

CUP Conference Paper
Rome, September 26, 2014

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A Reflection on Democratic Citizenship. A View from Ukraine and UCU

Opening Remark

Since we were advised by the organizers of the conference to familiarize ourselves with the Charter on Education of Democratic Citizenship,¹ I did my homework and read the document. Let me share with you my little statistical data on the Charter which took me only a few minutes to collect.

Guess, how many times the word “rights” is used in the Charter, a document about six pages long? How many times, would you think, the word “dignity” is written in the same document? You are correct if you assume that the word “right” is winning this completion. You might be a bit surprised to hear that the overall result of the game is: 47 to 1.

To make things even more concerning, the single usage of the “dignity” isn’t given any prominent place in the text at all. It is rather hidden behind many other concepts in a long paragraph. By the way, the word “person” is mentioned as many times as the word “dignity” in the same text.

While the words “dignity” and “person” enjoy very little recognition in the Charter there are some words like “solidarity”, “love”, “community”, and “common good” which are not mentioned at all in the document which aims at providing guidelines for shaping education for democratic citizenship of 500 million Europeans.²

There seems to be something inadequate in the Charter’s choice of vocabulary, regardless of its noble objectives, especially for someone who reflects upon the recent phenomenon of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in trying to understand the fundamentals of democratic citizenship.

I would like to contrast the Charter with UCU Public Statement *UCU Students Stand Firm for Freedom and Dignity in Ukraine* made on December 13, 2013 at the time when the Ukrainian corrupt regime was still very powerful and in control of the country and there were no clear signs that Maidan would ever become victorious. Here’s just a short fragment of the Statement:

¹ Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/edc/Source/Charter/Charterpocket_EN.pdf

² It is also telling that the word “common” appears only twice in the Charter and only in conjunction with the word “interests”. The word “good” is written three times and always as a part of the phrase “good practice(s)”.

“The current situation in Ukraine remains serious, tense, dramatic, and unpredictable as to the immediate outcomes. And yet, there is a distinct understanding in the UCU community that this turning point in Ukrainian history is a special gift — a blessing for Ukraine and for millions of our citizens who are exercising their freedom and service to others so selflessly. Their lives will be changed forever by standing up in solidarity for their values, beliefs and their vision of Ukraine as a strong, prosperous, and moral nation.”³

Doesn't this sound as something which clearly and unambiguously points in the direction of democratic citizenship?

My Personal Entries Into Reflection

Let me continue with a description of three personally experienced episodes, which, I believe, lead us into the discussion of civic values and issues of democratic citizenship. First, I'd like to share a few lines from the letter which was emailed to me by a friend of mine, a Netherlander philosopher, Ruud Meij, on July 22, 2014, shortly after the downing of MH17 flight of Malaysia Airlines. He writes:

“These are sad days for my fellow countrymen, my friends and myself. Seven years ago Frans and I came to a sunny and vivid Lviv. And we kept coming, convinced as we were - and still are - that Lviv was the host of 'der Weltgeist'. That working on a non-corrupt City Council with a high level of integrity in Lviv was a just cause, the best we could choose. You probably remember our saying: "Where Lviv goes, Ukraine goes. Where Ukraine goes Russia goes." But we never could imagine that the price to pay would be this high. For you. But now, by a macabre twist of fate, also by us, the Dutch. In a more than superficial sense we share the same destiny.”

Amazing and moving as it may sound, it is nonetheless just a tiny personal fragment of just one relationship. But there are millions of similarly profound personal experiences, encounters, discoveries and sacrifices – born and tested by the dramatic Ukrainian events – which awakened and boosted the sense of compassion, solidarity, friendship, and mutual civic responsibility on the global scale.

