great enthusiasm and ability, they have developed a system quite fast. Initially focussing on the existing options and disregarding any existing obstacles and restrictions. (cf. ProZoro). (30)”

External security: forming alliances or remaining in isolation?

In the Ukraine, security is an omnipresent issue. If you think of the Ukraine, you invariably think of war and conflict, says a medium-aged academic. “The conflict in the Donbass is the only shooting war in Europe - we are beginning to forget this.”

However, security issues cannot only be reduced to the state of war in the country’s East alone; they apply to different aspects of daily life including the war in Eastern Ukraine, the reform of the security services, the growing number of weapons and assassinations in the country, the mass traumatization and the general desire for a comprehensive protection of the human existence - e.g. by improving the state health system. All these unresolved questions generate “a feeling of profound insecurity with the Ukrainian people,” a political adviser from Berlin knows from his own experience.

However, the state of war in the country’s East and the conflict with Russia remain the dominating security issues. According to an elderly academic from Hamburg, it is quite obvious where the Ukraine’s adversaries come from: you only have to look around towards the East, the West, the North and the South to realize “who is standing at the Ukraine’s fence.”

Whereas, thanks to the implementation of the police reform, there is good progress with regard to internal security (including a stringent control of corruption), the Ukraine does not seem to be able to build a security apparatus which could withstand any external threats. This is why external help is still required. However, to reach a balance of interests in questions

of security, only diplomatic means should be applied and no violence.

Different from the police system, the reconstruction of the secret services has not even been tackled: after the Maidan, the internal secret service SBU does not seem “compatible with the Ukraine any more”. “To strengthen the population’s trust in the state, a reconstruction of the secret services is of great significance and has long been overdue”, says a political expert from Berlin.

A media representative from Berlin believes that the Ukraine “appears to be on the right way with regard to security: she is building alliances.” After the NATO-summit in Bratislava, necessary steps have been taken towards a higher degree of collective security. “Now Russia is aware which countries must not be attacked by her”, says a security expert from Berlin who is in her sixties. Unfortunately, this has come too late for the Ukraine.

Irrespective of the declarations of support by the West, the Ukraine is still in a state of shock about the alleged breach of the Budapest Memorandum; the West simply “did not keep its promises”. However, the discussion partners do not elaborate on the repercussions of this breach of promise on the current relations.

Some interviewees, however, make clear demands including German arms exports to the Ukraine. “I am in favour of every country’s self-defence and, consequently, I advocate German arms exports to the Ukraine.”, says a young representative from Munich. The aim is to contain the war in Eastern Ukraine, so it cannot spread any further. And it is important to protect the neighbouring cities of

“War is not an easy situation for the country. However, you cannot use it as an excuse or an explanation for a reform deadlock.” (425)

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Odessa, Saporischschja and Kharkov which have remained intact so far. For any foreign investment is only possible in a safe environment. The fact Germany even denies the supply of passive equipment to the Ukrainian army, is “absurd.” Such a total ban has already resulted in the fact that bullet-proof vests and winter-proof boots are being smuggled from Germany “on a wide scale”, says a media professional from Berlin.

In Germany, too, we would have to think about what we can offer to the Ukrainians to improve their external security, a political adviser from Berlin adds. “I also expect German initiatives to advance the Ukraine’s external security.” What the Ukraine needs is a domestic arms industry - especially now as significant parts of the old arms factories are situated in the war zones.

Another interview partner - also a political adviser from Berlin - explicitly disapproves of German arms exports to the Ukraine. He argues that, since the Euromaidan, the density of weapons in the country and the intensity of violent clashes have increased dramatically.

“Whereas, previously, only blunt weapons such as sticks or shields had been used, it is now armed weapons.” This would not make any easier the prevention of violence and the restoration of the state monopoly of legitimate violence.

Altogether, a mixed picture emerges from the discussions on the security issue: While the war in the country’s east gradually fades into the background, the questions on internal security are gaining importance. And while the Ukrainian government could so far use the challenges of the internal war to justify the current reform deadlock, the patience of the citizens with regard to this issue is dwindling fast.

“Gradually, the security issue fades into the background and the reform issues gain the upper hand,” a young Think-Tank representative from Berlin reports from his own field studies on site. “The political elites can no longer use the war in the Donbass as an excuse for the reform deadlock. After all, this is why the country’s current situation has become so explosive again.”

However, the longer the implementation of reforms will take and the more those reforms will be masterminded by the conditions of the EU and the ICF, the greater will be the danger that “populists will argue against these reform efforts.”

The fight against corruption: a consistent lip-service

According to a unanimous assessment of almost all our interviewees, “corruption and missing constitutionality represent the greatest obstacles for the Ukraine’s development.” This is also reflected on the concrete level of cooperation; moreover, it is “the omnipresent bureaucracy along with a lack of experience with democratic processes” which hamper cooperation, says a Think-Tank representative from Berlin. It is especially corruption and bureaucracy which “strongly” shape the picture of the Ukraine.

The fight against corruption will have to take place fast and consistently in practically all areas; according to several observers, this will be an ambivalent process which presupposes the society’s determination to stop offering bribe money in

the future. The population will have to develop an awareness that “there are special things which cannot be ‘bought’ anymore.” Any infringements must be punished stringently by prison sentences.

According to an observer from Berlin, it appears to be quite simple. The fight against corruption equals the fight against smoking: “Stop it once and for all! There is no other way. You cannot transform a corrupt system step-by-step; corruption must be fought fast and instantly.”

A young political adviser from Berlin suggests a different therapy: “The state must pay its employees adequately” - so “the good ones” will remain within the system and the civil servants will be less tempted by corruption.”

A media professional from Berlin believes in drastic measures: “Germany and the EU have reached a point where we will have to operate with ‘sticks’ rather than ‘carrots’ - the carrot-and-stick-policy as a means to enforce German and European interests in the Ukraine.

After all, there is nothing to lose as the trust of the Ukrainian citizens in their institutions

could not be any smaller - it amounts to a mere single-digit percent. It is only the anti-corruption court - which has now been suspended - that enjoyed a 20-percent approval. "This speaks volumes, doesn't?" says the journalist from Berlin.

If the country does not gain ground with its fight against corruption, the people will be losing all their hopes and aspirations, says a representative of the civil society in Berlin. "Sooner or later, people will say: 'The Maidan and the war have led to nothing; we want to return to the secure Russian world.'" After all, the comprehensive reforms "are financed by the ordinary people, while much money continues to trickle off in the pockets of the local and regional elites."

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Only a few voices differed from the circle of the 44 interviewees. Thus, a politician assured that "no other country - except for Romania - has committed itself so drastically to the fight against corruption than the Ukraine." What is upsetting, however, is the fact that "each publicized case of corruption is credited to the account of the reform sceptics." And an industrial representative from Munich thought that "from our experience, the issue of corruption is no longer an omnipresent phenomenon," admitting "that this may be explained by the size of our company." According to him, however, the reform process is showing the first visible results.

Quality deficits and bribability in the higher education system

Obviously, corruption and nepotism are widespread in the higher education system, too. According to many of our interview partners from the academic sector, one can buy degrees and diplomas everywhere. Moreover,

"It is the issue of corruption that will eventually decide on the success or failure of the reforms." (612)

“Ukrainian professors often do not speak any English; consequently, there are no active contributions to the international academic discourse. In the Ukraine, the focus is on domestic literature rather than on international literature. In Germany, it is impossible to become a professor without speaking English.” (48)

the quality of the academic education in the Ukraine is comparatively low - even though it has improved over the past ten years, says an academic from Hamburg. At any rate, there are still obvious differences between the metropolitan and the provincial universities. The Schewtschenko University in Kiev is regarded as an international showpiece, but many other tertiary institutions still maintain a “post-Soviet mentality.” Only a few universities are able to carry out research which is internationally competitive.

These deficits can be explained by a chronic underfunding of the Ukrainian higher education system - also, because there is no connection between the academic world and the economic world. Consequently, academic departments almost exclusively depend on state-funding - currently a most unreliable resource.

