Interview with Oleh Bazar (O.B.), chief editor, LB.ua ("Livyy Bereh" – *"Left Bank"),* previously chief editor of "Lvivska Gazeta" *("Lviv Newspaper").* Interviewer: Roman Kabachiy (R. K.). Place of record: Kyiv.

We are talking to Oleh Bazar, chief editor of LB.ua, in his cabinet in the editorial office not far from Maydan. Conversation by Roman Kabachiy.

R. K. : How would you describe the most important stages of your life, please?

O.B.: I hope they are still ahead.

R. K.: Is it an answer in the style of replies by those interviewed by "Novoye Vremya" *("New Time")* magazine?

O.B.: I don't read "Novoye Vremya". What does 'the most important' mean?

R. K.: Those, which contributed to personality and personal development.

O.B.: Obviously, I hope that the first important stage in my life was the university. After all, Lviv National University named after Ivan Franko is one of those Ukrainian higher educational institutions, which look like something that can be called a classical university, or at least it was like that when I studied there. It was not a vocational college turned into university, but truly with a university spirit. There is a notion of 'university spirit'. Not a spirit of 'the Ukrainian higher educational institution', but a university spirit.
I hope that my first protest activity was indeed connected to university. When I was a first year student, I took part in the second Revolution on Granite.

R. K.: The second Revolution on Granite? What is that?

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: The second, not the first one. It took place the following year after the first one. I call it like this figuratively. Those were again the protests by students, demanding resignation of Prime Minister Masol and re-election to Verkhovna Rada *[Supreme Council – Ukrainian Parliament]*. It was the year of 1992, if I'm not mistaken. The organizers were practically the same as in Revolution on Granite – Volodymyr Chemerys, Markiyan Ivashchyshyn. We organized a strike at our faculty and went to Kyiv with friends. We lived in a tent town here on Maydan, so I lived on Maydan in a tent since my youth.

R. K.: Let's get back to that later. I'd like to make it clear, was it journalism in the university?

O.B.: Yes.

R. K.: I personally heard an opinion that there are two normal journalism schools in Ukraine: in Kyiv and in Lviv. Or shouldn't we put a one from Kyiv even close to the one from Lviv?

O.B.: I guess they were equal. Kyiv, being a capital, had its own advantages. Lviv also had its advantages, because its advantages were outside the faculty. We were in Lviv as it was. At that time a cultural environment flourished, and we really tried to communicate with it, interweave, hang there. I believe this significantly expanded the horizons for us, maybe more than the lectures did.

R. K.: How did you get to choosing studying journalism? Was it your family who helped with the choice?

O.B.: My father wanted me to be a writer for all of his life. In my understanding journalism was some kind of a compromise between his wish and what I did. I started falling for this at school – all that young correspondent stuff…

R. K.: Was it Lviv or Lviv region, to say exactly?

O.B.: Town of Sokal.

R. K.: It's quite close to the Polish border…

O.B.: Yes! After entering journalism faculty, there was a period when teachers completely put me off being a journalist. I entered the university in 1991, and those teachers were very archaic. What I heard at the lectures, and what we did during the practice, and what I saw at internships in the editorial offices, was worlds apart. I was taught to make a layout on paper, using some crazy systems for line size and letter size calculation. I remember the terms, but I can't say what they mean. At that time things were turning different.

R. K.: Did you influence those 'old fools', did you teach them anything new?

O.B.: We wanted to be left alone. We had an environment of ambitious people, who were willing to do something. By that time a phenomenon of Lviv journalism, Kryvenko's "Postup", had appeared. When my friends or me during our first year of studying got something published there, it was super cool. We made a student information agency. There was a wish…

R. K.: To change a country?

O.B.: To be honest, at that time we have not put it that way yet. There were no social networks, which would let people set their goals so clearly. To change a country was connected to some social activity, not to the journalism.

R. K.: OK, but in the beginning of the 1990s, when all of this was happening, there was freedom already…

O.B.: "Freedom" *["Svoboda" – Ukrainian political party]* was not here yet [laughs], there was an organization called Social-National Party of Ukraine, which actually existed as a part of Student Fraternity. Seriously though, that was really a time of some absolute freedom.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: I wonder, was there a turning point – there was the time when you couldn't talk about something, and then there is freedom and you can talk about anything. Before the university, your long 17 years of life were spent in the Soviet Union, right?

O.B.: The theme of the Soviet Union was, of course, present. To be honest, I don't remember the moment when I understood whether it was if we 'could' or 'couldn't'. Probably, it was when approximately in 1989 I became a member of SNUM, the Union of Independent Ukrainian Youth [*"Soyuz nezalezhnoyi ukrayinskoyi molodi"]*, still an illegal youth nationalistic organization at that time. UNSO and other organizations developed out of it.