My second example follows. I had a short conversation with a student of UCU Journalism School at the time of the most dramatic and tragic moments of the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity in the winter of 2014. It would be important to know that she was born after the collapse of the Soviet Union and has never, as it were, breathed the “original” soviet atmosphere. She felt herself overwhelmed with the unprecedented, as she thought, amount of lies and falsifications broadcast by the Ukrainian media controlled by Yanukovich, at that time Ukrainian president. She said, “Oh, now I understand, this must have been how media and journalists worked during the soviet time.” She certainly felt personally offended by this kind of manipulation, which violated her sense of human dignity; she was never willing to accept such treatment;

³ UCU Statement [UCU Students Stand Firm for Freedom and Dignity in Ukraine](#) made on December 13, 2013. It is worth noting that unlike any other university in Ukraine (which predominantly remained publicly silent), UCU has made 11 Public Statements during the time of the Revolution of Dignity on a variety of issues in an attempt to provide moral discernments and guidance for all people of the good will by acknowledging and encouraging civic values and civic virtues.

she felt responsibility to counteract and she did. What was most important, she was one of the hundreds of thousands who counteracted, and the corrupt regime fell down.

And finally, in July of this year, we held the 7th UCU Philosophy Summer School entitled “Forgiveness, Solidarity, and Civic Responsibility: The Ukrainian Context.” Graduate students from all over Ukraine attended, including from regions that at the time of the summer school were under the control of the terrorists supported by Russia. One of the assignments was to write 100 words every other day on the topic of the school and to discuss their mini-texts in small groups. They produced impressive and mature reflections. Let me just quote one of those 100-word pieces which, I think, so well captures the goal of civic education:

“Solidarity is the basis of any genuine community. Citizens of a community cannot have real solidarity without being responsible. If it happens, solidarity loses its significance. The most important thing for a community is forgiveness. Forgiveness is liberation from the power of evil; it is inner purification and freedom. Only those people that forgive can create a new society, especially a tolerant and decent society of happy, merciful, responsible and united people.”

Ukrainian Context: A Bird's-Eye View

Unexpectedly for many, Ukraine became a wake-up call for Europe and a reminder of the values which were shaping European identity for centuries. That something wasn't going right with Europe could be seen even from such “innocent” and “harmless” things as an increased usage of the concept of “enlargement of Europe”.

The essence of Europe and europeanness isn't about enlargement. To give you a helpful, I believe, parallel: think of Christianity. It is not about enlargement. The reason why Christianity grew in numbers and geographically wasn't because of some enlargement strategy or roadmap. It all came as a mere consequence of the life animated by faith, joy, and sacrifice. With all its difficulties, mistakes, challenges, and failures, Europe emerged through the centuries as an endeavor to transcend its boundaries by responding to the transcendent.

I think that such a sense of the transcendent and the habit of transcending itself are losing their vitality nowadays in Europe. This is why, sadly, the concept of “enlargement” becomes so much more fitting and meaningful for those who define present day European discourse.

If looking westwards from Kyiv's current vantage point, Ukraine, as I have just mentioned, is playing its role in awakening Europe. If looking eastwards from Kyiv, Ukraine is facing the huge challenge of transforming Russia.

Russia, however sadly it might be to realize, is the product of the enlargement strategy and mentality. Things like values and culture are subdued, adapted, and instrumentalized to serve the purpose of the enlargement. Even the Russian Orthodox Church has predominantly become one of the instruments in serving the imperial goal of the Russian state. In the most recent years one of the strongest supporters of Vladimir Putin, Patriarch Kirill of the Russian Orthodox Church became the most ardent promoter of the “Russian world” or the “*Russky mir*” construct which justifies Russian ideology of expansion and its aggressive application.