What aggravates the situation further is the fact that the university landscape is infiltrated by “old apparatchiks.” The international networking is pretty bad, not least owing to a poor knowledge of foreign languages; there

are hardly any research projects with regard to social sciences.

According to a young expert on Eastern Europe from Frankfurt/Oder, “the standard in the higher education system is so bad that there is an urgent pressure to act immediately.” And a young academic from Berlin adds: “The academic world is sitting in an ivory tower doing research for its own sake.” “But what is the meaning of research,” an academic from Berlin asks rhetorically, “if it does not lead to a practical application?”

The Ukrainian higher education system must be careful not to lose contact with international standards. Even though, admittedly, the current situation for Ukrainian academics is quite difficult, “it will be important not to allow any compromises with regard to the standards of research”, says a professor from an East German university. Otherwise, one would simply support a system which is corrupt and unable to compete internationally.

Ukrainian research and teaching are also undermined by a strict ban on any cooperation

with Russian universities or research institutions. This means that the Ukraine's higher education institutions are not only separated from long-established academic networks, but they cannot acquire any Russian-speaking literature either. Whatever appears to be Russophil, is removed from the curricula. Even seminars on Marxism are currently "inconceivable" - as if the historical materialism was a Russian invention, an interview partner from Frankfurt/Oder is shaking his head in disbelief.

Instead, he advocates the implementation of so-called "fast-track-programmes" to liberate talented academics from the corrupt structures

- thus offering them medium- or long-term career prospects. To identify qualified undergraduates and graduates, German selection committees have repeatedly travelled to Ukrainian higher education institutions believing that marks and grades do not represent adequate selection criteria - as "they are frequently bought."

According to a discussion partner from Hamburg, the most important prerequisites for any improvements in the higher education system are "good contacts abroad and a young teaching staff." A lot can be achieved through partnerships with (foreign) universities, enterprises and through town-twinning.

Lack of recognition for vocational training

According to the reports by our discussion partners from the educational and academic sector, education in the Ukraine is recognized most of all in the academic context.

By contrast, vocational training only plays a subordinate role; its social recognition is rather poor – also, because there is no craftsman tradition. The result is that even Ukrainian production companies do not recognize the added value of in-house vocational training programmes, says a young political adviser from Berlin.

An expert on the Ukrainian educational landscape believes that the separation of universities and polytechnics could possibly bring about a solution. This would not only reduce the large number of universities in the country, but it would also promote the vocational, practice-oriented educational opportunities. Frequently, the universities are unable to cope, “simply because they lack the prerequisites; there are not enough suitable laboratories, for example”, a young academic from Berlin knows from his own experience. ■

Ukrainian parties - alliances of personal interest

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Political parties in the Ukraine cannot be compared with those in Western Europe. They tend to be alliances of interest with an undemanding political objective – grouped around a close circle of strong leaders – frequently oligarchs. This also applies to political newcomers who – even if they advocate more transparency – only display a rudimentary, rather authoritarian concept of democracy thanks to their strong private interests. This, at any rate, is – roughly speaking – the perception of our discussion partners with regard to the Ukrainian political party system.

“As yet, the political parties in the Ukraine cannot be regarded as genuine parties”, a young academic from Berlin declares. “They are insubstantial alliances oriented to the personal interests of individual people.” They do not have any firm party structures nor do they have any membership worth mentioning. According to a young Ukraine-expert from Berlin, this loose structure has a negative

effect on the government programmes and on the everyday parliamentary work. Nevertheless, an NGO-representative hopes “that the reform forces will unite and agree on a presentable candidate [for the presidential elections in the spring of 2019].”

Different from many expectations in the West, Wiktor Janukowytsh's overthrow did not result in the foundation of a left-liberal political party. “Unfortunately, even the reform forces did not manage to quit the old system”, a journalist ponders on the missed chances in the wake of the upheaval. “After all, such a step would have made a big difference in the political discourse.”

So far, however, the young members of parliament have not distinguished themselves by an explicit willingness to cooperate; they lack the experience of parliamentary work and the necessary sense of responsibility to place their own interests behind those of the community. ■

The Ukraine's future as a litmus test for the European Idea

For some of the discussion partners, the success or failure of reforms in the Ukraine is not only a test for the Ukrainian population and the country's political elite, but also for the sustainability of the European Idea. Therefore, a successful reform policy would not only "be in the interest of the Ukraine, but even more so in the interest of the EU."

Under most difficult circumstances, the Ukraine has made a decision in favour of Europe and European values; now it is up to Europe to protect those values. "For me, it was exciting to observe how the rights and liberties of the individual, but also the

connection with the classical European values (such as the human rights) have been shifted by the Euromaidan into the centre of the political discourse," a cultural expert from Berlin describes her impressions of the year 2013/14. And she adds: we Europeans can learn from the Ukrainians which values the EU is based on.

A man in his late forties shares this view: "For Europe, the Ukraine represents a challenge for everything we cherish. We do not seem to realize sufficiently what would happen if we lost the Ukraine as a partner." ■

The Ukraine's backbone is her strong civil society

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Owing to the Euromaidan, the world has discovered the strong Ukrainian civil society which has been active until now – quite aware of its power and role. The civil society controls politics as a non-parliamentary corrective, thus promoting social change. After two Maidan-revolutions, the Ukrainians now have their own clear idea how they want to live and in which direction they want to develop.

Consequently, many observers, looking for the essential characteristics of the Ukrainian society, do not focus so much on the often-quoted issue of corruption, “but on the high degree of the civil society’s self-responsibility.” On behalf of many discussion partners, a young East German expert on Eastern Europe adds: “I have a great respect for the Ukrainians. A country strong enough to sustain two Maidans does not allow itself to be patronized.” Admittedly, there is at present a growing consolidation of oligarchic structures and the containment of rampant corruption has not been successful either. “However, thanks to an extremely vital civil society, there is a strong will to become a self-determined and democratic country. And this will last”. The civil society has proved to have “a long wind.” Moreover, it has developed “a distinct awareness that the country must not fall back again into old patterns.”

Today, four years after the events on the Kiev Maidan, one looks at a country which

has undergone a basic change. “The mental strength, the formation of an identity and the social processes in the wake of the Maidan have altered the country.” This is essentially the merit of a liberal citizens’ society.

Despite cultural differences, there is a broad consensus among the reform-oriented forces with regard to the country’s future orientation: “All of them want to fight corruption and to establish local democracy. They are in favour of European integration and constitutionality. And, of course, they want an end of the Russian aggression in the Donbass.”

A young political analyst from Berlin is also fascinated by “the Ukrainian civil society’s incredible capacity to mobilize people.” Likewise, another observer “was quite enthused about the speed in which the civil society’s network had been generated.”

If, in the years 2014/15, the citizens themselves had not assumed public duties in the war zones, the supply of the population in Eastern Ukraine would have collapsed, a young East German academic asserts. “At this stage, the total weakness of the Ukrainian state became obvious” – and, at the same time, the cumulative force of the Ukrainian civil society.

However, the civil society also has a blatant weakness: even though it is capable to trigger “revolutionary moments”, it cannot >

bring about “revolutionary movements.” To ensure any long-term changes, the reform movement lacks an integrative leadership, sustainable processes and established structures.

In view of the old elites’ forces of persistence (or forces of inertia) and the delayed reforms, there are signs of a “growing

fatigue on the part of the civil society”. The expectations of the Maidan have remained unfulfilled; the people are disillusioned and exhausted. Gradually, they are losing the strength and the faith to change the country for the better. The Ukrainian society will either sink into lethargy or it will soon face a third Maidan. This question will be resolved by the civil society alone. ■

4. The Ukraine as an object and a subject in international relations

“What happens in the Ukraine comes close to a battle between the East and the West.” Among the interviewees, nobody has expressed it more pointedly than this journalist from Berlin. However, the significance of these events only gradually seeps through into the Germans’ awareness. So far, the relationship with Russia has superseded all other issues, if only because of Germany’s economic interests. Against this background, the Ukraine has played a secondary role at best - a world view which is now becoming rather shaky.

