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# The post-Soviet oligarchy and how it shaped national state politics | 30 Years of Freedom, p.2



About the Source

**BOHDAN BEN**

Bohdan Ben is a researcher in the field of social and ethical philosophy and in the field of local governance. He was



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**Article by: Bohdan Ben**  
**Edited by: Sonia Maryn**

Editor's Note

Oligarchs and corruption go hand in hand when examining the economy and politics of post-Soviet states. Although true to some extent, this cliché overlooks the differences between these states and conveys a sense of hopelessness.

Speaking with 10 intellectuals from post-Soviet states, including Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, Moldova, Georgia, and the Baltics, for the series "30 Years of Freedom," Euromaidan Press drilled deep into the roots of oligarchs.



What gives them their strength? What is their good and bad influence? What progress has been made over the last 30 years in these different countries? And

Hawrylyshyn Foundation. Together with his friends, he began the implementation of the project "In the land of Hope," which aims to facilitate and promote local initiatives that strive for social and ecological sustainability. Bohdan can be reached by [b.ben@ucu.edu.ua](mailto:b.ben@ucu.edu.ua) or on fb.

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This is Part Two of the four-part series, **30 Years of Freedom**. All four series are based on the comments of our speakers, including quotes from their published essays.

- **Part One.** Demolishing monuments not enough to destroy post-Soviet nostalgia, but property rights help | 30 Years of Freedom, p.1
- **Part Two.** The post-Soviet oligarchies and how they shaped national state politics | 30 Years of Freedom, p.2
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**30 YEARS OF FREEDOM**  
Post-Soviet Transformations

**Petru Negura,** Moldovan sociologist at the Free International University of Moldova, fellow at several other European universities

**Andrey Zubov,** Russian historian, political activist and vice president of oppositional People's Freedom Party

**David Jishcariani,** Georgian historian at the Soviet Past Research Laboratory (Tbilisi), focuses primarily on 20th century totalitarian regimes

**Yaroslav Hrytsak,** Ukrainian historian at the Ukrainian Catholic University, member of the supervisory board of *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*

**Paula Erizanu,** Moldovan writer, author of book on the 2009 protests in Moldova and culture editor of *The Calvert Journal*

**Sigitas Liekis,** Lithuanian historian and political scientist at the Vytautas Magnus University, expert on inter-ethnic relations and conflicts

**Artyom Shraibman,** Belarusian political analyst, founder of Sense Analytics and former political editor of the TUT.BY

**Mykola Riabchuk,** Ukrainian poet, translator, prose writer and essayist, honorary president of Ukrainian PEN Center

**Andrei Khadanovich,** Belarusian poet and translator, former president of PEN Belarus and active participant in 2020 protests

**Robert van Voren,** Lithuanian and Dutch historian and Sovietologist at the Vytautas Magnus University in Kaunas

As Petru Negura says, the main problem is that **major pro-European and democratic political forces in post-Soviet states were founded by oligarchs**, then exploited by them to serve their own business interests and – only partially – real reforms. This was especially the case in Russia, as Andrey Zubov says. David Jishcariani adds Georgia to [the list](#) while speakers from Ukraine partially share this view. Baltic states successfully avoided oligarchs but still had economic problems during transition until the 2010s.

On the other hand, as historian Yaroslav Hrytsak notes, there are some **good oligarchs** who use their influence to serve their country or at least meet demands of civil society **to become popular**. Achievements relate to the many reforms that were successfully introduced after 1991.

**The 2010s were the turning point, because strong parties and movements other than those of the oligarchy emerged.** With varying success, some came to

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 **The post-Soviet oligarchy VS civil society and democratic reforms (1991-2021)**

**Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia**




The Baltic states managed to disperse property well during the privatization of the 1990s and largely avoided the establishment of powerful domestic oligarchs. What was the problem is proper functioning of the economy after the collapse of economic ties with the USSR. It was only resolved by the influx of international capital. Contributing to the growth of GDP, the policy did not prevent emigration nor the expanding stratification between rich and poor – a problem which only recently has been partially mitigated.

**Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia**



In the 1990s, many used the deeply deflated price of securities to concentrate assets. Oligarchic pluralism emerged. Although oligarchs used corruption to monopolize entire sectors of the economy, competition between them and pressure from civil society gradually weakened their power. National upheavals launched the birth of truly democratic political regimes: in Ukraine, the 2004 Orange Revolution and the 2014 Revolution of Dignity; in Moldova, the 2009 Stone Revolution; and in Georgia, the 2003 Rose Revolution. The drawback is that most TV channels, as well as several sectors of the economy, are still monopolized by oligarchs. An unreformed judiciary is subject to corruption. Russia has started conflicts in each of these three states to prevent their successful transformation. New grassroots political parties of the 2020s, as well as the new middle class, are promising.

**Belarus, Russia**



After the same concentration of assets as in Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Presidents Putin and Lukashenka managed to subjugate all oligarchs quickly, mainly through the concentration of political power and use of *siloviki* (strongmen). Authoritarian regimes arose that merged economic power with force. However, freedom of speech and the Internet as an open space prevailed, facilitating the proliferation of civil society in spite of these repressive conditions. The Belarus protests in 2020/21 blossomed into a democracy movement and demonstrated the power of the people – a power growing by the day, not only in Belarus but in Russia as well.

## Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia

“I don’t think that privatization in Lithuania differed very much from other post-Soviet states. What differed was the level of accumulation in a few hands,” **Robert van Voren** says.

**Voren:** Of course, you have a number of Lithuanians who managed quite cleverly to gather wealth and become the upper layer in society. But the extremes you see in Ukraine or Russia is something that didn’t happen in Lithuania. **It was much more balanced.** One of the reasons is that Lithuania was a democratic and independent state between the two World Wars. Therefore, a huge **process of restitution** occurred. Property went right back to the people or to the families that owned this property before the Soviet occupation.

And then, regarding the EU, my opinion is that **from an economic perspective joining the EU by the Baltic states was far too quick.** I understand politically why it was important because of a sense of security. But economically it very much created a two-tier society: the ones who managed to get big money and the ones who became very poor because prices skyrocketed.

**Sarunas Liekis** elaborated on the impact of the EU.

**Liekis:** A lot of things were transformed because of EU and NATO membership, but in terms of hard power the Baltic states did not become more powerful than they had been.

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## Demolishing monuments not enough to destroy post-Soviet nostalgia, but property rights help...

Article by: Bohdan Ben  
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type of economy. Big business gains huge profits and formally GDP grows, but society as a whole does not always benefit.

The issue is how to make the system work, not for the sake of a few but for wider distribution among people

Liekis expanded on the differences between the Baltic states, mostly based on the manner of privatization they chose. In Estonia, a whole enterprise was privatized and went to a single owner, while in Lithuania, the same shareholding system of privatization as in other post-Soviet states remained. The former led to the flow of international capital, while the latter to the creation of domestic business groups.

**Estonians did better because they were privatizing entire business entities.** In Lithuania, they were privatizing on the basis of shareholding. For example, ownership of the factory is distributed to the workers. Somebody buys this and that and in reality you lose management and have looting. Usually the stronger – those who have a greater stake in the business – defraud.

Estonia didn't allow shareholding. The same in Poland. In Lithuania we lost much more during the transition in several sectors, like industry and agriculture, because the state tolerated too much fraud in the structuring of business entities.

*Ben: Who had money to privatize whole enterprises in Estonia?*

Not the locals, usually foreigners coming in. Previously, the single owner was State Plan USSR. The question was what to do next? In Lithuania, the state basically took away all resources from the enterprises because of the lack of money in the economy, plus inflation.

In Estonia, when they found a buyer, the enterprise was sold as an autonomous entity with a governing body. At the very beginning, the flow of capital – especially Scandinavian – to Estonia was a lot.

Lithuania and Latvia were lagging behind because they were taking very neoliberal positions. Thus, Scandinavian money came here through Estonian financial institutions. Many Swedish banks were first established in Lithuania as a branch of Estonian banks.