Thus, one should not wonder on hearing the current Russian President describing the collapse of the Soviet Union as the largest catastrophe of the 20th century. Neither fascism, nor communism, nor the holocaust, nor Ukrainian holodomor (an artificial famine orchestrated by Stalin in early thirties which took millions of lives) is mentioned by him.⁴ None of those and many other horrific, terrible, bloody, and humiliating events of the last century, wherein thousands and millions of human beings were denied their dignity and deprived of their lives, is worthy to be nominated for the greatest 20th century catastrophe in the eyes of Russian current leadership.⁵

Ukraine stands right in the middle of these two worldviews, traditions, and mentalities: one of them looks so much established and self-confident and so much molded by the respect to the rule of law that it often sees no need to remember its sources, its original vocation and aspirations; the other is so much concerned with its past (constantly carefully rewritten and adjusted to the needs of the “now”) that it can’t open itself towards the future.

In the course of the last two decades, the two worlds learned how to co-exist in a carefully balanced way with appropriately selected rhetoric of mutual interests with the exactly right injection of values and dignity talk, so that it wouldn’t become a lethal dose for their mutual interests.⁶

⁴ As early as in 2005, Putin made this statement in his annual speech to the nation (as reported by [NBC NEWS](#). “First and foremost it is worth acknowledging that the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century,” Putin said. “As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory.” Since then the idea of restoration of a great Russian empire became the strongest element of Putin’s brand which seemingly justified brutality, violence, and the wars he launched to fix the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century”. The same reasoning is manifestly present in [a speech to a joint session of the Russian parliament](#) which Putin delivered on March 18, 2014 in defending his rights to annex Crimea. An excellent analysis of this speech is done by Molly K. McKew and Gregory A. Maniatis who were advisers to Georgia’s president, Mikheil Saakashvili, and his national security adviser during and after the 2008 war with Russia. See their [article](#) in *The Washington Post*.

⁵ Edward Lucas writes in his [Testimony for Senate Foreign Relations Committee Subcommittee on European Affairs](#) on July 8, 2014 in Washington DC.: “...whereas Russia once regarded the collapse of the Soviet Union as a liberation from communism, the regime there now pushes the line, with increasing success, that it was a humiliating geopolitical defeat. That is not only factually false; it is also a tragedy for the Russian people. They overthrew the Soviet Union, under which they had suffered more than anyone else. But they have had the fruits of victory snatched away by the kleptocratic ex-KGB regime. The bread and circuses it offers are little consolation for the prize that Russians have lost: a country governed by law, freed from the shadows of empire and totalitarianism, and at peace with itself and its neighbors.”

⁶ On the role of business interests in Russia-EU relationships read Anne Applebaum article [“Russia’s message to the E.U.: Money talks”](#) in *The Washington Post*, July 25, 2014. Applebaum writes: “Russia has political influence in Europe because of the nature of Moscow’s European business counterparts and partners: very large companies, usually connected to oil and gas, that make very large donations to political parties. (...)As they began to do business in Europe in the 1990s, the Russians learned very quickly about the importance of politically connected companies. As a result, they have begun to acquire shares in more of them.” Applebaum argues in her article that in the Russian case, business interests almost always are subordinated to political interests and goals of the present Russian leadership. It remains to be seen to which extent purely business interests may create unsurpassable obstacles for the European nations to take a stance and an action regarding Russian intervention in Ukraine. As Applebaum is rightly worried: “For that matter, the wishes of the saddened, angry Dutch victims of the [Malaysia Airlines plane crash](#) may not, in the end, matter as much to the Dutch government as the views of Royal Dutch Shell, which has major investments in Russia, although I hope this doesn’t prove to be true.”

Maidan in Kyiv has changed the existing balance and challenged the language of interests by starting to speak the powerful language of values and dignity. Fr. Cyril Hovorun, an orthodox priest, captured well and described the essence of Maidan in the following few sentences:

“Moreover, the Maidan has dramatically outgrown all the Ukrainian churches in regards to values. These churches before the Maidan, and partially at its first stage, remained engaged in bilateral relations with the state, some to a greater and some to a lesser extent. Only recently have the churches started to realize and to reach for the moral heights of the Maidan. They moved beyond the general admonitions to avoid violence and began to come together in words and deeds with the values of the Maidan. They realized how close these values were to the values of Christianity, including altruism, readiness for self-sacrifice, solidarity, and so on. The Maidan in a very Christian way chose to be weak, even though it is strong in numbers and in the determination of its participants. The Maidan has adopted almost eschatological expectations that the dignity of human nature, created in the image and likeness of God, can one day be restored.”⁷