The annexation of the Crimea has changed the world considerably - including the German picture of the world and of Russia. “The annexation of the Crimea has upset parts of the political Germany”, a discussion partner describes his perception. Another adds: “The faith in a collective understanding on a European security architecture has been deeply shaken by this annexation,” Before that, “the world appeared to be good and comfortable for Germany.” The fact that “Russia plans to establish a new order, has not been grasped in Germany for a long time”, says an academic from Berlin. “However, the

most important people in Berlin have understood all this pretty fast.”

Meanwhile, it has become clear to everybody that the European security system also depends on the fate of the Ukraine; both elements are inseparately connected with each other. Again and again, the interviewees refer to the Budapest Memorandum: in 1994, the Ukraine renounced the possession of nuclear weapons, because the USA and Russia, in return, pledged to respect her sovereignty and territorial integrity. Therefore, the disregard of the Budapest Memorandum does not only represent a breach of international law by Russia, but also by the Western guarantor powers: “With its reaction to the breach of the Budapest Memorandum, the West has made itself guilty. The West’s credibility has been deeply shaken. Therefore, it is the West’s obligation to support the Ukraine in her efforts to restore her external security.”

Some observers are surprised that this issue is not addressed more strongly in the Ukraine. After all, “the country took an important step when it voluntarily renounced the possession of nuclear weapons.” Just now, with a possible NATO-membership no longer on the agenda, the question of

“With its reaction to the breach of the Budapest Memorandum, the West has made itself guilty. The West’s credibility has been deeply shaken. Therefore, it is the West’s obligation to support the Ukraine in her efforts to restore her external security.” (69)

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security guarantees in the context of a sustainable European security system is gaining more and more importance. “Ever since the military clashes in Eastern Ukraine, Kiev’s security needs have increased as a NATO-membership has become more and more unrealistic.”

The controversy about a membership of the Ukraine in the EU and in NATO has played a prominent role in several interviews. In this context, the opinion prevailed that the country’s division was not so much caused by the Ukraine’s rapprochement to the EU, but by the prospect of a Ukrainian NATO-membership. Whereas a further rapprochement of the Ukraine to the EU may go unchallenged, any accession of the Ukraine to NATO is out of the question. “For the Ukraine, it would not be a good idea to join NATO, as this would mean a formation of new power blocs. The Ukraine must remain neutral and attempt to find a common language with Russia.” This is the only way to resolve the conflict step-by-step.

However, as NATO will not be the Ukraine’s guarantor for quite some time, the EU must “bare its teeth” striving to become the security actor on

the European continent. Admittedly, both the EU and Germany have already assumed far-reaching responsibility through negotiating the Minsk Agreement; and, moreover, the German Federal Government “actively” supports the reform process - but “does this solve the conflict - as long as Russia continues to play for time?” asks a discussion partner rhetorically.

Germany: Mediator or double-minded opportunist?

Despite - or even because of - the absence of any successes so far, many interviewees see Germany in a bridging function between the East and the West. Against the background of her own past, Germany is considered particularly sensitive to the East-West-relationship. “This is definitely one reason for Germany’s present support of the Ukraine”, a Think-Tank representative from Berlin believes. However, this intermediary role is sometimes eyed suspiciously in the Ukraine. “Germany defines its foreign-policy role in terms of a central power, i.e. she tries to maintain good relations with all sides in order to gain influence. Sometimes, this attitude is not properly appreciated in the Ukraine.”

However, there is widespread recognition of Germany's "key role" in supporting the efforts of the Ukrainian government to implement economic and political reforms even if the German Federal Government has imposed conditions insisting on the strict observance of agreements. "Germany is the most important EU-country in all decision-making processes with regard to the Ukraine. Germany was ready when the crisis erupted and Germany has stood by the Ukraine reliably ever since." The discussion partner ends with a rhetorical question: "Who else could do it?" Poland, admittedly, still plays an important role, too; but in the past years, the Ukraine has found Germany to be a significant partner as regards foreign policy - over the years, "a close friendship" has developed.

However, there are also critical voices to be heard: admittedly, Germany has strongly committed herself to the Ukraine (and within the Ukraine); what is lacking, however, is a public debate on Germany's long-term contributions to the Ukraine's stabilization. The support appears to be too closely connected with the Minsk process. "This is not enough for a long-term cooperation with the Ukraine."

"Ever since the military clashes in Eastern Ukraine, the question of a rapprochement with NATO has clearly changed. The security needs have increased as a NATO-membership has become more and more unrealistic." (591)

“During the public debate in Germany, it is frequently asked why on earth do we get involved in a conflict with Russia on account of the Ukraine? Russia, after all, is Germany’s much more important partner. One should not strain this relationship too much with the problems in the Ukraine.” (1946)

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Nevertheless, most of the interviewees agree on Germany’s leadership and strength in view of this difficult constellation. The following remark which is reflected in many statements is so succinct that it should not be omitted: “Just as well that Angela Merkel happens to be Chancellor in this day and age, with her East German experience; it doesn’t bear contemplating what would have happened if Schröder was still Chancellor.”

Behind this allegedly personal insult, there is a more profound fear: it is the latent worry on the part of the Ukrainians to become a pawn in the hands of the powerful, a pledge in the conflicting interests of their powerful neighbours. The fear: sooner or later, Germany will sacrifice the Ukraine’s independence in favour of the German-Russian economic interests. These, after all, are more important than the German-Ukrainian trade. “Germany’s interest to cooperate with Putin, seems more important than the containment of the conflict”, one of the interviewees thinks. And he calls a spade a spade: “Within the economy and the great lobby organizations, the Ukraine is only regarded as a disturbing factor in the relations with Russia.” Some lobby groups even deny the Ukraine’s right to exist, claiming

that “the Ukraine used to be a part of the USSR, after all.”

This attitude can also be observed with regard to the Crimea-issue. Despite the violent annexation of the peninsula, many Germans regard this clear breach of international law as “unimportant and irrelevant.” Instead, the focus remains on the long-term interests with Russia; and the Crimea, in the opinion of many Germans, belongs to Russia anyway. The incorporation of the Crimea into the Ukraine in 1954 is considered a deal which “Khrushchev made when he was totally drunk. The fact that the Ukraine has been independent since 1991 and is still fighting for her autonomy, is completely neglected.”

The fact that the EU lacks a unanimous attitude with regard to the sanctions against Russia does not make the West’s policy any more reliable or predictable. Apparently, the West tacitly cherishes the hope that “Putin will eventually withdraw his troops tacitly and we would thus enable him to save his face” - only to revive the past.

However, even though the rhetoric of the German population with regard to these issues

may be contradictory - Berlin has remained on track so far. This is also the hope of our discussion partners for the future: "Despite the economic interests, Berlin should take a firm stand towards Russia. The Kremlin really does not understand any other reaction. Keep going! Don't give up! And wait for better times to come." By the way, it may be permitted to ask what Germany could have done differently in the past years: "Not much, really. There are clearly defined limits of exercising influence and of being influenced."

Ukrainian and European passivity

Some observers ask themselves why Kiev behaves so passively towards Brussels and the big European member states - especially Poland, Germany, France. The more so, because those countries play an essential role with regard to Russia and represent the Ukraine's most important allies. "The battle for the Ukraine will be decided here in Berlin and in Brussels. The Ukraine must show up here; she does not make enough efforts to make her voice heard loud and clear in articulating her presence" - she even justifies her passivity with a lack of money. Some discussion partners also wish for a stronger role of the Ukraine in the

"Despite the economic interests with regard to Russia, Berlin should take a firm stand. The Kremlin really does not understand any other reaction. Keep going! Don't give up! And wait for better times to come." (737)

“The question arises what Germany could have done differently in the past years? - Not much, really. There are clearly defined limits of exercising influence and of being influenced.” (555)

“For Europe, the Ukraine represents a challenge for everything we cherish. The Ukraine is a European project. We do not seem to realize sufficiently what would happen if we lost the Ukraine as a partner.” (855)

context of the Eastern partnership of the European Union.

