

Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity 2013–2014: Origins, Progress, and Impact on Society

Volodymyr Kotsiuk¹, Liudmyla Hutsalo², Ihor Hryhorchak³, Anastasiia Havrysh⁴, Olena Stadnyk⁵

¹Department of Social and Humanitarian Training, Faculty of Management, Entrepreneurship and Law, Khmelnytskyi Cooperative Trade and Economic Institute, Khmelnytskyi, Ukraine.

²Department of World History, Faculty of History, Zhytomyr Ivan Franko State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine.

³Department of Social and Humanitarian Disciplines, PHEE "European University", Kyiv, Ukraine.

⁴Department of National Security, Public Administration and Management, Zhytomyr Polytechnic State University, Zhytomyr, Ukraine.

⁵Department of History of Ukraine, Faculty of History, Vinnytsia State Pedagogical University named after M. Kotsiubynskyi, Vinnytsia, Ukraine.

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ABSTRACT

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Introduction: The analysis of the Euromaidan (Revolution of Dignity) events will remain relevant for a long time, both from a scientific and applied point of view. It was the events of November 2013 – February 2014 that laid the foundations for real, not just declared, reforms in Ukraine, shaped the modern Ukrainian nation and identity and demonstrated to the world the aspirations and capacity of the Ukrainian people to be subjective in history, present and future.

Objectives: The aim of the article is to analyse the unity of the milestone revolutionary events in the modern history of Ukraine, focusing on the Revolution of Dignity as a revolution of values and historical and cultural subjectivity of Ukrainians.

Methods: The methodological basis of the article is the method of critical analysis of scientific literature, the historical and comparative method, and the methods of analysis and synthesis.

Results: The main reasons for the revolutionary events were the usurpation of power by former President Viktor Yanukovich and his subsequent refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. This violation of the aspirations of the Ukrainian people caused a natural wave of protest that grew into the Revolution of Dignity. The Euromaidan was an expression of the will of the Ukrainian people regarding values, freedom of choice, dignity, respect for human beings, and the ability to express their opinions freely. Initially, it was Euromaidan itself which united student and civic activists. The authorities' violent actions against the protesters led to the growth of revolutionary sentiment and brought people to the streets to protest. Adopting dictatorial laws on January 16 2014, only intensified the popular resistance. The storming of Euromaidan by the security forces and the shooting of people on 18-22 February 2014 (the Heavenly Hundred) turned Euromaidan into a Revolution of Dignity. The Euromaidan events unfolded across Ukraine, involving around 10 million people directly or indirectly participating in the protests.

Conclusions: This massive scale and scope of protests demonstrated the powerful potential of Ukrainian society for genuine renewal, the development of civil society, and the readiness to defend its values, even in the face of an arduous struggle and external threats from the Russian Federation.

Keywords: European integration, Euromaidan, Orange Revolution, Revolution of Dignity, Revolution on Granite, Russian-Ukrainian war, values.

INTRODUCTION

The Maidan Nezalezhnosti in Kyiv has repeatedly become a place where Ukrainians have defended their values and sought to uphold the right to democracy and sovereign development [1, 2, 3]. The first such protests in the modern history of Ukraine took place in October 1990 and went down in history as the Revolution on Granite [4, 5]. The

Revolution on Granite significantly changed the vector of the USSR's development and became one of the catalysts for its collapse in 1991 [6, 7]. After the restoration of state independence in August 1991, two more milestone events took place in Ukraine, which determined the further vector of development of Ukrainian society on the path to European integration and had a significant international resonance. These were the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan) [8]. On November 21, 2004, the Orange Revolution [9] began in Ukraine against electoral fraud, followed nine years later by the Revolution of Dignity. Each was a step towards Ukrainians' realisation of the power of unity in the struggle for a better future and democratic state development.

Moreover, today, as the Russian-Ukrainian war continues, it is essential to note that in the struggle for democratic development and pro-European transformation in Ukraine, the role of active young people has always been and remains very high. This is evidenced by the events of the Revolution on Granite, where the driving force was student youth. The younger generation also became active participants in both the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity, defending the values for which the generation of the Revolution on Granite once fought [10, p. 69].

These events have primarily shaped the following decades, as Ukraine underwent democratic transformation and reform, moved closer to joining the European Union. On November 21 2013, the first pro-European protests began in Kyiv after the government of Prime Minister Mykola Azarov announced the suspension of preparations for the signing of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. On November 30, there was a bloody attempt to disperse the Maidan. On December 3, the opposition attempted to dismiss the Cabinet of Ministers. However, the Verkhovna Rada did not support this proposal. On January 22 2014, Mykola Azarov called the participants in the peaceful protests on Maidan "terrorists", and on January 28, he resigned as head of government and fled abroad. Former Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich also fled abroad [11].

Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century. Ukraine faced challenges that shattered its internal unity. The political process at the time, full of contradictions and power struggles, laid the groundwork for future upheavals. The first major test was the fraudulent presidential election of 2004, which sparked mass protests known as the Orange Revolution. The revolutionaries' victory gave the Ukrainian people hope for qualitative changes in all spheres of life. However, the inability of Viktor Yushchenko's team to deliver on its promises led to disappointment and the accumulation of new contradictions [12, 13, 14]. However, Yanukovich's rule failed to solve old problems and exacerbated existing ones, ultimately leading to the Euromaidan (Revolution of Dignity). The analysis of the preconditions and causes, the course of the main events and the results of the Euromaidan remains relevant for Ukrainian society, as it became one of the critical events in the modern history of Ukraine and determined the future course of the state and its vision of external development. Understanding and studying these factors will contribute to a better understanding of modern Ukraine's political, economic, social and cultural context, its place in the new geopolitical realities and the development of a new global security architecture.

LITERATURE REVIEW

When studying the historical and political context of the Revolution of Dignity, one cannot ignore the studies on the Revolution on Granite and the Orange Revolution. These events, despite being somewhat distant from each other in time, actually have a lot in common and directly demonstrate the desire of the Ukrainian people to express their will through peaceful assembly and intolerance of the usurpation of power by political elites and attempts to legitimise authoritarian methods of governance and negative external influences. Therefore, we relied on the work of scholars who analysed the events of the Revolution of Dignity, the Revolution on Granite and the Orange Revolution from different perspectives [3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14]. For a comprehensive view of the events of the Revolution of Dignity and their impact on the further development of Ukrainian society and geopolitical significance in general, it is necessary to draw on the work of domestic historians, political scientists, sociologists, cultural studies, and foreign research. This comprehensive approach to the review of scientific literature allows us to form an objective view of Euromaidan and its role in the modern history of Ukraine.

The role of civil society in democratisation processes has become a subject of scientific study for many researchers. One of the results of this analysis in the context of the topic of our article was a special issue of the Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal, where the authors consider Euromaidan as a platform where Ukrainian civil society based on values was born. Euromaidan appears not just as a place of revolutionary events, not as a physical space, but as a concentration of values: democracy, dignity, political rights and freedoms, and an awareness of individual civic

responsibility. Another essential aspect scholars emphasise is the Ukrainian nation's development on an ethnic and linguistic basis, combined with cosmopolitanism, cultural diversity and pluralism [15]. Shveda and Joung Ho Park [16] view Euromaidan as a socio-political phenomenon and a dynamic process. For Krapfl and Kühn von Burgsdorff [17], the Euromaidan events marked the birth of a new Ukraine when Ukrainians, outraged by the Yanukovych regime's rejection of the Association Agreement with the European Union, took matters into their own hands. Moreover, within a few months, Euromaidan grew into the Revolution of Dignity and formed a new civil society that also rallied around the values of self-organisation: democracy, transparency, respect for generally accepted norms and rules, and human dignity. The next ten years were a testing time, and Ukrainians reaffirmed their choice and desire to fight for it and win [17].

METHODS

In analysing the discourse of the Revolution of Dignity, we referred to the work of Ukrainian researchers and foreign scholars. The scientific literature study method gave us a general overview of the solution to this problem in the academic environment. The literature review and its systematisation formulated a vision of the topic of our article in the scientific discourse both in Ukraine and abroad. The method of critical analysis of the texts of scientific developments allowed us to formulate a vision of the role and place of the Revolution of Dignity as an integral part of modern socio-political processes in the international format.

In general, the use of the term "Revolution of Dignity" firstly records the protest movement in Ukraine not only as a process of overthrowing an authoritarian criminal regime and not only as evidence of the "European choice", i.e. Ukraine's European integration process but also as evidence of profound social and cultural transformations of Ukrainian society. Secondly, the term "revolution" refers to a long process involving both different strata of society and large areas, which once again demonstrates the scale of the changes caused by the November 2013 – February 2014 events. The historical and comparative analysis allowed us to cover the events of the Revolution on Granite and the Orange Revolution, which are links in the same chain of transformational processes in Ukraine in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which continue to this day, in the context of the existential Russian-Ukrainian war. The method of analysis and synthesis allowed us to compile a significant amount of material and present it in a convenient form of tables and conclusions.