Maidan was rapidly evolving into a genuine civil society shaped by solidarity, respect of the other and civic values. Maidan’s spiritual and moral energy, and the enthusiasm of its members were reaching to millions of people in the farthest Ukrainian regions, communities and social groups. Maidan firmly stood for truth, dignity, and freedom and the power of its witness was transformative. George Weigel, who has written numerous texts on the recent Ukrainian events, offers his analysis of the phenomenon of Maidan which in some important ways complements Fr. Hovorun’s observations:

“What had begun in protest at Yanukovich's rejection of the EU became something more, something different, something nobler: a movement of national civic renewal, concerned about politics to be sure, but concerned in the first instance about a defense of human dignity in a morally-grounded renewal of public life. Established democracies often use the term "the public square" glibly, as if that essential civic space for democratic politics were, somehow, self-constituting. The people of the Maidan movement knew better. Having experienced the deep corruption of public life under the Yanukovich regime, they knew that any "public square" capable of sustaining the civil society institutions essential to democracy and free politics had to be self-consciously built on the foundation of civic virtues. Those virtues could not be taken for granted. They had to be constantly nurtured — even with personal sacrifice. Freedom, the Maidan movement reminded the world, is never free.”⁸

Maidan has frightened Russian totalitarianism to the death. Ukraine, pregnant with Maidan mentality and civic values, was perceived by Putin as an immediate and direct threat to his own future even within the confines of the present Russia not to mention his grown over the time geopolitical ambitions and appetite. This is why he decided to terminate “Ukrainian pregnancy” by annexing Crimea and invading in the Ukrainian eastern regions.

⁷ Fr. Cyril Hovorun (<http://sainteliaschurch.blogspot.it/2013/12/on-maidan-archimandrite-cyril-hovorun.html>)

⁸ George Weigel, [Maidan as a Reminder of the Forgotten Values](#), May 2014.

UCU: Educating for Freedom

One of the legacies of the Soviet time which exists until now is a practice of leading a “divided” life. While the communist ideology was gradually fading out, Ukraine was increasingly becoming more and more trapped into corrupt practices. Widespread corruption was not only undermining the country’s political, economical, legal, and social life, but foremost, it corrupted and perverted human relationships.

However while corruption and hypocrisy were steadily occupying the life of many in the post-Soviet Ukraine, the need for an authentic human life started to evolve as well.

From the very first days of UCU operations in Lviv it was absolutely clear that the transformation of the country required a healthy public space and a new quality of relationships among people. To put it in a very simple and straightforward way, Ukrainian Catholic University has seen its mission in forming and educating free persons empowered with a sensibility and respect for God-given dignity of the other. Already then it was clear to us that only a new generation of free and responsible citizens will make the societal changes and transformations irreversible and eventually successful in Ukraine.⁹

Over the years of work, UCU’s formula for educating free and responsible citizenship has crystalized itself in the following three concepts: interpersonal communication, witnessing, and serving the other.

This is essentially a Christian approach which enables us to respond to an unrelenting need for the authentic life of many Ukrainians. This need is by far not limited to Ukraine but it has the global dimension as well.

It was absolutely critical and important for UCU to formulate it’s three-fold educational formula (communication, witnessing, and serving) but it was equally important to articulate some points of references which would allow us to keep the right track as well as to evaluate the progress we made. In other words, we needed to have a “tuning fork” to tune our educational and formative performance.

The new martyrs of UGCC in the 20th century, on the one hand, and the marginalized, the people with special needs, on the other hand, are the key elements of UCU’s “tuning fork” which let us be attentive to and mindful of the real needs and true values.