On the other hand, some discussion partners take a look at Brussels and the European Union. In their opinion, the EU - owing to its association course - plays the most important role in the current conflict and has to make every conceivable effort to make the Ukraine a model of success. One must not forget that this conflict is the result of considerable geopolitical upheavals in the region - especially the extension of the EU and of NATO towards Eastern and Central Europe. Precisely because the EU is a party to the conflict, some observers would want “more support from the EU. Until now, the EU has shown comparatively little support for the Ukraine. However, if ‘it clicks’ in the Ukraine, it will have a great effect on us.”

Our very own interests alone should motivate us “to intensify our efforts for the Ukraine’s European integration.” These efforts must essentially include the “four freedoms” of the Single European Market: free movement of goods, free movement of people as well as the freedom of services and of settlement. According to some interviewees,

Germany should become the pioneer of such initiatives in order to open up the Ukraine step-by-step and lead her closer to the EU. Such successes in the reform process would not only make the Ukraine more resistant against any external aggressions, but also against any internal separation efforts.

One discussion partner points out that, in principle, the issue implies much more than the free movement of goods and people. If the EU should allow the Ukraine’s freedom to be sacrificed for the economic or geostrategic interests of its big members, this would mean the end of the EU. Literally: “For Europe, the Ukraine is a challenge for everything we cherish. The Ukraine is a European project. We do not seem to realize sufficiently what would happen if we lost the Ukraine as a partner.”

On the other hand, an analyst from Berlin asks for more activity on the part of the Ukrainian government. Yes, he says, the Ukraine needs a perspective with regard to a EU-accession. “But she must now begin to develop her relations with the EU in as many areas as possible”, even if her free resources are rather limited at the moment.

A special relationship: the Ukrainian-Russian relations

What is considered essential for an understanding of the current crisis in the Ukrainian-Russian relations is the fact that “the Ukraine has been playing a very significant role in Russia’s power and security politics. Until now, Russia’s international political significance has always depended on the Ukraine.” This close connection between the Ukraine and Russia’s vital security interests plays an essential role in every attempt by the interviewees to explain Moscow’s hard reaction to the Ukraine’s orientation towards the West.

Like every other country, a political adviser from Berlin argues, the Ukraine has “to pursue a foreign policy which takes into account the interests of her neighbours. For the Ukraine, this means the obligation to consider Russia’s interests.” The biggest mistake during the Maidan was to reduce the situation to an “either-or”. After all, Wiktor Janukowytsch must be given credit for his efforts “to maintain a dialogue with both Putin and Barroso [president of the EU Commission].” This was “the only sensible policy.”

“We can learn from the Ukrainians which values the EU is based on.” (325)

“Russia will always forestall any reforms in the Ukraine. If the Ukraine were successful, the Russians will ask: ‘Why not us?’” (213)

Independently from each other, several discussion partners put forward the same hypothesis: A Ukraine, successfully transformed and modernized, would become a real danger for the continued existence of the authoritarian regime in Russia. If the Ukrainian government were successful with its reform efforts, the Russians would ask themselves: “Why not us?”

From “the Kremlin’s point of view, the Ukraine is ‘Russia’s smaller brother’, ‘its own flesh and blood’.” If Kiev were successful in reforming the country, the pressure on the authoritarian regime in Moscow would become untenably strong. A Ukraine which develops politically, economically and socially would almost inevitably lead to Russia’s destabilization. Consequently, Russia has to undermine all reform efforts in Kiev. “With the war in the East, Russia is in a strong position to quash the Ukraine’s successes, to destabilize the country and to strengthen the extremist forces in the Ukraine.” The only thing the Ukraine can do is to seek the dialogue with Russia and “to wait until things have been sorted out over there.”

However, other discussion partners believe that only an accelerated reform course can bring about

a solution – otherwise, the decision makers in Kiev would “forfeit the Ukraine’s reputation.” A sluggish reform policy would only play into the Kremlin’s hands, for “it suits Russia to talk about the Ukraine as a failed state.” At any rate, Russia will do everything to make this picture come true: “Russia will continue to destabilize the Ukraine systematically: politically, economically and in terms of the media. Russia does not show any motivation to strike compromises at any particular point.” Whether one likes it or not: reality shows that Russia is back - “risen from prostration” - and that the Ukrainian state is unable to offer any resistance. Under these circumstances, the Ukraine will not be able to turn her reform policy into a success story. “How on earth can this possibly be achieved?”

In view of this dilemma-situation, some of the discussion partners hope for a political thaw in Russia: “What would help both the Ukraine and Europe as a whole would be an ‘Orange Revolution’ in Russia.” Other discussion partners make similar statements: “The only solution to the Ukrainian-Russian problem would be a change in Russia herself.” And yet another: “It is quite disillusioning to realize that only a political change in

Russia would bring about a complete resolution of the present situation.”

However, Kiev does not only depend on a “regime change” in Moscow; it could also take the reins in its own hands. “At the moment, Ukrainian politicians happen to be rather strained, because they find themselves in the mode of war. This status quo can only be resolved by abandoning this mode trying to talk with others - including Russia.” For, looking at the problem in the cold light of day, both Moscow and Kiev find themselves in a situation where none of them can win anything. “The war in the Donbass has reached a deadlock associated with a tragic momentum in the Russian-Ukrainian relations. A situation has developed revealing horrible dimensions.” Other observers also find it “regrettable that the relations with Russia are breaking down on different levels - caused by the war.”

Irrespective of the current crisis, some observers see the Ukraine “in an ideal geopolitical situation: on the one hand, the country used to have economic ties with Russia, on the other hand, it is now more closely connected with the EU.” This

“The conflict with the Ukraine has shown Russia her limits. The Kremlin may be able to exercise influence on post-Soviet countries which are not members of NATO - however, this does certainly not apply to members of NATO such as the Baltic States.” (594)

“If we continue to speak with Putin and his circles of power only and to disregard the forces of the opposition, we should not be surprised to note that our influence on Russian politics will continue to diminish.” (656)

situation may well serve as a model for the future - possibly suggesting a bridging function between the East and the West. A hypothesis shared by “some circles” in Germany, says one interviewee. And he hastens to add: “However, those circles do not ask themselves sufficiently how this may sound for the Ukrainian politicians. After all, you can just as well march over a bridge in military boots, can’t you?”

No matter how the situation is viewed - it remains clear that there can be no solution without Russia. “We will have to think about how we can stabilize the Ukraine’s unstable situation. There is no way without Russia. Perhaps a status such as Moldova or Transnistria? In these two countries, tens of thousands of people hold a domestic passport, a Russian passport and they can enter the EU as well.” Whatever the models of cooperation may eventually be: “Ultimately, there will be some kind of deal.”

Other observers are more hesitant pointing out the role of Russia as an aggressor. They maintain that Russia, after all, uses “her territorial power to inflict damage on the Ukraine” instrumentalizing other countries - such as Kazakhstan which, due

to Moscow’s pressure, has joined the economic embargo against the Ukraine. Ultimately, the Ukraine represents no more than a useful pledge. “Depending on the global situation, Moscow can use this pledge in any direction.”

There are sceptics of a Russian-Ukrainian rapprochement who believe that Russia has ultimately manoeuvred herself into a deadlock by her policy towards the Ukraine. For the conflict with the Ukraine has shown Russia her limits. The Kremlin may be able to exercise influence on post-Soviet countries which are not members of NATO - however, this does not apply to members of NATO such as the Baltic States.” In the end, the war in the Ukraine could have consequences for Russia similar to those the war in Afghanistan had for the Soviet Union in the past.

As long as Putin stays in power with Russia considering herself isolated internationally, it will at best be possible to establish a sustainable line of defence in Eastern Ukraine.” According to an expert on the Ukraine from Berlin, the objective must be to reach a systematic exchange of prisoners and other persons. This would “render people’s lives in the region much more bearable.”