*Lithuania and Latvia were lagging behind because they were taking very neoliberal positions.*

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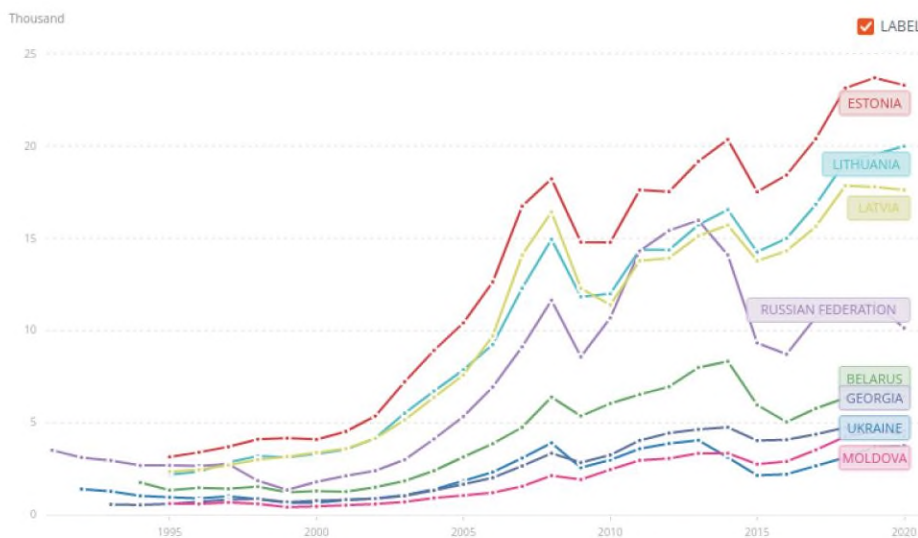
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*At present, Lithuania in the Baltics is causing serious competition to the north*

to make a difference, especially in Lithuania because we had our Polish neighbors next door. Since Poles conducted rapid decentralization and attracted investments, especially from Germany, Lithuania became a type of extension of the German and Polish economy.

At present, Lithuania in the Baltics is causing serious competition to the north. The region around Kaunas in the south now has more potential than the whole of Latvia. These transformations were not easy, it took 30 years — an entire generation.



*GDP per capita (thousands of current \$US) in the former post-Soviet states, according to World Bank data. As speakers confirm, the level of GDP shows state capacity in terms of financial resources but not necessarily corresponds to the wealth of the average citizen.*

## Land privatization

Regarding land privatization, right now, when you are having a discussion about land privatization in Ukraine, I'm on the side that cautions you to be very careful with this. You can create all kinds of *latifundistas* [owners of a very extensive piece of land -ed.], whereby huge owners are leasing the land in Ukraine.

Look at the Dutch Embassy, for example. How many agricultural attachés do they have in the embassy — 13! They have an interest in land privatization. The Netherlands are small, overcrowded, but very efficient in agricultural production. They lack land and their businesses want to go to Ukraine and start enterprises there.



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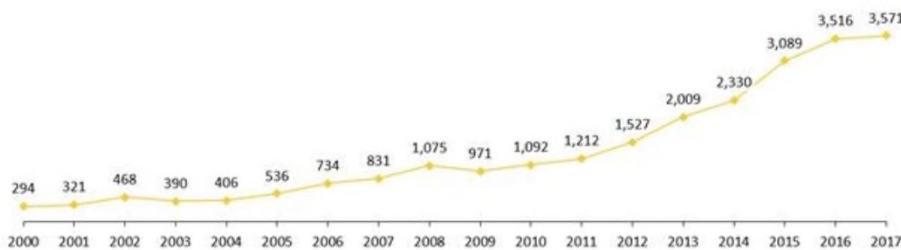
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*system of farming developed into a system of latifundia – big owners*

ownership at that time was in the hands of small owners with maybe three or five hectares, no more than 10. In 1939, a farmer could probably work these hectares as a livelihood, but nowadays you need at least 500 to run a farm.

So, it created a class of small owners without modern equipment. Over 30 years, the entire system of farming developed into a system of *latifundia* – big owners. The people who were owners of that land mostly became the underclass and migrated between Britain, Ireland, and so on. Large ownership of land doesn't need this kind of workforce. Before, if I'm not mistaken about 10-15% of Lithuanians worked in agriculture. Right now, there are 2-3%. All the rest became a source of labor migration, like in Ukraine.



*The price of 1 hectare of agricultural Land in Lithuania, €. Source: rpr.org.ua*

I think your state should be very careful in this transformation. It's not like announcing a free market and letting everybody go. You have to look carefully after the interests of small owners and workers, so that people get jobs, taxes are paid, and the land is not wasted.