UCU vision for a new campus, which we started to build in 2010, was inspired by these ideas, principles, and approaches which at the very bottom were nothing less than an attempt to rethink university life and its role at the edge of 21st century.

⁹ Maidan and the Revolution of Dignity came as the most serious test for UCU education and formation philosophy, which the University was implementing for the last 20 years of its activities in Lviv. University was proud to be able to state the following in the middle of the Revolution of Dignity: “UCU has invested almost two decades in the formation and education of this new generation and we now bear witness to the outstanding results of those efforts, which are visible on both national and international levels. UCU students in Lviv were the first in the country to protest, ultimately triggering, inspiring, and leading the protest of millions in Ukraine.” ([UCU Students Stand Firm for Freedom and Dignity in Ukraine](#))

One of the key components of UCU vision is a new model of residential life, which, we hope, will become inspirational for other universities in Ukraine and abroad. Our first Josef Slipyj Residential College (or Collegium) started to operate in September of 2012.

UCU's idea of collegium abandons the soviet concept of dormitory which has remained unrivaled in Ukraine so far. An average Ukrainian dormitory would offer a minimum of personal conveniences and operate more akin to a "student hostel." UCU started to develop its concept of residential life with a very simple and obvious observation: the students on average spend only one third or even less of their "daily time budget" in the classrooms. A considerably larger amount of time is allotted for other activities, involvements, and commitments. This immediately implies that it is precisely in and through this extracurricular life of the students that their personal formation and maturity is taking place.

The question we asked ourselves was the following: is there a way in which a university apart from conveying knowledge to the young people and helping them to explore and master the academic domains, can also provide an impetus and context for enhancing them to grow as caring, loving, conscientious, responsible, and generous individuals.

The philosophy of UCU residential life and its potential for educating free and responsible citizens could be well articulated by using a very helpful approach elaborated in the recently published document entitled *The Vocation of the Business Leader* by Sr. Helen Alford and a group of her fellow co-authors. The way to overcome one's "divided life" on the way to personal integration, argues Sr. Helen, is to go through the following interrelated stages: *seeing, judging, and acting*.

The healing of personal fragmentation begins by *seeing* things as they are. The "seeing" here is best described as the unfolding of one's capacity for listening and observing the complexity and interrelatedness of the surrounding world with all its challenges and opportunities.

The capacity for *judging* essentially presupposes seeing and leads beyond it in some important sense. It requires a certain level of maturity to be able to distinguish between good and evil, between lies and truth, between dignified and undignified behavior, between respect for the common good and abuse or ignorance of the common good.

The capacity for *acting* enables, unfolds, and fosters our freedom. It is in and through acting that one's spiritual life, ethical principles, the virtues and attitudes are integrated into one's life, work, and study.

The configuration of the Residential College community, unlike any other "traditional" dormitories in Ukraine, is unusually complex and deliberately reflects the structure of the real society wherein people of different generations constantly meet and interact. The challenge is to be able to understand, as it were, different "languages" of those who are of a different age, who come from different contexts, and who therefore might have different views, approaches, and perspectives on things.

While the students constitute the largest group of 180 persons living at the College, the total number of the College community residents amounts to 220 people. Apart from students, the college community also includes tutors, UCU academic or administrative staff, who permanently live in the College with their families. The University has asked

the Redemptorist Sisters to establish a small monastic community at the Residential College.

UCU has also invited a very special group of people to join the residential life. These are people with special needs whom we – to borrow a phrase from Bishop Borys Gudziak, UCU President – consider as our professors of human relations in teaching us to interact with each other without fears and masks and thus help us restore honesty and openness to one another.

As a part of the College there has been established the Center for Personal Development. Prominent professors, researchers, professionals, artists, authors and public figures from Ukraine and abroad who are willing to share their time, experience, and knowledge with the college community are joining the residential community as Fellows of Center for Personal Development. One never knows who will eventually affect the depth of one's personality and prompt him or her to discover and follow a certain life vocation.