“My vision for Kharkov in 2030: Even more colourful, no corruption, an efficient bureaucracy, participating in Europe-wide networks, no national(istic) aspirations on the part of the young generation. Putin has become more pragmatic, more constructive, and he has developed an interest in genuine solutions. Reconciliation.” (786)

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At any rate, there is a general consensus regarding the long-standing criticism of Western politics towards Russia: “If we continue to speak with Putin and his circles of power only and to disregard the forces of the opposition, we should not be surprised to note that our influence on Russian politics will continue to diminish.”

“After all, we know everything about the causes of war in Eastern Ukraine.”, a media professional from Berlin adds, visibly upset. “It is Russia which has carried the war into the Ukraine. And it is Russia which is fighting the war there, too.” Thus, Moscow is not a mediator in the conflict in Eastern Ukraine (as suggested by the Minsk Agreements), but a war party. “Why is this issue not addressed?” a man asks, bewildered. The only plausible reason could be “to enable Moscow in a face-saving manner to withdraw its troops tacitly at one time or another.” Why, then, do we have to listen to the nonsense from our German foreign minister who expects Russia to exercise restraint on the conflicting parties”?

According to some observers, Europe and Germany should also examine their own policy

towards Russia if the present deadlock is to be overcome. At the same time, it is considered naive to assume that things will turn for the better after Putin. “It is not Putin who represents the Ukraine’s main problem - rather, it is the renewed orientation of Russian foreign policy towards the traditional geopolitical thinking. This, at any rate, will continue after Putin.” Putin is only “a particularly strong protagonist of this kind of thinking.”

Ultimately, the whole debate shows that “our picture of the Ukraine is still shaped by a post-Soviet and post-colonial perspective. One talks with Moscow about the Ukraine, but one does not talk with the Ukraine herself. Why on earth does the road to Kiev always have to go via Moscow?” an academic expert on the Ukraine asks.

Karl Schlögel, a historian from Berlin, is said to have been one of the few observers who, during the Maidan, had admitted that their view on the Ukraine had been shaped by traditional stereotypes. If one is honest, then “the Ukraine has been looked at through Moscow’s very own filter until the present day.”

“Whenever, in Germany, some circles apply the metaphor of ‘bridging function’ to the Ukraine, they do not ask themselves sufficiently how this may sound for the Ukrainian politicians. After all, you can just as well march over a bridge in military boots, can’t you?” (851)

Social exchange as a key to modernization

Some of the interviewees believe that an increased exchange between Germans and Ukrainians would be “helpful” for the reform efforts in the Ukraine. Therefore, exchange programmes in different fields should support the developmental and economic measures which already exist.

Apparently, a success story is the municipal cooperation which has undergone big changes in the last years. “A change of paradigm” – in that more financial funds are available, the decision makers have become accessible more directly and, consequently, more joint programmes could be developed – also with the help of dispatched experts – so that things could be “implemented more realistically” than before.

Another observer knows about the unifying power of culture: “International exchange and the promotion of artists, writers, musicians and journalists as well as the promotion of citizens’ travel activities create sustainable relations, understanding and a broad public”, says a man in his fifties. “Culture unifies.” In Kharkov, for example, there is a ‘Nuremberg House’ – an association based on partnership where German culture and German language are imparted.

Vice versa, Ukrainian artists would find new inspiration in Nuremberg.

A young man from Munich would like to invest more sustainably in the exchange of skilled professionals. In his opinion, it is paramount “to increase economic synergies between the EU, Germany and the Ukraine” – also by means of ‘Hermes Cover’ [government export credit guarantee] and academic cooperation. Every year, around 10.000 Ukrainian students come to Germany, whereas only 100 Germans study in the Ukraine. It should be the aim of such exchange programmes “to create more prosperity, more stability and more perspectives.”

An academic from Berlin wishes for more intense cooperation with his Ukrainian colleagues; and he considers such a plan “well founded. Back in the 1990ies, we used to have an academic promotion programme with Russia – this could serve as a model.”

After all, what has been a success story in the German-French relations could well be tried with regard to the German-Ukrainian relations: “Perhaps one should contemplate a German-Ukrainian Youth Project,” a representative of the private business says. ■

5. Pictures
of the future -
perspectives
of the future

In the final sequence of the interviews, we asked our discussion partners to formulate a vision for the future of the Ukraine and to express their expectations and hopes for the country. This is to confront the current debate (which is fraught with problems) with a positive picture of the future. Naturally, our interview partners also expressed doubt; consequently, the confrontation of different perspectives has resulted in a multi-faceted and nuanced picture of the future.

To begin with: many observers find it difficult to identify any socially relevant issues which are not related to war, corruption or reforms. “People tend to be tired of these issues”, a young academic reports. What is needed is a number of positive stories, “and what is also needed are new forms of narrative.”

Success factors for a sustainable change

In view of the many external and internal factors which will determine the Ukraine’s future, many interviewees perceive a high degree of uncertainty. However, despite widespread scepticism and occasional

disillusionment owing to delayed reforms, there is a prevailing mood of optimism amongst the discussion partners with regard to the Ukraine’s development opportunities. “When I look ahead”, says a political adviser from Berlin, “I believe that the Ukraine will continue her reform course - even though she may sometimes have to muddle through.” It is important for the EU to remain a point of reference. If so, reconstruction “will be implemented much faster and much more successfully”. “If not, the process will be slowing down.”

A young man from Munich, who also works as a political adviser and analyst, says “that the Ukraine has many chances for a good future.” If existing barriers are removed, e.g. corruption and a lack of constitutionality, the country will have “a great perspective to develop”; in this case, an economic growth rate of 5 to 7% p.a. could even be expected.

However, one should not cherish too many illusions: it will certainly take some time for people to feel the positive effects of the reforms - after all, the reform process is taking

place “under most difficult conditions”. “In five years the social change in the Ukraine will have advanced considerably.” At any rate, one should not apply double standards: even here in Germany, large reform projects require more than one legislative period to become effective.

Some interview partners regard international pressure as “a guarantor of continued reforms” - this also applies to the political class which, despite its own interests, largely fulfils the demands of the international creditors. “At this point, the current political decision makers fundamentally differ from the previous governments of the past ten years.”

However, a young political adviser from Berlin thinks that the Ukrainian government should “connect the association- and reform processes more intelligently.” “In my view, these two processes could ‘cross-fertilize’ each other much more effectively. After all, the government bears “a huge responsibility: it has to show that it seriously wants to implement a political reform process.”

Economically, a sleeping giant

In particular, the basic optimism of the interviewees is backed up by the Ukraine’s great economic potential. According to our discussion partners, both the natural conditions and the educational level of the population justify hopes for a prosperous future - provided that the necessary framework will be set up. An expert on Eastern Europe from Berlin thinks that the Ukraine could become a model for other post-Soviet countries if she succeeds “in establishing a progressive political system and in building a modern economy.”

To achieve this, however, a further stabilization of the country’s security situation is necessary along with more progress in setting up constitutionality, a young political adviser from Munich remarks: “The economic development is extremely dependent on the Ukraine’s stability. As soon as the security situation is under control along with the advent of constitutionality, there will be great potentials for the Ukraine.”

It is the access to the EU-market, in particular, which could open up new opportunities

for the Ukraine to create added value, says a young academic from Berlin. With regard to some individual economic sectors, the Ukrainian economy has quickly exhausted the trading quota of the EU-Association Agreement; meanwhile, about 40% of the Ukraine's exports go into the EU.

However, these exports are still restricted to raw material - a restriction which brings about a certain kind of dependency, a young political analyst from Berlin knows. If the Ukrainian economy invests more into the processing of raw material, "it could export much more into the EU." At the moment, however, any further creation of added value is hampered by a lack of (foreign) investment. The reason for the absence of investment capital appears to be obvious, many observers think: "Without any constitutionality, no foreign investment capital will be forthcoming." The Ukrainian economy is not attractive enough for foreign investors, because it is non-transparent, insufficiently regulated and characterized by unfair competition.