I believe that ideologically these new political and economic elites take part in this neoliberal discourse, but the reality is that **more and more people understand that the real interest lies in ruling.**

## Moldova

Moldovan writer **Paula Erizanu** emphasized that oligarchs exist across the political spectrum in Moldova – both pro-Russian and so-called pro-European or reformist. They all lobbied for their business interests, and at the same time competed with each other.

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emerge that won elections in 2021.

**Erizanu:** We share very much the same problem as Ukraine regarding privatization. It was not consistent across the post-Socialist space. Obviously, it has affected the stratification of the population. We also have very weak state structures which get easily weaponized by these very wealthy people.

*We have oligarchs on all sides of the political spectrum*

The big oligarchs are Vladimir Plahotniuc, Igor Dodon, and Veaceslav Platon. Plahotniuc was a dictatorial figure between 2016 and 2019, chairing the Democratic Party of Moldova and controlling government and parliament. Today he is self-exiled in Turkey.

Platon was one of his friends but when they fell out, Platon found himself in prison. He has now been released and his influence is again on the rise.

There is also obviously Vlad Filat, founder of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova who served as prime minister in 2009-2013, then was imprisoned from 2015-2019. He came from a kind of reformist party. They had really good people in the team, but Filat's corrupt leadership basically ruined that party.



*Vlad Filat, founder of the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova who served as prime minister in 2009-2013. Source: wikipedia*

We have oligarchs on all sides of the political spectrum. Plahotniuc, for instance, was supported for a while by the U.S. Dodon is clearly pro-Russian and is getting money from Russia, as several reports have shown. The other oligarchs, like Platon, get their money from a combination of sources.

**Ben:** *I would like to move to the 2009 revolution. You dedicated your first book to this event. What was the revolution about? Was it only about fair elections or something more?*

The communist regime had been an authoritarian regime so the protest was against authoritarianism. But protesters were also motivated by the hope for a better life, for more freedom and more prosperity. You know, when protests in Belarus erupted in August last year, I had flashbacks to April 2009. Partly because of the police brutality that we experienced as well.



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There was a top-down structure of the protest. And a lot of the slogans people were chanting were outdated – they were from the protests of the 1990s.

We were following a kind of pro-European route after 2009. But it wasn't until 2021 that a real pro-European Moldovan party actually won a majority of votes in parliament. After 2009, we had progress in terms of media freedom.

The judiciary is the area that needs most reforming and is stagnating most. Because it was actually the judiciary that was helping corrupt oligarch politicians to stay in power and make money. Without a corrupt judiciary they would all be in prison now.



*Moldovans during 2009 protests. Source: zdg.md*

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Moldovan sociologist **Petru Negura** elaborated on the details of how the 2009 revolution happened, and why it was not a revolution in the full meaning of the word. He underlined 2015 as the true turning point when the first grassroots political parties were created, as an opposition to oligarchic forces.

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**Negura:** The revolution was labelled a Twitter revolution, which is correct because Twitter was becoming more and more popular, together with other platforms. But I call it the Stone Revolution, because people were throwing stones at parliamentary and presidential buildings.

But was it a revolution indeed? I'm not sure. There were several thousands of people protesting in the center of the city, but the majority of society was quite indifferent – just going around, doing their thing and working like in everyday life. So, yes, some people protested and in quite a violent way, but that doesn't make it a revolution in the sense that the whole society is throwing down a political power.


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*People throwing stones near parliamentary and presidential buildings during 2009 protests in Moldova. Source: RFE/RL*

**Opposition parties benefited from these protests.** They provoked early elections, and came to power in the fall of 2009. It was quite a promising political change: democrats, liberals came to power and overthrew this Communist bullshit. But the very same democrats and liberals committed fraud and high-level corruption within the Moldovan state, starting in early 2010.

They made all these banking and financial frauds. So people again became disappointed – now against these liberals and democrats and pro-Europeans. This is the great disappointment of our post-1991 transition.

In November 2014, a fraud with banks occurred in Moldova, right at the night of elections several banks went bankrupt for the benefit of oligarchs and people lost money. Soon afterwards, and especially during 2015, new political forces started emerging.

First was the Dignity and Truth platform. In the beginning, it was a civic platform but then it became a political party. And then we had a second party emerging – Action and Solidarity of the current president Maia Sandu who won the election in 2021.

