



September 2009

Facade Europeanization

Alyona Getmanchuk, Editor-in-Chief, Glavred

The love of all kinds of words that loftily start with the prefix "euro" has been evident in Ukraine for some time. Just drive down the streets of any major city in the country and you will see "Eurotires," "Eurorenovations" next to "Eurowindows," "Eurosalon" and "Eurostyle." Take a stroll down the corridors of power and you will get an earful of "Eurointegration," "Eurostandards" and "European-style education." And if you have a chance to look at posters for an upcoming performance schedule, you are bound to see the phrase "European level" applied to the latest show or concert.

Europeanization and European integration

Everybody with a product to sell deliberately "packages" it in a box labeled "Euro," thereby admitting automatically that European means better quality. At the same time, it is significant that this "Euromania" is most evident in shop windows and names. Symbolic because this kind of widespread "facade Europeanization" has been evident for some time in Ukraine. In short, on the surface, everyone seems keen to live according to European standards, but in fact, people have little or no idea what this actually means. And so, to paraphrase Javier Solana, they play not by the rules, but with the rules.

To be perfectly fair, we have to admit that even world-class European analysts have been unable to come up with a single definition for the term "Europeanization." Or in what way it differs from European integration. Some prominent Old World analysts claim that this primarily means the carrying out of reforms that would allow a given country to freely join the European Union. Others suggest that Europeanization is more like a process when everyone in the country, from politicians to waiters, upholds certain accepted standards. Yet others say that Europeanization is the European answer to globalization.

Some would narrow the concept to mean the development of institutions that are analogous to those in the European Union. And yet others consider Europeanization the reconstruction of an identity, that is, the accent is placed on cultural and historical aspects. Of course, all these notions of Europeanization complement each other, rather than contradicting. At the same time, they are all an indivisible part of European integration.

In short, what does it mean to meet the standards of the European Union? This essentially means to meet the standards of Western European countries. What the US's former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, once rather disdainfully referred to as "Old Europe"—a phrase that is now happily used. In the end, no matter how we approach Europeanization, we will reach one and the same goal: a certain set of standards, whether they refer to governance, education or food products, service, or even the pace of life and R&R.

What does it mean to meet EU standards? This really means complying with Western European standards

Thus, in the case of Ukraine, the two terms, Europeanization and Eurointegration, should be treated as synonyms. In both cases, it means nothing less than "transplanting" certain principles and norms that underpin how people live and work in Western Europe to our post-soviet soil. That is, what the countries of Central and Eastern Europe that joined the EU five years ago and Bulgaria and Romania, who joined in 2007, did.

But can Ukraine strive, as did her western neighbors when they stormed the gates of the EU in 2004, to match Western European countries or should the country first aim at a lower standard, that is, take new EU members like Poland or Slovakia as its model? Can Ukraine seriously undertake reforms without reconstructing its identity first? Finally, a question that is growing in urgency as the European Union suffers enlargement fatigue—how can Ukraine become more European without the prospect of EU membership?

Identity crisis

Unless there is an understanding that Ukraine has the right to be not only in Europe, but also in the European Union, Europeanization will remain little more than a virtual topic, just as European integration has been, year after year. Four years ago, not long after the Orange Revolution, only a third of Ukrainians (33%) considered themselves Europeans according to a poll by the Razumkov Center, while 60% firmly said they did not. In a more recent poll, taken by the State Institute for Family and Youth at the end of 2008, only 32.8% of students felt that they were Europeans—yet this generation is seen as key to the future promotion of European integration in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, feeling yourself European does not automatically mean a desire to join the European Union. This was more than clearly stated, if quite crudely, some six years ago by then-head of the European Commission, Romano Prodi. At the time, he said, "The fact that Ukrainians believe themselves European is a matter of self-identity. New Zealanders also consider themselves Europeans but that

doesn't constitute a reason for New Zealand to join the EU."