"As long as the Ukraine cannot guarantee the

„Die Wirtschaftsentwicklung ist hochgradig abhängig von einer stabilen Lage in der Ukraine. Sobald die Sicherheitssituation beherrschbar wird und Rechtsstaatlichkeit einkehrt, wird es für die Ukraine großartige Potenziale geben.“ (699)

„Schaut man sich in der Ukraine um, fällt einem schnell ins Auge, wie strukturschwach das Land ist und wie marode ein Großteil der Betriebe.“ (866)

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property rights of entrepreneurs and investors, she will not be able to progress economically and develop her potential,” a political adviser from Berlin remarks. Only when a “horizontal economic structure” is developed, the middle class will have better opportunities, an economic expert from Berlin believes. As soon as this structure is achieved, “many issues of corruption” will disappear, too. Owing to these deficits, the Ukrainian capital markets are presently dominated by speculators - “fast in, fast out.”

It should be a strategy to count on the cooperation with medium-size enterprises - in agriculture, in the IT- and service sector. With small and medium-size entrepreneurs, cooperation proves much easier than with complex structures, an expert on Eastern Europe from Berlin knows.

The Ukrainian agricultural sector, for instance, is “highly interesting” and promising, says a representative from private business. Whoever invests in this sector without making a profit, “only has to blame himself.” The Ukraine has a strong, export-oriented agricultural sector.

However, the businesses are frequently so old and ramshackle, that they are not internationally competitive. Just like in former Eastern Germany, large businesses have to be converted into small ones so that they can operate more efficiently, an academic expert on Eastern Europe from Hamburg believes.

The structural weakness of the rural regions is considered another obstacle on the way to modernizing the agricultural production. Plus the lack of regulation - e.g. with regard to land acquisition. Admittedly, you can lease land in the Ukraine, but you cannot buy it easily. Which also means that any space which is agriculturally cultivated cannot be lent on mortgage - a factor which would be conducive to the development of the agricultural sector, says an academic discussion partner. Without any sensible regulation of the land law, the Ukrainian agriculture will hardly be able to develop, another interview partner in his sixties adds.

As far as the consumer goods market is concerned, the Ukrainian economy still has a long way to go. Ukrainian products do not have a good reputation, a young analyst from Munich

reports. The people in the Ukraine prefer to buy Western goods. In Germany, too, the label “Made in Ukraine” is fairly unknown and must be better positioned, a discussion partner from Berlin’s NGO-scene believes.

Nevertheless, the Ukrainian economy has a great potential: e.g. with regard to IT-services, tourism, building- and energy efficiency or renewable energies. “However, the oligarchs are not interested in improving it”, an academic expert on the Ukraine believes. “For it would be the oligarchs themselves who could lose everything through liberalization and social change; they could even be brought to justice.” Not even the strongest opposition has so far been able to cope with this.

Thus, the economy finds itself in an increasingly difficult situation again. In some areas, one could talk about “chaotic conditions”, a young economist from Berlin reports - adding: “We believe that this is due to the dwindling impact of the reform forces.”

Young people - a potential for the Ukraine’s future

The discussions have made it quite clear that the young generation, most of all, cherishes a vision of the “new Ukraine”. This generation is ready to invest its creativity and ability in their country. Mostly born and socialized after the collapse of the Soviet Union, these reformers do not belong to the post-Soviet cohorts any more. Therefore, many discussion partners regard the young generation as a particular potential for the country’s social change.

“The young Ukrainians’ enthusiasm for Europe, for democracy, for art and culture is overwhelm-

„Die Ukraine hat großes Potenzial; denken Sie nur an den Tourismus. Aber, die Oligarchen haben kein Interesse, es zu heben. Sie sind es, die durch eine Öffnung und gesellschaftlichen Wandel alles verlieren und womöglich vor Gericht gestellt würden. Keine noch so starke Opposition ist bislang dagegen angekommen.“ (538)

ing”, a middle-aged academic knows from his own experience. “We should count on this human capital,” he says. An expert on Eastern Europe from Hamburg also strikes an optimistic note. There are many people who want to bring about change.

However, the biggest obstacles for a quicker progress are the old post-Soviet apparatchiks who still dominate the administration. “If no professional people are available”, he says laconically, “you just have to carry on with the old ones.” Other discussion partners have had better experiences. “In our daily cooperation with the administration, we had to do with highly qualified and very able people,” said a young political adviser from Berlin. “We have encountered very young and dynamic persons.” All in all, there is a divided impression which indicates that changes are visible in some places while there is deadlock in others.

Despite their divided experience, young people do not say any longer: “Let’s quit!” They prefer to stay wanting to have an active share in creating a new society,” a politician from Berlin believes. “In their view, Kiev is the

„Das größte Potenzial der Ukraine sind die Menschen. In der Ukraine gibt es unglaublich viele gut ausgebildete, hoch qualifizierte Leute in verschiedenen Bereichen, die ganz viel können, machen, die total wach sind, sich orientieren.“ (348)

„Die jungen Leute in der Ukraine sind teilweise gut ausgebildet, interkulturell kompetent, können Fremdsprachen. Ich sehe eine wirkliche Mentalitätsveränderung. Die junge Generation ist offen und aufrichtig, sie sucht nach Zugängen zu neuem Wissen und kümmert sich um den Erhalt der Umwelt.“ (787)

very place to be” - this constitutes a difference between the current situation and the sclerotic end of the Janukowytch-era. A perception which is not unanimously shared - as illustrated by the enquiry about migration (see section below).

What is regarded as an essential neglect on the part of the reformers is their failure to transform a revolutionary movement into a political one which would be capable of carrying out successful parliamentary work. The young people will have to professionalize themselves and to “re-invent politics”. This will be their “only short-term opportunity” to make the reconstruction of the Ukrainian society a success.

On behalf of many discussion partners, an artist from Berlin articulates her hope for the country: “I would like to see the development of new perspectives for the Ukrainians in their own country with people assuming more self-responsibility”, says the woman in her mid-fifties. Most of all, however, she hopes that the people want to stay in their own country.

Staying or leaving?

As a matter of fact, the exodus of well-qualified people (“brain-drain”) represents one of the greatest dangers for the country’s reform- and modernization efforts. It resembles a vicious circle: the more the reform process loses its momentum, the more the well-qualified people prefer to seek their fortune abroad. This brain-drain deprives the reform movement of important know-how and political energy; consequently, the innovation process gradually loses momentum.

“Migration is a big problem,” the representative of the economy knows. Each year, half a million well qualified people leave the country.” These people are tired of their own country - tired of corruption, low wages and a lack of constitutionality. A problem which is steadily increasing, a young academic reports. “I happen to know a number of good Ukrainian academics, but none of them wants to stay in the Ukraine for good.”

This tendency to migrate also makes itself felt in the administration, because well qualified administration staff faces many opportunities

to make a career - “especially with international organizations.” “The growing lack of personnel within the administration is becoming a real problem for the implementation of the reforms”, a young expert on the Ukraine from Berlin reports.

This is why some of our discussion partners regard the recent EU-visa-facilitation as a “Greek gift.” For it is exactly these visa-facilitations which will increase the exodus of young people - “similar to what we witnessed in the new federal states [Bundesländer] after the German reunification”, a media professional from Berlin believes.

On the other hand, contrary to many expectations, one does not perceive any wave of return on the part of the Ukrainian diaspora. Whoever has “managed to grab” a German passport, stays in Germany. “To silence one’s conscience, money is sent to war widows”, a journalist adds with a touch of cynicism.

According to a middle-aged academic from Berlin, the brain drain can only be contained by a double strategy in the long run: on the

„Toll ist, dass die Ukraine Reisefreiheit hat. Man muss nur aufpassen, dass gute Leute das Land nicht langfristig verlassen.“ (511)

one hand, massive investment must be made into the education system in order to provide the necessary expertise for the Ukraine's renewal and modernization; on the other hand, the Ukraine has to change fast enough to guarantee job opportunities for those well qualified people which would meet their expectations.