*The very same democrats and liberals committed fraud and high-level corruption. This is the great disappointment of our post-1991 transition*

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two parties.

## Belarus

According to political scientist and analyst **Artem Shreibman**, the pillars of Lukashenka's regime include state-controlled TV; no free municipalities, because mayors are appointed by Lukashenka; and no free enterprise, because all major businesses are either directly state-owned or personally controlled.

However, none of this will remain unchecked indefinitely – civil society is in a state of protest-in-waiting. As soon as even a minor opportunity occurs, active protests will return.

**Shreibman:** We don't have oligarchs – not only because of the lack of privatization – but because Lukashenka knows that oligarchs are a threat to his power. In 1994 and 1995, **even before he destroyed Belarusian democracy, he destroyed or subjugated big businesses** and big business owners.

***Lukashenka knows that oligarchs are a threat to his power***

There had been some proto-oligarchs in Belarus, but most of them found themselves either in jail or in complete subjugation to Lukashenka. This is not to overlook the lack of privatization as one of the reasons for the absence of oligarchs.

In fact, most of the state assets lie in big industry, in fertilizers, in oil refineries, or elsewhere. And they are actually state-owned by none other than Lukashenka himself, effectively making him the sole oligarch in the country.

So, we don't have the large numbers of oligarchs as do Ukraine or Russia – instead we have one, the president himself. This has had a profound impact on politics, because if you have many oligarchs – as is the case in Ukraine – it is very hard for an authoritarian like Yanukovich, for example, to consolidate power throughout the country. Putin took several years to consolidate his power over Russian oligarchs; jailing Khodorkovsky, Abramovich, Berezovsky, Gusinsky, and others.

In Belarus, Lukashenka simply destroyed them outright. Thus, **it's next to impossible for revolutionary movements – as in 2020/21 – to find allies among powerful individuals like oligarchs, because there are none.** Meanwhile, in Ukraine some oligarchs did indeed support the 2014 Maidan Revolution.





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Workers of big state enterprises rally in Minsk. Source: tut.by

*Lukashenka personally appoints every mayor of every small town and every head of a district*

**We don't have any private TV channels in Belarus**, only state-owned. There may be some private TV companies that broadcast on a regional level, but they are entirely entertainment-based – no in-depth social/political content. The only exception is Belsat TV which is broadcast from Poland via satellites, and its journalists, who mainly reside in Belarus, are routinely arrested and repressed.

**Municipalities don't have any autonomy**, even economically. Lukashenka personally appoints every mayor of every small town and every head of a district, no matter how remote. There is virtually no freedom of any sort – be it financial, political or administrative – only departments of the presidential administration.

*Ben: Is victory possible for protesters, or has the country fallen into a stalemate for at least five to ten years?*

Obviously, it's not possible to protest in the current environment, but this environment can change at any time. For example, if Lukashenka decides he wants to bargain with the West again. More so, if relations with Russia deteriorated again, then he might have to deliver a few concessions – at least for the West. Either way, he feels less secure because of sanctions and the decrease in foreign currency reserves.

Protests can erupt if the conditions for them are ripe. What we have now is the **protest-in-waiting**. Whether such conditions emerge entirely depends on the



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However, I'm not sure that the future protests of Belarus – if they erupt – will be as peaceful as in 2020/21. Many people have regretted these peaceful tactics. Many who protested themselves repeatedly – often for months – and were then arrested or became disillusioned now regret they were not more assertive.

This means that when they come back to the streets, from their perspective they would look foolish to repeat what didn't work last time. And that is why I'm not sure that the next round of protests in Belarus will be as peaceful as before.

This is a risk, given the Belarusian regime's brutality which can lead to massive casualties and to intervention from Russia. As you well understand, Russia considers every revolution in its neighborhood a threat to their own interests.



*Peaceful demonstration by employees of state-run Belteleradio. Source: Naviny.by*

**Ben:** *Preparing for the interview, I discovered that you have recently moved to Ukraine from Belarus. It is sad news that you had to leave your homeland. How do you feel living now in Ukraine?*

**Many activists have left and this saps steam from the kettle, so to speak**

Yes, this is a very unfavorable trend and a victory for the Belarus regime to a certain degree, because many activists have left and this saps steam from the kettle, so to speak. It's also sad in terms of **brain drain**, because it's not just political emigration. By some estimates, **more than 20% of Belarusian IT specialists have left the country since 2020.** Not all of these



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I'm relatively comfortable and okay in Ukraine. First of all I was lucky to leave without major obstructions. I didn't take the direct route. I took a very elaborate way of getting out of the country, but in the end my family was able to unite with me.