Still, while no one looked cross-eyed at the desire of Ukrainians to feel themselves Europeans during Prodi's term in the European Commission, in the last few years, the European Union, by denying the "Europeanness" of Ukraine as a state, has done little to strengthen such feelings. Unfortunately, this trend is growing stronger all the time. For instance, prior to last year's Ukraine–EU Summit in Paris, such member states as Germany and the Netherlands insisted on changing the closing communiqué to read "European country" (a geographical term) instead of "European state" (a political term). And at the inaugural Summit of the Eastern Partnership (EP), which took place last May in Prague, some of the EU's older members did not even want to label Ukraine a "European country." Originally, the plan was to treat Ukraine and five other states simply as eastern partners in the summary documents. True, they changed their mind in the end and agreed to the term "Eastern European Partners."

In the case of CEE countries, says Slovak expert and president of the country's Institute for Civil Affairs Grigorij Mesežnikov, the whole point was precisely political Europeanization, given that "at the level of culture and civilization, these countries were, are and will remain European countries, that is, societies with a European cultural code...For these countries, Eurointegration became a component of Europeanization. Moreover, accession to the EU was the final stage in the process of political Europeanization."

It is probably not worth noting that these countries were very much wanted in Brussels, whereas "no one is expecting us there," as certain of Ukraine's politicians would like to have Ukrainians believe. At a recent session of the Diplomatic Club of the Open Ukraine Foundation in Kyiv, ex-Polish President Alexander Kwasniewski admitted that, after talking to then-French President Jacques Chirac about Poland's joining the EU and listening to Chirac expound about what a terrible, difficult European integration faced the Poles, he completely lost his appetite for accession.

No stick, no reforms?

Still and all, there is one critical difference between Ukraine and its former colleagues in the socialist camp—they had a clear signal about their prospects for membership. “Theoretically, Europeanization without the prospect of EU membership is possible—but it’s highly unlikely,” says Polish analyst Andrzej Szeptycki, summarizing the opinion of more than one specialist in Eurointegration. “We have European countries like Norway and Switzerland that are not members of the EU. We have extra-European countries that have independently adopted European standards and a European lifestyle at one point, such as Japan in the 19th century. Yet, the EU’s policy towards neighboring countries, especially those in the Mediterranean basin, where there has been active cooperation for many years, shows that exporting European standards without membership is not easy.”

In Ukraine, an indirect confirmation of this difficulty are political slogans along the lines of “Let’s build Europe inside our country,” which have failed to assume any real meaning despite being bandied about for years. Every official who was involved in the Eurointegration process

its non-candidate status as an excuse to ignore one or another condition being demanded by the European Union if it feels that that condition is extremely inconvenient, in terms of its own interests, or even absurd (who has not heard about the requirements regarding the size and form of “EU” cucumbers?). Nevertheless, looking at the difficulties with preparations for EURO 2012—which ought to be a truly significant Eurointegration milestone for Kyiv—, it becomes ever-more evident that, without constant oversight and relentless criticism on the part of Brussels, nothing’s going to move ahead in Ukraine.

At the same time, it is equally understood that, in the long run, membership cannot be the be-all and end-all of Eurointegration for Ukraine. Even more so, the absence of such a prospect should not be a form of blackmail that Ukraine uses in order to justify to Brussels why domestic reforms just aren’t happening. Yet, from the side it looks exactly like that.

“Why is it that, instead of changing your society, you are constantly looking for excuses not to do so?” This question was put to the author by the President of Estonia, Toomas Hendrik Ilves, at the end of 2008. “Estonia is a highly computerized country, not because it’s good for the EU but because it’s good for us. We have great roads, not because we want to please the European Union, but because we need them ourselves.” And he was justified in his conclusions: “I have been involved with Ukraine for more than a decade—from the minute I became Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1996. And if you look at where Ukraine was in 1996 and where Estonia was, the difference was not that remarkable. But if you look at Ukraine and Estonia in 2008, we are in completely different positions.”