R. K.: Was it taken off diaspora?

O.B.: Yes, but they had SUM *[Spilka Ukrayinskoyi Molodi]* – Union of Ukrainian Youth, and here we had SNUM. Maybe, there were some contacts, but at the places where I swam, there was no any diaspora. We published some newspapers, distributed them. We did what seemed to us an 'underground activity'. There was no fear as such any more. I rather 'terrorized' others, for example, my classmates, forbidding them to enter Komsomol [*Young Communist League*]. Such 'totalitarian' things came through…

R. K.: It seemed to me that in Galicia there shouldn't be any problems with this, probably everyone hated Komsomol there?

O.B.: Even I was told that I wouldn't enter the university, if I was not a member of Komsomol. I did not believe that, to be honest, and did not worry. But few of my classmates, I know this for sure, quietly went and became members of Komsomol. I cannot say that was when 'The freedom came', it was a process. I remember totalitarianism when I was a child. I was told 'you can't mention this' – my father listened to 'the enemy voices', that's why they warned me not to tell it to anyone outside. But the transmission from that lack of freedom was very gradual.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: What was the role of the church on this process? Or it didn't have a significant meaning for your family?

O.B.: Of course, it had. The family was quite religious, and we did not hide in Soviet times that we celebrated the religious holidays. We used to go to the village to grandparents for Easter or Christmas. I have a strange childhood story about this. The father of my classmate saw me in the church, came to school and told about that. The form teacher called me to the blackboard and put me to shame in front of the whole class. It was very unpleasant for me.

R. K.: Was the father of that classmate one of the 'liberators'?

O.B.: No, a local villager from some nearby village. The funniest thing that it was impossible he saw me in the church. Because we attended the church not where we lived, but in the grandparents' village.

I don't know if we should put religion and the freedom feeling together. In 1975 we went to Lviv for a big religious procession and a demonstration to demand legalization of the Greek Catholic Church. There were few hundred thousand people there. We went there with my father, with conscious intentions. But those things were rather parallel. I was baptized in an underground church by Greek Catholic priest, but in the village where we attended the church, the church was Orthodox (there were no other options in the Soviet Union), and by the way, it was one of those in Lviv region that stayed under Moscow Patriarchate for the longest time. The priest was very nice, everyone loved him, and they stayed in Moscow Patriarchate until he retired.

R. K.: The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church had its underground organizations, didn't it?

O.B.: I was baptized by a Greek Catholic, but we got by with having just Orthodox in the village – otherwise, we would have to go to Lviv and search for those priests.

****

REVOLUTION ON GRANITE

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: Did you know the organizers of Revolution on Granite?

O.B.: I know them now. I met them when I was a student. There was no really a heroic image about them, just the students who did something concrete. Markiyan Ivashchyshyn was the oldest one. He was the head of Lviv Student Fraternity. I met Chemerys in Kyiv during our second action. During my first year of studying I met Giya Gongadze, he also hang around in the Student Fraternity, and my friends made a joint program with him. That was such a big melting pot of one student community.

R. K.: There was an impression that they managed to get something out of the government, overpowered the system?

O.B.: Probably, no. We saw that nothing was overpowered. I had quite frank and active conversations with the leaders of the first revolution, and they often told that the politicians deceived them. That the camp of National Democrats sitting in Verkhovna Rada, the People's Council, deceived them. They deceived them, not allowing to reset the whole situation completely: no one wanted to go to elections, they were contemplating – ok, let our decent men sit there, some of them were in the prison camps not so long ago and became the members of parliament not in the best circumstances, so maybe they did not want another shakeup. Maybe, they understood more, than those students did. There is no unambiguous answer. And was it possible to talk about reload, when the head of the country was the Ideology Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party **[Leonid Kravchuk]**? When the majority of Verkhovna Rada were the open former communists? When now society is sensitive about some issues, but at that time after what we went through, this was unthinkable.
Galicia was its own enclave, and we saw what the rest of the country was like.
R. K.: By the way, at that time people were saying that "we won't manage those 'Moscovites'", there was something like 'romantic separatism' in the air…

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: 'Romantic separatism', if we can call it that, appeared much later, nearly in the beginning of 2000s, as a disappointment after the failures of the Ukrainian project in general. In the beginning of the 1990s there was a strong romantic illusion that everything would be alright, if not today, then tomorrow everything would be alright. We saw that some gradual steps were happening, and all that was perceived positively.