I have my work. I continue working as an analyst. For many people this was a problem. Ukraine is a very hospitable place for people from Belarus, I mean mentality-wise we are close to each other and our languages are similar. Legally there are some problems. People especially complain about getting their residence permits – the right to work. Otherwise Ukraine does a lot to support us and help us adapt.

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## Georgia

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According to **David Jishcariani**, the main problem in Georgia is the absence of strong grassroots political parties. Reforms to eliminate daily corruption were successful. But, on the other hand, oligarchic criminal gangs of the 1990s didn't entirely disappear. They morphed into Western-style large-business entrepreneurs. "Main branches of the economy and the monopolies of these branches are now in the parliament of Georgia."

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**Jishcariani:** In the 1990s, the economies of all Soviet republics were interconnected because they all existed in a world of mini-globalization, within the framework of the Soviet Union. After the collapse of the USSR, it was not clear how these economies should go forward.

In Georgia, mostly former communists or criminals accrued all the resources of the country during the privatization of state assets – strategic resources. While quasi-criminal gangs took control over the economic life of the country.

People who had studied for well-paid technical professions during the Soviet era found that their professions were not needed anymore. In this regard, during the 1990s there was little difference between Georgia, Ukraine and Russia.

Regarding media, no independent TV channels exist in Georgia. Instead, almost all are controlled by today's oligarchs or former criminal gangs who gained billions in the 1990s.

**Ben:** *Your 2003 Rose Revolution seems quite similar to the 2004 Orange Revolution in Ukraine, and to the 2009 Stone Revolution in Moldova – each fighting rigged elections and bringing to power reformers – who, unfortunately, only managed to*

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When comparing Georgia and Ukraine, we need to compare their population numbers as well as their regional distribution, because these are two different countries. In 2003, regional political parties were much stronger in Ukraine – as were the oligarchs.

**Since 2003, Georgians have succeeded in many respects.** For example, **corruption at universities was largely eradicated.** Earlier, tuition was free but placement was awarded based on personal favor. Now, placement is based on merit. Corruption by officials, or in the workplace, for example by traffic police, is better controlled.

Societal norms started to improve and one could see real grassroots progress.

**Citizens started paying taxes straight away, with the reforms of Saakashvili.** This was very important, because in the 1990s there was no culture of paying taxes. With Saakashvili, taxpayer numbers increased – this is very important.



*Georgians protests during 2003 Rose Revolution in Tbilisi. Source: alchetron.com*

But on the other hand, **corruption moved out of day-to-day society and penetrated the legal system**, where criminals – past and present – could resume their economic command.

As a result, political forces controlled the economy – people who were supporting the National Movement [Saakashvili's political party -ed.] and donating to the party were quite successful in doing business. Meanwhile, the political opposition was mostly thwarted and could not succeed in business.

Nonetheless, despite good GDP, we can say that since 2003 the gap between people who control everything and are very rich, and ordinary people – even impoverished – has become greater. These policies are in no way changing, and poverty in Georgia is increasing.



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*Affiliates of main branches of the economy and their monopolies can now be found in the parliament of Georgia*

I think this is the biggest problem, because out of 150 members of parliament, approximately 20 or 30 of them are millionaires. So, how is this a leftist party when the founder Ivanishvili is a billionaire and many members of parliament are millionaires? Not to mention that they control almost everything in Georgia, from construction to pharmacies, and more.

Affiliates of main branches of the economy and their monopolies can now be found in the parliament of Georgia, and most of them are members of the Georgian Dream party.

So the Georgian Dream party is an absolutely, institutionally corrupt party. They may no longer be taking bribes from ordinary citizens, but they are in complete control of officials heading up business branches, and they prevent those outside of their power structure from earning money legitimately. Honest people are forced to do something else at a much lower pay.

But this policy really started under Saakashvili, because many of these millionaires who are now members of the Georgian Dream were once the biggest donors to the United National Movement. These donors are not changing, they are getting richer, and supporting any political party that feeds their interests. So, I think, the Georgian Dream is simply a continuation of the National Movement.