Computer penetration is high in Estonia, not because it’s good for the EU, but because it’s good for Estonians

As the process of preparing for EURO 2012 continues, it becomes obvious that, without constant oversight and relentless criticism from Brussels, nothing’s going to move ahead in Ukraine

in Poland or any other Central European country will tell you that they were assisted in joining the European Union not only by EU financial and technical assistance—the EU carrot—, but also by constant monitoring and strict oversight from Brussels—the EU stick.

Of course, some might say that Ukraine is actually better off than its western neighbors: the country can always use

The Real Europe

And when we talk about different positions, we are not just talking about matching the “Copenhagen criteria” that few ordinary Ukrainians know much about, which require that the country be democratic, respect the rule of law and human rights, and possess a proper market economy. Europeanization, in reality, involves very much down-to-earth conditions that simply make life better for the ordinary person.

Living in a Europeanized country means knowing that an official who took off to hunt one weekend in a government car will step down from his office (similar to what happened to the Lithuanian head of the State Property Fund), while his colleague, a presidential advisor, will write a letter of resignation the following day after voters see a photo in the papers of a fancy house that he built just outside of Vilnius for lord-knows-what money.

Living in a European country means being certain that the bus for which you are waiting at a stop will come according to schedule and will “kneel” so that the granny next to you will be able to enter it without looking for someone to help her, while the young man in the wheelchair will be able to get from Point A to Point B like any other passenger.

It means being able to defend your rights in a court of law, and not by camping out in tents on the country’s squares—which is possibly (the thought is scary) the only way to affect those in power in this country.

It means not being likely to run into waiters and other individuals in the service industry who are rude or completely indifferent to their job. And the extreme unlikelihood that you will ever be accosted in any airport or downtown area by pesky taxi drivers who leap on foreign visitors with an irritating “Wanna cab” and launch into negotiations over a price!

And if Europeanization is crowned with accession to the European Union, then the list of benefits grows geometrically.

It means, for instance, being able to choose whether you want to work in Sweden or Ireland, then retiring, if you so wish, to sunny Spain or Portugal, but getting the pension you earned where you used to live.

It means studying in a prestigious university at the EU tuition rate, which is much lower than the rate paid by students from non-EU countries (right now, only the children of the *nouveaux riches* from former soviet countries can even begin to think of studying in London or Oxford). For Ukrainians, of course, this may not have much appeal, given that the current EU student exchange program, Erasmus Mundus, only involved 24 students in the 2005–2006 academic year (Poland sent something like 10,000!). For 2009-2010, this number increased by a whopping 4, to 28 students from Ukraine.

It means the option of working not only in the capital of Ukraine but also in any European capital. For Ukrainian politicians, specifically, it also means the opportunity to compete for seats in the European Parliament or the European Commission, where they will be able to improve their political culture and understand, finally, that what makes politics worthwhile is not diamond cuff links and cars that cost as much as an apartment in Berlin.

It means the opportunity for ordinary farmers in distant villages to deposit tens of thousands of Euros on their accounts, an award from the EU just because they have ensured the necessary environment for their animals and produce high-quality food. Today, this is standard stuff for Polish and Lithuanian

Ukrainian politicians will have an opportunity to improve their political culture and to understand that what makes politics worthwhile is not diamond clips and cars that cost as much as an apartment in Berlin

farmers. Of course, it's also interesting that, at the beginning, EU veterinary legislation to which new member states had to adapt themselves looked pretty silly to our neighbors. They could not understand at all why the EU demanded that their legislation establish a minimal quantity of grain to feed cattle. But the Polish lawyers who worked on harmonizing this legislation in the Sejm took it in all in stride, responding: "We have to do this if we want to get into the European Union."

It means not seeing cars on your streets whose exhaust contains far more CO² than the norm, let alone beat-up trucks like the ones that drive Ukrainian streets, leaving a trail of stinky black smoke. And to be convinced that the selection of cars on the road should be a hundredfold less shiny than the state of the actual roads, the way it is in Warsaw today; in Kyiv, by contrast, road surfaces are in pitiful condition, while the cars driving on them are the height of luxury.