R. K.: But a formal Galician assembly also existed, didn't it?

O.B.: That was a story made up by Vyacheslav Chornovil to make it possible for three regional councils to synchronize their actions: they were under pressure from Kyiv, but on the other hand they were able to handle the local bureaucracy. This is also true. So, as an example, Chornovil appointed Stepan Davymuka, who really was not from the democratic camp, as a head of the executive committee. That was a compromise between councils of the Rukh members and executive committees of the communists. The project of Galician assembly was born the same way it died. It did not have any political consequences at all. It could have had them, if Chornovil spent a little more time and energy on it. He was an incredibly energetic person. Again, these were quite symbolic things. At that time many things were made just as a symbol, it is also true. It did not have any practical dimension. Three heads of regional councils gathered together, so what? Nothing.

R. K.: Maybe, the patriots in Ukraine were looking at them enchanted, expecting that soon they will go all out…

O.B.: I am not sure anyone knew of it at all.

R. K.: My father in a village in Kherson region subscribed to the newspaper "Za vilnu Ukrayiny" (*"For free Ukraine"),* so I knew.

O.B.: People who subscribed to "Za vilnu Ukrayinu" knew, of course. That newspaper was also a phenomenon, in a way. When they founded it, as I remember, each session of the regional council

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

started with Chornovil reading out the lists of donors: such and such village brought this amount of money for "Za vilnu Ukrayinu", those money was placed on the table in front of TV cameras, - look here, people brought money, so that we could have our newspaper. It started well, but unfortunately the project died. In an ugly way, and in terrible agonies, as they say.

R. K.: As for your second action in Kyiv, what was the cause of it?

O.B.: It was in autumn, the campaign was organized by USS, Ukrayinska Studentska Spilka *(Ukrainian Student Union)* (Doniy & Co), and partially by Lviv Student Fraternity. That was some attempt to repeat and replicate the positive experience of putting pressure on the government from the previous years. It was in 1992, two years afterwards. It is difficult to call that attempt a very successful one. Few hundred students, with very few of them from Kyiv, - we tried to block the red building **[of Kyiv University]**, stop them from going to the lectures, and finally opened those doors and saw that they wanted to go somewhere, but not with us, for coffee at least. We walked away from the door, and they all ran to the lectures.
Kyivites came to take a look at that after work, like these were the funny animals. I had this feeling. Many people who spoke Ukrainian came, many deeply sympathized. There was certainly no aggression.

R. K.: Did the first revolution of 1990 set some matrix for the future?

O.B.: We can say so. Some of those people who stood on Maydan were on a hunger strike. My friends and I were not. We were walking around, distributing the leaflets, appealing to join in the student dorms.

R. K.: What did you protest against?

We did not like the way all that was developing. We probably did not think about hyperinflation, because objectively everyone lived poorly. People received salaries in sweets and light bulbs.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: So there were no economic demands? The miners had them…

O.B.: But only they could have them at that time. The miners were an organized power that knew its demands. What economic demands could students have? They appeared later, but… I remember, around my third year at the university Viktor Pynzenyk came to Lviv to give speech for the students at the lectures. He was a minister of economy at that time or a vice prime minister, and he got complaints about low stipend (bursary). He replied, "When I was your age, I offloaded the trains! You go too, what do you want from the state?"

R. K.: He played being Balcerowicz?

O.B.: He could become him. But he was under Kuchma, and when they worked with Pynzenyk, he had a peculiar vision. Just remember that Kuchma's statement, "Tell me what country to build, and I will build it that way". No one has ever told him.

R. K.: When Kuchma won over Kravchuk at the elections, did not you have the feeling that all was lost?

O.B.: No. Kuchma, of course, seemed like a bigger threat. Russian speaking, "the red director". Kravchuk with his cunning knew how to be liked. I remember when he came, still being a Secretary of the Central Committee on Ideology, to the assembly of Narodny Rukh *(the People's Movement)*, which was called Narodny Rukh za Perebudovu *(People's Movement for Rebuilding)*. One of our renowned writers put a blue and yellow pin on the lapel of his suit jacket. Leonid [Kravchuk] pretended he was hot, because he could not take off the pin, as that would have caused the scandal, so he took off his jacket. He was always such a cunning official fellow, who knew how to defuse the conflicts. As for Kuchma, when he has just been appointed to be a prime minister, the 'Postup' newspaper published a front page article where Kuchma on the cartoon had a big wrench, and the caption was "I will tighten your screws". There was no feeling of a tragedy, honestly.
It appeared later, from the second term.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: But have you noticed something else that with every new election the range of those who vote 'kind of' for pro-Ukrainian candidates, 'kind of' for pro-European, expanded? Because in 1991 only Galicia provided the majority for Chornovil.