## Russia

There are no independent oligarchs in Russia, rather a single dictator, Putin. The question is not to create a grassroots political party but to overthrow the dictatorship altogether. Professor Zubov named two directions in which his and other democratic parties currently aim their work in Russia.

**Zubov:** In late February 2021, we discussed realistic goals at our party assembly. We have several of them.

*First,* Creation of a coalition of parties and movements that share our liberal values in general, such as those underway; namely, Alexei Navalny's movement, Yabloko [United Democratic Party, centre-left opposition -ed.] – the Open Russia movement. However, as you see, one by one, **these movements are being declared illegal by the**

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I think the main problem of our liberal movement is its fragmentation. Another problem is that people are oriented predominantly towards certain leaders, like Navalnyi or Mikhail Kasianov, rather than ideas. This is not right, and this is why our party doesn't strive for any leading role in this movement. We are ready to give leadership to other people – the main thing is to preserve the system of ideas and goals. When God wills, and Russia becomes a democratic state, then we will start competing.



Andrey Zubov speaks at the PARNAS party assembly, 2016. Source: [www.golosameriki.com](http://www.golosameriki.com)

*Second.* Enlightenment. The big problem of our society is the lack of education. In many regards, it remains in the system of the Soviet intellectual and political paradigm. Partly, this explains the power of Putin's regime.

Putin is understandable. He is the same as Soviet general secretaries were before him. He is the headman. Many people like this, not all of course, but many. His goals are imperialistic, similar to the communist goals in the creation of the World International.

Education is needed. People should be taught that the contemporary world is living with totally different values from Russia. The work of our party and my personal work is dedicated to the goal of enlightenment for all post-Soviet states.

**Ben:** Did you expect that something like Maidan could ever happen in Ukraine?

*Putin is understandable. He is the same as Soviet general secretaries were before him. He is the headman*



## Collective 'network' action is why protests in Khabarovsk and Belarus are lasting so long, sociologist suggests

Edited by: Yuri Zoria "This underrating of the strength of the resource of horizontal action," she says, "characterizes now no the experts but the situation itself. We are going through a period in which network mechanisms of coordination are replacing and beginning to push out hierarchical ones," although this process is far from complete. When ... Continue reading

We used to think (please don't take offense) that Ukraine is quite a provincial state, that people are rather passive there and, although presidents change, it is controlled by oligarchs. I think Putin thought similarly.

But it turned out the other way. It turned out that Ukraine is absolutely different. Belarus, in this last year, also turned out to be absolutely different. When there were ques standing for hours to register Sviatlana Tsikhanovskaya as the candidate for the presidency, it was absdutely unbelievable for Belarus.

I was speaking a year before with Sviatlana Alexievich and other professors of Minsk University and they told me that Belarusians are a sleeping nation. But it turned out differently. Therefore, **we can also expect that Russians can do more than we now think.**

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People don't riot all the time; they live ordinary lives, bear children, have families, earn money, take holidays. But when a critical moment arrives, they all come together, as happened with Maidan – some to defend the nation, some to make food for the defenders.

It was not important why they came – it was important that almost everyone came out. My colleagues from Kyiv University, who work on Ancient Egypt, were all on Maidan. The same happened in Belarus – all my colleagues stood with the people.

Because of all of this, I believe that in a beautiful Russia of the future, in contemporary Ukraine and contemporary Belarus, there will be much strength to shake hands and help each other become a worthy part of Europe.

## “We're against the Putin regime!” Fifth day of protests in Russia's Far Eastern city of Khabarovsk



Source: Krym.Realii Source:  
Censor.net Source: Censor.net  
Translated by: Christine Chraibi On  
the morning of July 9, 2020, the  
governor of Khabarovsk Krai, Sergei  
Furgal, was arrested by FSB officers  
on the doorstep of his home in Khabarovsk. He was flown to

## Ukraine

According to **Yaroslav Hrytsak**, Ukraine has many oligarchs who compete with each other, as well as a strong sense of regionalism among the big players. Not all of them are bad guys. Many of them set good social and political goals for the nation, beyond their own enrichment. The second point is that the Ukrainian revolution won, unlike revolutions in many other post-Soviet countries, and it had a strong nation-building dimension.