Being part of a university, which has at the core of its identity the legacy of martyrs and offers stimuli for communication, UCU Residential College offers opportunities to transform the social sphere and revitalize community life of Ukrainian universities.

Democracy: Concluding Remarks

By way of summarizing my reflections, let me offer for our further considerations and discussions a few points about the concept of democracy. I draw these points by primarily looking into the most recent developments in Ukraine starting from October of 2013 and until the present moment, and also by reflecting upon UCU experience and mission.

I strongly believe that the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity and the processes it has triggered on the national as well as on the international levels, require profound and open reflection, analysis and, perhaps, even a rethinking of some currently existing political, financial, business, educational and social, etc. principles and activities that, until now, were believed to be strongly embedded in the contemporary Western democracy model.

Asking a question as to how to educate students for democratic citizenship, especially in the context of the unfolding events in Ukraine, gives a very special meaning, importance, and even urgency to this question. Whatever will be our response to this question, it should take into account the following points which recent Ukrainian experience and UCU practice teach us about democracy and democratic citizenship.

As never before, in today's globalized world being a citizen bears within it not only local or national responsibilities, but there's also a global dimension to citizenship.

Democracy has a price. It may be enjoyed and consumed for free but never for too long and never by too many. Democracy requires sacrifices to come into existence but it could be eaten up by consumerism, individualism, self-complacency, and relativism.

Democracy isn't a goal in itself. Democracy for the sake of democracy smells totalitarian. True democracy emerges as a consequence of people's solidarity, loving care of the other and mutual respect. In this sense, what we call democracy is meant to reflect the quality of the interpersonal relationships in the public domain.

As many admirable and worthy things in this world, democracy could be easily corrupted and undermined. Long established and functioning social institutes and procedures may still keep their democratic facade shining and yet the power of democracy might be diminishing to the extent to which the rhetoric of interests replaces the voice of values. This is why the Ukrainian case bears such a powerful global and geopolitical importance in terms of testing the quality and vitality of the Western democracies with regard to both their leadership and civil society.

One cannot inherit democracy in a similar way to which one inherits a house or a capital from his or her predecessors. One also cannot build a democracy for himself or herself and neither for just a few people. It can only and always come as a generational effort and achievement even if facilitated by the previously existing tradition of democracy. Sadly, but such effort might also result in a generational failure.

Democracy would never be sustainable if it would only cherish and endorse the respect for the rule of law and human rights but would neglect and ignore man's capacity to discriminate between good and evil, between lies and truth.

Democracy is about strong commitments, fullness of emotions, and richness of the spiritual life which result from an unbiased, sincere and open attitude towards the reality of the other. Democracy is dependent upon and is build upon man's capacity to respond in a genuine way to the needs of the needy, to the richness and beauty of the entrusted world, to the pains and sorrows as well as to the joy and glory of even the tiniest human achievements. In other words, democracy is an actualized modality of responsibility understood as man's profoundest capacity to transcend oneself in caring and loving response to the other.

Shouldn't the above-mentioned moments become constitutive elements and a backbone of modern democratic citizenship? During the last turbulent months, it takes an awful lot of hardship and sacrifice for my fellow Ukrainians to learn these lessons by heart while witnessing to a global community the values of dignity, freedom, and solidarity. There's still a long way ahead of us.

Let me conclude my reflection by citing one more time UCU December 13, 2013 Statement which suggest to us the most effective plan of action for today if we are serious about fostering democratic citizenship:

“Our experience at UCU convinces us that it is imperative to resolutely defend moral principles and live according to the social teachings of the Church, and teach others by our example and witness. By hiding, we would never reach our goals. If the authoritarian regime of Yanukovich becomes firmly established, UCU will no longer be able to fulfill its mission. Therefore, adherence to our principles and moving forward with faith and trust in God, is the most effective plan of action for today.”¹⁰

¹⁰ [*UCU Students Stand Firm for Freedom and Dignity in Ukraine*](#)