O.B.: One detail here – in 1991 Chornovil did not run in the elections alone – Levko Lukyanenko, Ihor Yukhnovskyy, and few others, and each took the votes off Chornovil.

R. K.: During 'developed Kuchmism', when did you have a feeling that the country is kind of being stolen, that oligarchs emerge, that it was impossible to influence the situation? The university studying was coming to an end…

O.B.: I started working. First, I worked at Radio Lux for a short time, then continued in a quasi-political public organization with a weird name "Nova Khvylya" *("New Wave")*. Its head was Taras Stetskiv, soon to be a member of parliament. We published the magazine "Nova Khvylya" *("New Wave"),* which was 'fashionable' from the point of view of design and anything else. It was approximately 1997-98. That magazine was aimed for quite a small community, something on politics, something on art and culture.

R. K.: Did you have a feeling of journalist mission?

O.B.: No. There was a feeling to do something interesting, but it would be hard to call it a mission. Later, when I started doing straight journalism, understanding and importance started to come to me, very gradually. "Postup" in Lviv was a phenomenon, but there was another good newspaper in Lviv, "Ratusha", it was born as independent, but later it became a city newspaper **[its co-founder is Lviv city council]**. It provided a good example of a city newspaper. I don't know, maybe at that time there were great publications somewhere in Kherson, Odessa (though not in Odessa, because they always had many TV channels and only few newspapers), somewhere else. There were "KoZa", "Kievskiye Vedomosti". We cannot say that something died and something was born or reborn. "Postup" maybe was a phenomenon from today's perspective, but

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

it was hard to call it a quality professional newspaper. IMI **[NGO "Institute of Mass Information]** or "Media Detector" would say their articles were a massive breach of journalist standards. That was an example of interesting, but subjective journalism.
It was always easier with this in Lviv, because there was so much of everything there. Later "Vysokyy Zamok" appeared, there was "Za Vilnu Ukrayinu", which more or less stayed within the bounds of decency for a while, then "Express" appeared, simply as a TV program at first, in 1992. Ihor Pochynok was a commercial **[director]** in "Postup", and he started making this "Expres Prohrama" *("Express Program")* as it was called in the beginning. As time passed, he understood that he could provide people with something bigger than TV listings. It started acquiring more flesh gradually, and as of today, as far as I know, that is one of the most 'alive' newspapers in Ukraine. It exists on its own, it earns income, it has regional editorial offices and a really decent circulation at the time when print journalism has died, as a matter of fact. There was always some room in Lviv.

R. K.: Was your continued life in Lviv and activity of journalist community in any way correlated with Kyiv?

O.B.: Not at some exact time. Some of my friends moved to Kyiv for work. Some, such as Oleh Onysko, came back (he worked in Kyiv for quite a long time). We didn't give a damn about Kyiv. Kyiv did not have an example, something to look up to. From time to time we came to Kyiv for business matters, to drink, and that was how I met late **[Serhiy]** Naboka, we also had mutual friends in UNIAR *[Ukrainian Independent Information Agency "Republic"]*. That was an information agency, headed by Serhiy Naboka. **[Oleksandr]** Kryvenko was a kind of communication agent with Kyiv, he attracted people from both Kyiv and Lviv to his projects. He came to Lviv just to exchange thoughts and ideas. His family lived in Lviv.

R. K.: Kryvenko was from Lviv, but not a Galician…

O.B.: Yes. It is a very precise statement. They are, with rare exceptions, very good people – "people from Lviv, not Galicians". On the one hand, they do not have that Galician pettiness. On

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

the other hand, Lviv provides some kind of cultural baggage. We have recently discussed this with Podolchak. He says there is a difference when you walk and you have all of that around you, and when you walk in a common industrial town. It forms even the trivial elements of taste in a slightly different way.

R. K.: When did "Lvivvska Gazeta" start? Was it some opposition for "Ratusha" as a 'more of Lviv type'?

O.B.: "Lvivska Gazeta" started without me. I was a chief editor of "Ratusha" newspaper at that time. I have caught it in times of some degradation already. We tried to boost it in panic, until **[the mayor Lyubomyr]** Bunyak fired me. And then I went to "Lvivksa Gazeta". Its investors were two leaders of student Revolution on Granite Yaroslav Rushchyshyn and Markiyan Ivashchyshyn. They provided money for it. "Post.Postup" at that time became a mouthpiece for Sadovyy, with clear problems and reasons to exist.
And "Ratusha"… It is difficult to make a newspaper, when half of its staff is approaching the retirement age, but it is hard to get new people, because the salaries are low. It is also a 'municipal enterprise': the funds are available, but you cannot transfer them from code to code. Because they are from the city council, these are the funds of the municipal enterprise. It was my first and the last time when I worked for public service, because it was a nightmare: you have the funds, but you cannot pay the wages. And when Bunyak and I disagreed, and our relations were good when I came to newspaper, he told through the third party that if I did not leave, he would hold back the wages for people.