RESULTS

The Revolution of Dignity is a complex and multifaceted historical phenomenon that has once again demonstrated the importance of the Ukrainian people uniting around shared values and the desire for freedom and liberty.

The main reason for the revolutionary events was the usurpation of power by the former Viktor Yanukovych and his subsequent refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union. Ukraine had been preparing for this document for years. Such actions by the then-head of state triggered protests that grew into Euromaidan and the Revolution of Dignity. It was not a protest against political abuse or economic demands. The Euromaidan was an expression of the will of the Ukrainian people to have freedom of values and choice, dignity, respect for human beings, and the opportunity to freely express their ideas and aspirations in a democratic state among European countries. The Revolution of Dignity was preceded by a series of smaller protests caused by the actions of the Yanukovych regime: Tax Maidan in 2010, Chornobyl Maidan in 2011 and Language Maidan in 2012. In addition, the outcome of the Orange Revolution and the disillusionment of many participants in the revolutionary events and society at large contributed to the growth of revolutionary sentiment.

A comprehensive assessment of these events and their consequences remains to be made by our descendants. However, several key aspects can be identified that have influenced the life of Ukrainian society:

- *Political system:* There has been a shift from authoritarian rule and establishing democratic development principles. Power has also been decentralised, and local self-government has been strengthened. However, the high corruption and inefficiency of many state institutions largely offset these achievements of the Revolution of Dignity.
- *Social sphere:* Ukraine has experienced increased civic engagement and unprecedented volunteerism. However, the country's economic situation has deteriorated due to Russian armed aggression and a full-scale war, which has negatively impacted social stability and the living standards of the Ukrainian population, as well as increased emigration.

- *International relations*: rapprochement with the European Union and practical steps towards full European integration; strengthening Ukraine's presence in the international arena. However, at the same time, Ukraine's dependence on external support – financial, material, military, and humanitarian – has increased dramatically. In addition, Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine has had a dramatic negative impact on all spheres of life and the country's infrastructure.
- *Historical and cultural significance*: strengthening the processes of national, cultural, and historical self-identification and representation; attention to the Ukrainian language, history, culture, religion, and cultural heritage.

Although, as already mentioned, the results of such large-scale shifts in society and politics as a revolution become apparent only after a considerable period, we can more precisely identify some of the apparent achievements of the Revolution of Dignity (Table 1).

Table 1. Achievements of the Revolution of Dignity and Their Significance

Achievements of the Revolution of Dignity	Interpretation
Removal of authoritarian power, return to democracy	Yanukovych's policies and overt orientation towards Russia have demonstrated the possibility of Ukraine turning into a dictatorship like Belarus.
Increasing the role and influence of civil society	Several reforms have been carried out: police, education, healthcare, gas and banking sectors, pension and tax reforms. Such reforms are evidence of the democratic development of the state.
Affirmation of national, historical, cultural, and religious identity.	The rapid growth of the use of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of life; a sharp decline in the number of people who perceived Russians as a "brotherly people"; the development of a state cultural policy; decommunisation processes; the establishment of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine and the receipt of the Tomos.
Ukraine's civilisational choice	The Ukrainian people have demonstrated their desire to move in line with European development, to defend their choice despite incredible human losses and with arms in hand.
Decentralisation of power and introduction of local self-government	Local self-government reform was carried out, which significantly strengthened the role of local authorities and allowed them to develop in the historical and natural forms of state formation.
Return to European integration.	Association Agreement with the EU. Having abandoned its non-aligned status, Ukraine enshrined its membership in the EU and NATO in the Constitution.
The signing of the agreement on visa-free regime between Ukraine and the EU, May 17 2017, Strasbourg	Today, the number of countries with which Ukraine has a visa-free regime is about 140.

Source: compiled based on: [18-26]

The events during the Euromaidan were so dynamic and intense that they covered different parts of Ukraine. However, many people associate the events of the Revolution of Dignity with the Mandan in Kyiv and, more broadly, with European Square, Hrushevskoho Street and the area around St Michael's Cathedral. However, there were Maidans in both significant Ukrainian cities and small towns: "It was during the Maidan that the Ukrainian nation felt the possibility of a radical turn in its destiny. Either we will go back to the Russian Empire, or we will go towards Europe, towards democracy, towards Ukraine-centrism. That is why it was a Revolution not only of dignity, not only of mutual assistance but also a stage in the struggle for the Ukrainian state. The first people to go to the front came from Maidan, the first volunteers came from Maidan. The Maidan was the source of decisive events" [27, 28].