It means that even in the most backwoods Polish town, such as Dembica in the south or Olesznica in the west, you can visit a modern and (take note) affordable aqua park built on European Union money, something that even the capital of Ukraine cannot claim right now. (The entry price is around UAH 40.)

It means the opportunity for mayors to pay attention, again with the financial assistance of the EU, to cultural heritage and to rebuild historical sites that were ruined under the communist regime. Entire boards announcing "Built with European Union funding" are a common feature on buildings and streets in most population centers across Central and Eastern Europe.

It's not just a way to travel to the next country for coffee without a visa or borders, a pleasure the residents of Bratislava, who frequently drop into Vienna for this purpose, have been able to allow themselves for the last five years. It's also a way for those who live in border areas to visit the nearest supermarket in the country next door and to buy all their necessities for a better price. For instance, Slovaks have

been able to do this in Hungary and Poland ever since they joined the Euro zone.

Team play

These were only individual examples of Europeanization and Eurointegration in action. At the same time, what results from the enormous task taken on by the relevant political leaders who understood in time that, under the new EU rules, they would not be able to take bribes and live off kickbacks, but they would be certain of a worthy and, more important, legitimate salary and the kind of working conditions about which they could only dream earlier! Most of all, their children will live in a country where all the pluses mentioned earlier will be part of normal, everyday life.

In various EU countries, different people led this process. For instance, during negotiations between Slovakia and the European Union, which took place over 1999–2002, special departments were set up in all central executive bodies in charge of "Europeanization" in specific areas. In Poland, there was a special Committee for European Integration.

As Grigorij Mesežnikov recalls, starting in 1998, the Slovak Government and political parties who supported it, as well as the majority of community organizations, the press and most of the country's creative and intellectual elite, effectively spoke with one voice on matters related to Eurointegration. But what was important in this process was that roles were clearly designated: the Government was responsible for the negotiation process and for instituting European standards, NGOs monitored this process and analyzed it, the press worked on increas-

The process of Eurointegration requires that there be a clearly designated role for the government, NGOs, the press, the private sector, and the intellectual class

ing public awareness regarding EU membership, business worked on strengthening economic ties to Western Europe, while the intellectuals determined the main areas of European discourse, connecting membership in the European Union with the cultural and civilization foundations of Slovak society. The situation in Poland was very similar.

Of course, in one country the government and NGOs might have taken more on itself, in another business may have been or continues to be the key promoter of a bright Eurointegrated future. In the case of Turkey, the private sector is a powerful driver for EU integration in this "eternal candidate." It is Turkish business that pushed the government to establish a Customs Union between the EU and Turkey, something that a significant portion of Turkish society was, unsurprisingly, hardly enthused about. It's understandable why they were not: Europe's more competitive goods represented a major challenge for domestically-produced goods. In addition, having given the green light to goods made by their European Union

business colleagues, Turkey found itself completely unassisted when it came to participating in the adoption of any trade policies within the EU.

Needless to say, a broad pro-European alliance among those political forces oriented on EU membership, who all have support among voters, and a similar division of roles could become the main driver of European integration in Ukraine. Of course, this requires that the political leadership understand that the prospect of membership cannot be the starting gun for adapting legislation, bringing order to the judiciary or prosecuting graft and bribery. That business begin to feel that Russia is not the only place for making money and the EU only a place for depositing it. That the press start to write about life in the European Union on a regular basis and not just after the latest press tour organized by the Government of Poland or Lithuania. That NGOs begin to point out contradictions between politicians' talk on European integration and their walk. Really, none of this is especially hard.

Alyona Getmanchuk is a renowned Ukrainian foreign policy journalist. She is Editor-in-Chief of Glavred magazine and Merited Journalist of Ukraine. In 2009 Ms. Getmanchuk joined ICPS as an associate expert.

European Focus is an ICPS monthly that raises debate on key issues of European integration for Ukraine, EU policy towards Ukraine, and other important issues connected to Ukraine's European ambitions. Publication is financed by the Think Tank Fund of the Open Society Institute.

e-mail: office@icps.kiev.ua
www.icps.com.ua