Even though the majority of our discussion partners seem to perceive an ongoing brain drain, others report a "homecomer-phenomenon". In the past years, many Ukrainians

worked in the West and, having saved some money, "would like to return to the Ukraine in order to open up small hotels or restaurants", an expert on Eastern Europe from political Berlin reports. And an associate of the Berlin Think Tank adds: "What I find surprising is that well qualified Ukrainians who have studied in America or Western Europe wish to return to the Ukraine, although they would enjoy better opportunities abroad."

Internal migration and Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)

As a result of the war in the Donbass, there are around 1,5 million internally displaced persons (internal expellees) – an issue which, in the perception of some interviewees, “tends to be neglected” in Germany.

After all, internal migration represents “an enormous challenge for both the state and the population” – families would be torn apart and people would have to be integrated into a new environment. Some observers even talk of a “population exchange.”

Precisely because the issue of internally displaced persons is an additional political, social and financial challenge for the country, it must be highlighted more clearly in the external communication, an academic from Berlin believes.

In Kharkov alone, the second-largest Ukrainian city with around 1,5 million inhabitants, ca. 200.000 internally displaced persons from the war zones have been received. According to a political analyst, Kharkov has thus made “an unprecedented integration effort” – with small resources and “without any lamenting. Here in Germany, we could learn a lot from this attitude”, he thinks.

And a middle-aged journalist adds: “Western Europe hardly realizes the additional burden which the Ukraine, apart from the war and the economic crisis, has to bear due to the large number of internally displaced persons.” She is “quite impressed how the Ukraine is handling this challenge.” And a young political adviser from Berlin points out that “despite such large numbers there have been no social problems. You really have to say”, says the young man, visibly impressed, “that the Ukrainians are as thick as thieves in this situation.”

In the opinion of an almost thirty-year old interviewee, internal migration and labour migration represent issues which connect the Ukraine with other European countries. He believes that the issue of migration could serve as a starting point “to talk about similar challenges, but different experiences and attitudes.” For, if the Ukraine should not develop into the desired direction, a completely different scenario would be conceivable – already today, this is perceived in Germany as a worst-case-scenario: according to such a scenario, internal migrants would become refugees migrating to Western Europe. ■

Appendices

About the methodology of this study

The study “The Ukraine through the eyes of Germany” represents an explorative research project with a quantitative-empirical approach, i.e. the study does not proceed from existing hypotheses or theories, but it searches openly for any findable phenomena and patterns. The search itself takes place within a corpus of statements which have been collected previously through personal interviews.

This approach, then, basically differs from the traditional opinion polls which are often quantitatively oriented. There, most of all, the distribution of characteristics (here: opinions) within a relevant group of interviewees (basic population, population) is to be determined. This rarely happens by a full survey where all the members of a basic population are interviewed, but typically by random sampling which is organized according to certain principles (e.g. randomization) to ensure statistical representativity. For only then it is possible to draw reliable conclusions from a small random sampling to the basic population (which is mostly much bigger).

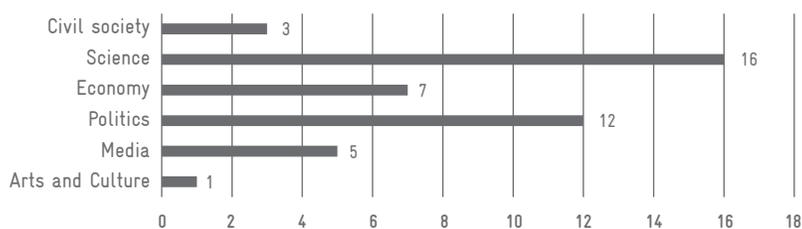
With regard to our chosen approach, however, such statistical conclusions can only be applied to a limited extent. On the contrary: this is one of the limitations of the chosen research approach. Instead, the chosen approach aims to select discussion partners who are suitable for the overall objective, paying attention to their specific ability to focus on a particular object of observation to be used for the collection of empirical findings. In our case, the object of observation is the Ukraine, and, therefore, the suitable discussion partners are experts on the Ukraine living in Germany.

The selection of the interview partners followed the usual principles of qualitative research for the selective case sampling (theoretical sampling). The setup of discussion partners was based on the GIZ's broad network in Germany and in the Ukraine. Particular attention was paid to the fact that there was no direct dependency between the discussion partners and the GIZ.

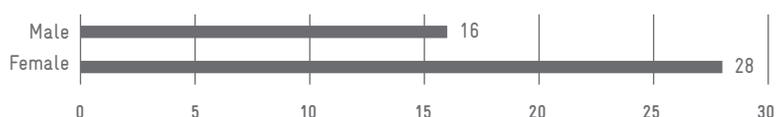
To meet the standards of the study objective, an expert knowledge of the Ukraine was the decisive selection criterion. Apart from the participants' observation skills and power of speech, further criteria included relevance, substance and diversity: relevance refers to the occupation with those topics which dominate the social discourse at the moment and which bear a particular meaning for as many target groups as possible; substance refers to a sufficiently deep and appraising consideration of the questions; diversity refers to a satisfactory range of topics in order to be able to offer a comprehensive overall picture as far as possible.

With regard to the selection of discussion partners, additional selection criteria were used, such as sex, age and the social occupation of the interviewees. Likewise, attention was paid to the criterion that, ideally, the selection should muster decision makers from the middle and higher (but deliberately not from the highest) hierarchical levels. Thus, 44 discussion partners could be identified. The final setup of the interviewee-samples took care to ensure a good distribution of the selection criteria mentioned above. The ultimate distribution according to social criteria can be read from the following graphics:

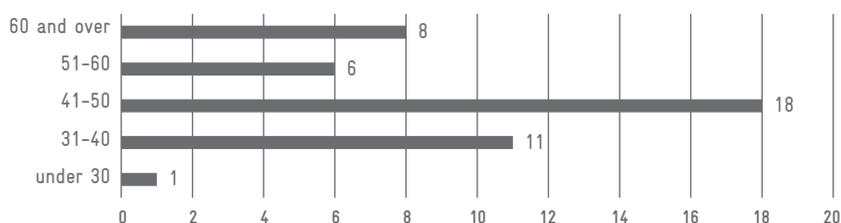
Interviewees according to areas of society (n=44)



Interviewees according to sex (n=44)



Interviewees according to age groups (n=44)



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The interviewees came from different social areas: e.g. from politics, economy, science, culture and civil society - the last two groups being slightly under-represented. 28 (64%) discussions were conducted with male partners and 16 (36%) discussions with female partners. As regards the age-groups, an appropriate distribution was reached, even though the age-bracket “under 30” is under-represented. The fact that 41 discussion partners (93% of the interviewees) had an expert (or near-expert) knowledge of the Ukraine, corresponds with the study’s intention. However, at this planning stage, too, we ensured a wider range of distribution in that persons were asked for their assessment whose connection with the Ukraine was less intense or indirect (3 persons, 7%).

Overall, a satisfactory case contrasting was reached and, thus, the largest possible diversity of perspectives on the Ukraine was ensured.

The collection of data in personal interviews

To collect the perceptions of the selected persons, personal interviews were conducted, each of them lasting around 90 minutes. In the interviews, a semi-structured method was used. Apart from a certain number of guiding questions in the opening and closing stages of the discussions, the participants were offered a pool of topics they could choose from. On the one hand, this method made sure that topics from everyday life could be chosen, while, on

the other hand, the interviewees could answer questions which invited them to call up their profound knowledge.

Importance was also placed on the flow of the interview which is oriented by the interviewee's natural narrative, carefully supported by the interviewers without interfering with the direction of the narrative or even contribute any pictures of their own.

In the foreground of this approach, there is the element of comprehension and understanding of the interviewees' individual perspectives revealing the pictures of the Ukraine in the background. In order to establish the theoretical disposition and uniformity in the practical implementation necessary for this approach, all the interviewers were trained accordingly prior to the survey, the same set of interview-material (master sheet, theme maps etc.) was used by everyone, and the same procedure was adhered to.