We propose summarising the main stages of the Revolution of Dignity in Table 2.

Table 2. Critical Events of the Euromaidan (Revolution of Dignity)

Date of the event	The course of the event
November 21 – November 29, 2013	Protests were caused by the government's refusal to sign the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. These events are commonly referred to as Euromaidan. Students and civic activists were the first to take to the Maidan.

Date of the event	The course of the event
November 30, 2013 – January 18, 2014	The peaceful phase of the confrontation; the development of the Maidan movement in Kyiv and the regions. Repressive actions by law enforcement agencies. Protesters begin to seize administrative buildings. However, there are already cases of murders of Maidan supporters under unclear circumstances. Violent dispersal of protesters.
January 19-29, 2014	On January 16, 2014, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted several laws that significantly restricted the freedoms of citizens, while increasing the powers of law enforcement agencies. The first protesters were killed on Hrushevskoho Street in Kyiv.
January 30 – February 17, 2014	Escalation of violent confrontation. The protesters vacated some of Kyiv's administrative buildings.
February 18-20, 2014	The final wave of violent confrontation. The use of firearms against the revolutionaries. The number of people killed on Maidan exceeds 100 (the Heavenly Hundred).
February 22, 2014	Yanukovych fled Ukraine. The Verkhovna Rada supported the resolution "On the self-removal of the President of Ukraine from exercising constitutional powers." Early presidential elections were scheduled for May 25, 2014. O. Turchynov became the acting President and Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada.

Source: compiled based on: [27-31]

At the same time, the Russian Federation, led by dictator Putin, realising that the victory of the Revolution of Dignity meant the loss of Ukraine and, therefore, the destruction of all plans for the quick and painless reincarnation of the USSR, launched a hybrid war against Ukraine. It began with the armed seizure of Crimea, its occupation and annexation. The Russian occupiers also launched hostilities in eastern Ukraine, in parts of the Luhansk and Donetsk regions, having previously made considerable efforts to foster separatist and anti-Ukrainian sentiment.

According to a sociological survey by the Democratic Initiatives Foundation, about 10 million people (every fifth adult citizen of Ukraine) participated in the Euromaidan events, directly or indirectly. In Kyiv, 5% of the population took part in these events. In other settlements, this figure was about 6% of the population. 9% supported the protesters with food and warm clothes and allocated funds for their immediate needs. Political parties and NGOs were also present on Maidan: "Batkivshchyna, UDAR, Svoboda, Civic Position, Democratic Alliance, KUN, URP, "For Ukraine!", "European Party"; "Right Sector", "Civil Sector of Maidan", "Common Cause", "Power of People", Student Coordination Council, Afghanistan Veterans Union, NGO "Ukrainian Modern Cossacks", association "Not Evil Maidan", organisation "Volya", Civic Operational Headquarters, "Vidsich", NGO "Ukrainian Alternative", Parents' Committee, UNSO (Shukhevych), "Automaidan", "Plast" and others [32]. This massive movement disproved the idea that Ukrainians had not yet recovered from the Orange Revolution and could not resist or fight for their values.

DISCUSSION

According to Codogni [4], many events in human history have attracted researchers' attention to their development. Among them are wars, armed conflicts, uprisings, and some non-violent actions that significantly impacted further historical stages. The research includes Mahatma Gandhi's Salt March in March-April 1930 in India [33]; American anti-racist campaigns [34]; the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 [35]. On the other side of the timeline are events that, due to various circumstances, remain out of the attention of researchers and analysts for some time, or are forgotten altogether. However, when circumstances change, they are once again the focus of attention. Codogni [4] points out that one of these events was the Revolution on Granite in Ukraine in October 1990. With their peaceful action, the participants (mostly students from Kyiv and Lviv) tried to put pressure on the then-government of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR). The students put forward five demands to the government:

- Early dissolution of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine and new multi-party elections in the autumn of 1991;
- Resignation of Vitaliy Masol, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Ukraine;
- Adoption of a law on the nationalisation of the property of the Communist Party and Komsomol;

- preventing the signing of a new union treaty;
- return to Ukraine of military personnel who served outside the country and ensure that future conscripts serve in the republic's territory [36].

