

# ICPS newsletter

## We have a democracy in Ukraine already

*All that has passed is gone; all that will pass has not yet come. Look no further to find the reason for our suffering.*

*Alfred de Musset*

***Ukraine has survived the last ten years without bloodshed or revolt, and this is a great achievement for a post-Communist country. As opposed to the countries of Central Europe, Ukraine has had to exact its right to a European choice independently. Today, all the elements of a democratic society are present in Ukraine, but Ukrainian democracy is ineffectual. However, deposing the current authorities will not make it effectual; this can be achieved only through the determined establishment of new social institutions, primarily through the implementation of democratic procedures for the formulation of state policy. This is the topic of our editorial on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of Ukraine's independence***

Historical essentialities can be seen only from the perspective of time passed. Is 10 years enough to understand the changes that have taken place in Ukraine? Big illusions bring big disappointments. These disappointments are even bigger if new illusions are joined to the old Communist hopes for building a society of fairness and general equity.

During its decade of independence, Ukraine has built up a democratic political system, which includes free elections as well as national and international news coverage in the press. Ukrainians can freely express their opinions, exercise their entrepreneurial initiative, and change their place or country of residence.

However, because the collapse of totalitarianism and establishment of civil rights did not lead to a rapid rise in the quality of life for Ukrainians, many citizens have become disillusioned regarding the fundamental principles of democracy. While in 1994 36 percent of Ukrainians believed that the country needs a multi-party system and 30 percent did not see the need for it, in 2001 only 27 percent of citizens still supports a multi-party system and the share of its opponents has increased to 43 percent. At the same time, citizens have regarded the development of a market economy in a more positive light; in 1994, 43 percent of Ukrainians supported the development of private entrepreneurship and 31 percent disapproved, while this year the share of supporters increased to 52 percent and the share of opponents decreased to 23 percent. Thus, it seems that even though market-economy institutions are important to the

members of Ukrainian society, they do not see any benefit to democratic institutions which could ensure proper transferring of power. Working incessantly to satisfy consumer demand and to improve their lives, private businesses have become a boon to Ukrainian citizens. Businesses have put together their own development strategies oriented at achieving these goals; they know all about customer satisfaction and have taken into account lessons learned by enterprises with foreign capital and foreign partners. Meanwhile, political institutions in Ukraine have never set themselves a mandate to increase citizens' welfare; accordingly, a survey done this year found that only 4 percent of the population trusts political parties, while 63 percent admits to distrusting them.

There exists a yawning gap between developed democracies and the Ukrainian-style democracy. In the West, political competition centers on political essentialities, i.e., the open formulation of interests of certain elements of society; meanwhile, in Ukraine politics is all about politicians, i.e., personalised battles for power between interest groups which remain hidden to the public. The battle of personalities versus legitimate interests leads to the revival of totalitarian forms of the class war-if you are not with us, then you are against us-and makes compromise or consensus impossible. Moreover, the mass media in Ukraine is incapable of assisting the voters in making an informed choice, since discussions held by opposing personalities that do not address opposing interests are useless.

Democratic institutions in Ukraine work on their image only, and that is exactly why the democracy is ineffectual. Meanwhile, the opposition is aggressive in its stance, but how does its vision of state policy differ at all from that of the current government? What kind of policy does the opposition espouse when it chants anti-presidential slogans? If the Ukrainian citizenry cannot answer these questions, then they should not choose to support the opposition; they should vote for a government whose policy is reflected in its actions. If political forces cannot justify or present concrete ideas to society, then democratic means of ascending to power will be abandoned as the opposition calls for the people to march in the streets and the authorities resort to totalitarian measures. This is a dead-end situation.

The political battle for power is in full force in Ukraine, but with almost a total lack of institutions or the ability of various, often opposing, interests to democratically coexist. Billions of dollars of international technical assistance have failed to create these institutions and abilities, because the donors have failed to recognise their critical significance, taking their existence in their own countries for granted and making the crippling assumption that they either do exist in Ukraine or can emerge of their own accord. Thus, the establishment of democratic institutions is not perceived as a necessary or worthwhile objective, and their absence in Ukraine is explained rather as a consequence of the "local mentality," which is expected to transform itself unassisted.

In our opinion, the only way for Ukrainian democracy to exit this vicious circle is to start learning. Societies that are continually re-educating themselves force their democratic institutions to take a critical stance with regard to their work and to constantly develop and apply newly acquired experience. Advanced technologies are not only in aerospace and IT, but also in the ways of carrying out public policy processes. They require time and effort to be learned, but there is no other way to ensure an effective democracy in Ukraine. ■