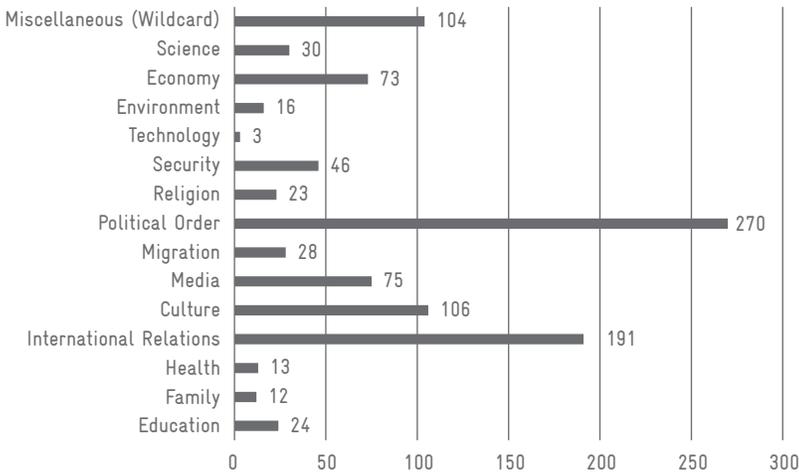
Each individual interview started with an open stage leaving room for free associations and pictures about the Ukraine. In the second stage, the interviewees were given the chance to choose unrestrictedly from a range of fourteen topics (plus an option called "miscellaneous"). These fourteen topics in the core section of the interview were chosen in such a way that all the essential functional areas of the society as well as all relevant cross-sectional material (e.g. migration) would be represented. In the closing stage (which was kept open again), the interviewees were asked to draw a substantial conclusion and to talk about their future expectations and recommendations.

The topics (and their short titles) which were offered to the participants were guided by the intention - despite the inevitable shortcoming of partial overlapping - to present clear and distinct categories and to use a terminology equally valid for German and Ukrainian contexts. Finally, up-to-date cross-sectional topics were presented for the enquiry (e.g. corruption, war, the Crimea), because they appear to be particularly relevant to the Ukraine's external perception on account of the current socio-political development.

As expected, the chosen topics have collected a large number of different statements. Although certain conclusions can be drawn from them, any interpretation should be attempted with great caution owing to the pseudo-statistical character of this qualitative survey. At any rate, it may suffice to mention the conspicuous clustering in the areas of "Political Order" and "International Relations" which can be regarded as an indication of a changed perception of the Ukraine since the Euromaidan, the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the war in the Donbass. As the given study design does not focus primarily on the clustering, but on the substantial quality of the statements, we have dispensed with a description of the frequency distribution of the statements.

There were no literal transcriptions subsequent to the discussions. Instead, all team members were asked to document the core statements which had already been substantially condensed. The documentation took place on a pre-structured evaluation sheet which provided a direct allocation to one of the fourteen topics (see table) as well as a coordination according to the types of statement (e.g. description, strength, weakness, recommendation etc.).

Statements according to fields of observation (n=1011)



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Evaluation of collected data

Looking at the most important parameters of the survey provides a good starting point to the description of the evaluation process. Between September and November 2017, altogether 44 interviews took place in Germany. Given a total number of 1014 collected core statements, there is an average number of around 23 core statements per interview.

Thanks to a good case contrasting and a sufficient number of interviewees, this assessment represents a reasonable data saturation level. Studies of a similar kind - such as the three GIZ studies on Germany - have repeatedly shown that an increase of data hardly results in new insights.

In this explorative study which was not theory-

driven, the main task of the data evaluation was (a) to examine statements from different perspectives and from different social sectors with a focus on the given phenomena-descriptions, (b) to join any statements with a reference to the same phenomenon, and (c) to relate the described facets in the best possible way in order to compose an overall picture. In simplified terms, the basic sequence of steps had the following structure:

1. Determining and examining the source material (corpus)
2. Determining the direction and the process of the analysis
3. Structuring and generalizing the data
4. Formulating the relevant hypotheses

5. Interpreting and reviewing the results

The 1014 core statements from the interviews constituted the basic reference material made available to the evaluation team (i.e. all interviewers for reasons of reference to the development context) in the form of index cards and lists.

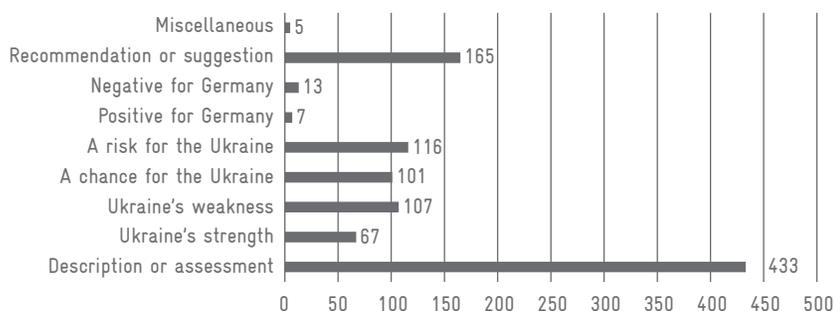
Direction and process of the analysis were oriented by the qualitative objective of the study. The focus remained on the identification of the most conspicuous and most interesting phenomena with regard to the picture of the

Ukraine. Thus, the aim was not to develop the description of a single phenomenon (the picture of the Ukraine), but - initially free of any prescribed search criteria and thought structures - to search for statements which could be joined with other statements because of their substantial affinity.

At any rate, it is important to distinguish between the different types of statements - whether it is a mere description, an assessment or even a recommendation. According to such categories, the total distribution of core statements reads as follows:

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Statements according to type of statement (n=1044)



In the central step of analysis, the resulting patterns were accumulated further, until the relevant data material had exhausted itself at the relevant point. In turn, the ensuing statement-clusters were subsequently assembled into a total picture. Hereby, we did not generalize statistically, i.e. we did not draw any basic conclusions from the random sample (sample-to-population), but we generalized analytically. With regard to analytical gener-

alization, specific phenomena (made visible from individual cases) are used to work out concepts - by means of inductive inference, abstraction and confirmatory evidence - which are believed to have a broader significance. To a certain extent, case-to-case transferability has also played a role. Case-to-case transferability is a form of generalization where - by means of a similarity between personal characteristics (e.g. young cultural professionals) or other

contextual factors (e.g. space, time, environment etc.) - inferences can be drawn from an individual case about another case or a group. Given this kind of structure, the data material represents the starting point for further processing.

The formulation of hypotheses constituted the fourth, result-oriented step of the evaluation. Here, the pre-structured material was examined in-depth and hypothesis-like summaries in the form of short texts were compiled which, ultimately, were made available for further editorial elaboration.

It should be pointed out at this stage that generalization and the formation of hypotheses in the context of qualitative studies have to bear and answer two essential questions: Are the assumptions sufficiently founded by the data material? Would a repetition of the analysis or a repetition with other analysts obtain the same results? What is meant here is the risk of premature and unverified conclusions (to stop at the "aha-moment") which can occur when the reflective process is terminated at one's convenience and not as a result of theoretical saturation. What should also be excluded as much as possible is the frequent disposition to develop enthusiasm (based on personal bias) for artificially constructed relationships or contexts. After all, even comprehensive qualitative studies do not yield sufficiently differentiated context information to allow for case transferability.

Therefore, the interpretation and the examination of the results were carried out on several levels: On the one hand, the obtained results were subjected to a critical substantial appraisal already during the preparatory and evaluation

workshops. On the other hand, the compilation of the study report repeatedly resorted to the raw material in order to examine any formulated assumptions and to specify them further if necessary.

Finally, when drawing up the text of the study, it was carefully observed that the conclusions and hypotheses offered in this study were not represented as objective truths, but as incentives or food for thought to stimulate the readers' own interpretations and inferences. This study report is the result of our endeavour.

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