The end of this protest, with the resignation of Vitaliy Masol, demonstrated for the first time in decades that Ukrainians were capable of openly challenging the Soviet regime and the communist government and getting their way. This had far-reaching symbolic and political implications, as researchers have repeatedly emphasised when studying revolutionary uprisings in Ukraine [4, 8, 9, 10, 14, 35]. The Revolution on Granite was necessary as a significant step towards restoring Ukraine's state independence; secondly, it became the prototype of subsequent Ukrainian revolutions and a harbinger of future events on the Maidan – first in 2004 and then in 2013–2014. After all, without mentioning the Revolution on Granite, the idea of further causal links between the revolutionary protests in Ukraine will be incomplete and one-sided.

The main impetus for the Revolution of Dignity and the political activism of many Ukrainian citizens was the attempt by the regime of former President Viktor Yanukovych and his clique to abruptly curtail Ukraine's European integration movement and direct its entire policy towards subordination to the Russian Federation, as well as the intensification of political oppression and systematic violations of people's rights and freedoms, and failures in social and economic policy. The events of Euromaidan were the culmination of the people's protest against the usurper president: Tax Maidan in 2010 [37], Chornobyl Maidan in 2011 [38], Language Maidan in 2012 [39].

The Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity were uprisings of popular power in Ukraine and defining milestones in the country's post-Soviet path towards full European integration, international subjectivity, and the development of civil society. The impact of these developments on the broader geographic region and the historical and political landscape has yet to be fully assessed. Few events in modern European history have been so distorted. Euromaidan is one of Russia's favourite themes in information warfare against Ukraine. Throughout the years since Euromaidan, Russian propagandists at all levels have been spreading false narratives about the Revolution of Dignity to whitewash their anti-democratic reputation and justify the occupation and annexation of Crimea and the outbreak of war in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions of Ukraine, followed by a full-scale invasion [8].

The Revolution of Dignity had global implications, many of which are still being realised. When former President Viktor Yanukovych and his government did not dare to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013, they signalled a turn towards further integration with Russia and, in the long run, its absorption of Ukraine. In particular, this can be seen in the financial assistance package and the long-term form of the Eurasian Customs Union. Ever since coming to power in 1999, one of the main goals of Russian President Vladimir Putin has been to revive the USSR by bringing back almost all the former republics that have already become sovereign states. Moreover, Ukraine was to play a unique role in this reincarnation of the USSR. In particular, Russia waged a decisive information war against the Baltic states on the eve of their accession to the EU in 2004. The fact that Yanukovych met with Putin in Sochi on the eve of signing the EU Association Agreement is yet another confirmation that Ukraine would have remained a sovereign state only on paper. Thus, the armed aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine since February 2014 is not only a war against the Revolution of Dignity, but much more broadly, it is a war against the achievements of Ukrainians on the Maidan that changed Europe and the world [17].

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February, 2022 finally shook many Western leaders into realising what was really at stake. Even though in 2014, the democratic world condemned Russia's actions regarding the occupation and annexation of Crimea and the escalation of the armed conflict in Donbas. It even imposed some sanctions against the aggressor country. However, very quickly, everyone returned to business as usual, urging Ukraine to seek compromises in its relations with Russia. Russia's large-scale war and nuclear blackmail have shown that Putin was only strengthening his power and had not abandoned the idea of armed seizure of foreign territories. Therefore, Ukraine must have the support of the civilised world in its struggle because this war is also a war against the achievements of the Revolution of Dignity and, therefore, against democracy, freedom and pluralism.

CONCLUSION

The Euromaidan Revolution of Dignity was a defining moment in the history of modern Ukraine. The Ukrainian people made a clear conscious decision that they wanted their country to develop into a fully-fledged democratic country and become a member of the EU. In the following years, Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU and received a visa-free regime, also after the full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Despite all this, Ukraine was granted EU candidate status, a historic decision.

The revolutionary events also laid the groundwork for developing a robust civil society in Ukraine and ushered in a cultural renaissance as Ukrainians began to explore their history and identity in greater depth and to pay attention to their cultural heritage. The Revolution of Dignity also contributed to the implementation of real, not just declared, reforms in Ukraine. In particular, the decentralisation of power and the development of local self-government became an important milestone. The revolutionary events also gave rise to a proper understanding of democratic values and a market economy. The Revolution of Dignity is the first post-Soviet resistance unrelated to election fraud or economic demands. It is a revolution in the struggle for values, rights, freedom and dignity. The Revolution of Dignity has become a vivid example of how civil society can unite to achieve common goals and change the country.

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