The main shortcoming is the final incomplete step – the reform of the judiciary and the full guarantee of private property rights. Despite all progress, this one shortcoming puts everything at risk and creates instability. Poroshenko – putting aside all of his achievements – didn't dare to complete this one step.



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**Hrytsak:** The Euromaidan 2014 revolution was different. Most new revolutions have ended in failure or are at a stalemate. The Ukrainian Maidan is one of the few revolutions that ended in victory. Of course, it was just a tactical victory – it eliminated only some negative scenarios of the corrupt Yanukovich government. In the long term, the success or defeat of a revolution is determined by whether the ruling elite have the will to radically change the country. We've been through three revolutions, but the changes were only partial so far.

## Good and bad oligarchs

*I do not consider the oligarchs to be completely negative actors*

I do not consider the oligarchs to be completely negative actors. They are definitely lucky – after all, we don't know for sure how fairly or unfairly they acquired their millions. The point is that among them are **those who think only about enrichment** and **those who actually think about what to do with their money**. I know that from time to time they think about where to donate money – what to do with it. I know

several oligarchs personally and I know that these are their thoughts.

The advantage in Ukraine is that we have several oligarchs – and there is competition between those oligarchs. I think this element of competition is very important. We have a few channels, a few buttons, and no one has a monopoly.



*Petro Poroshenko, one of the oligarchs who was present on Maidan. The peculiarity of his persona is that accusations of corruption go along with huge charity projects, such as purchasing air defense systems for the Ukrainian army with his own money.*

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*The key reform for me is judiciary reform*

The key issue is to ensure the inviolability of private property, so that no oligarch can attack anyone else and try to bite off power. And it's not just about the oligarchs – but also about average business and average people.

The key reform for me is judiciary reform. I believe that Ukraine has come a long way – 30 years – and has done so generally well. We have to go through a few last steps – but these steps are the most difficult, such as enacting the reform of the judiciary and creating a system of independent courts.

With this, the oligarchs cease to be dangerous. Maybe they remain caustic – so to speak – but not dangerous.



*Judges of High Anti-Corruption court take office in 2019. One of important steps towards the rule of law. Source: Ukrinform*

To conduct this, one needs political will. What is the formula for the success of reformers? The president should assemble a team of people who are smarter than him and let them do what they do best.

There was just such a moment when Kuchma [second Ukrainian president, 1994-2004 -ed.] came to power and gathered the reformers. And these couple of months of reforms survived very well, from the late 1990s until now. But the very process of reforming lasted only for a couple of months. Poroshenko maintained the process for two years.

I once wrote that Ukraine needed a third Maidan, but a third Maidan tied to the ballot box. I believe that there was an electoral revolution in 2019 when Zelenskyy was elected – a clear manifestation of Ukrainians' demand for change. Yes, initially



good team of professionals and instruct them to reform this country.



## “Historical event” as Ukraine finally adopts all legislation for judicial reform

After years of tribulations, struggles, and setbacks, the Ukrainian parliament finally adopted all the legislation that will, at least theoretically, allow reforming its corrupt judiciary. Legal expert and advocate of the reform Mykhailo Zhernakov did not mince words when he exclaimed “This is a historical event, without exaggeration. There has been no such ambitious project ...

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I know Poroshenko a little. I still believe in him. I can see how a person changes, grows, and so on. But he does not know how to delegate his power and authority. There was an anecdote about Poroshenko that he secretly sneaks into his office to clean it, because no one can clean as well as he does.

But a leader should be a little “lazy.” This is a precondition for everyone around him to work better. Leaders should not get involved in particular matters – instead delegate them.

How to convey this simple message to our political elite? Without offense, Zelenskyy came from business. That is another culture, you know, it’s something else.

If he creates an independent judiciary during the remaining years of his power, he will surely gain a place in history. I think he is an ambitious person. That’s why I say,



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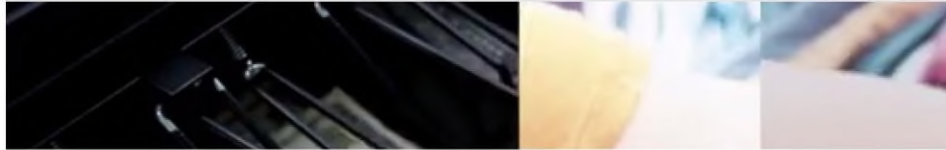
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