R. K.: Was it easy to change places like that in Lviv, where everybody knows everyone?

O.B.: It was easy for me to change places, because the chief editor of "Lvivska Gazeta" was my friend Oleh Onysko. We lived for 5 years together in the dorm in one room and were roommates in a rented apartment for two more years afterwards. His deputy was my good friend *(kum)* Serhiy Smirnov, who was also from my university. The founders of the newspaper were also the people I could understand and had friendly relations with at that time.

R. K.: The fact that Markiyan Ivashchyshyn and other students 'from Granite' later became well-known businessmen, was it taken fine? Were people of Lviv proud that these people managed to earn some wealth?

O.B.: They did not have huge money, and, secondly, they never transformed that money into the luxury, into Bentleys and Rolls Royces. Marek *[Markiyan]* worked on his art association "Dzyga" – exhibitions, galleries, meetings, concerts. He constructed some kind of cultural landscape. This was perceived not as earning money, but more as enthusiastic activity. They had few closed cafes here: the club "Lyalka" *("The Doll")*, the club "Za kulisamy" *("Behind the Scenes")*, the admission was by membership cards. That was some kind of half-conditional business, and on the other hand, it was forming the environment. We can say that all current normal people, who represent the cultural environment of Lviv, came out of those Markiyan's clubs.
As for "Lvivska Gazeta". You asked if we looked up to Kyiv. No, **we looked at Warsaw**, even if it sounds paradoxical. We always had an access to the latest issues of "Rzeczpospolita" and "Wyborcza", and could sense those fashionable trends coming from the West. Not from Kyiv. The newspaper design was more fashionable, how infographics was done, and we took it from Poland. Soviet print tradition was unsophisticated, to put it mildly. "Lvivska Gazeta", to be honest, took "Rzeczpospolita" as a visual example. Its structure resembled it in some parts as well. We were the first in Ukraine who had an "Opinion" page, with Andriy Pavlyshyn as its brilliant editor. He would find very interesting authors: both our and Polish columnists, and various cultural personalities. It was very interesting for me to read too. It was a real pleasure, this job. You go to work, buying all the competitors on the way, you spread them out and study. And you do it every day. 'Dailies', people who make daily newspapers, have their own professional nightmare: I had the same dream twice when I was the chief editor – it is 9pm already, and I have nothing to put on the front page. Not a single interesting text!

R. K.: Does it mean that there was a freedom of press in Lviv at the time of later Kuchma?

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: Yes, in some way there was. Of course, it was suppressed with various means. For example, we published few critical articles about Serhiy Medvedchuk, the brother of Viktor Medvedchuk who was the head of Kuchma's President's Administration at that time. His brother was the head of the tax administration in Lviv region. So I had everything in my editorial office: 'mask show' with armed tax officers from the tax police, **tax inspections that lasted for weeks, when they came and told openly, "We have a task to destroy you"**. They initiated the cases against us, and we went to the courts. Markiyan Ivashchyshyn was detained around New Year.

R. K.: How were those articles agreed with the owners?

O.B.: We were like-minded people. They also did not like what was happening in the country, and they had founded that newspaper in order for that newspaper to change something. They were not ready for those attacks. Rushchyshyn had his business basically destroyed at that moment. He had a company that made clothes for famous brands, they still do it, they make clothes, for example, for ZARA. But at that time his business was being destroyed: they would not let the fabric through, and the factory stalled. They took it with some share of philosophy: well, we got into trouble, what can we do. I do not remember them saying "Stop" or "Don't do this". Later, after the Orange Revolution, they sold the newspaper to the owner of "Arsen" supermarket chain, and I moved to Kyiv.

****

ORANGE REVOLUTION

R. K.: How was the cassette scandal and "Ukraine Without Kuchma" received in Lviv? Did you have the feeling that you can influence that process in any way?

O.B.: I cannot say what the whole Lviv was thinking, but that was very traumatic. I cannot say that Giya was a friend, but at least I knew the person. It is hard. Maybe, for the first time, people started to think how terrible our own Ukrainian government can be. You kind of imagined the corruption, people wrote about it, but that was kind of hypothetical. Politics was considered as

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

some puzzles, card games, but then it turned out that they have an effect on the human life. To close the newspaper or to destroy it, like "Kievskie Vedomosti", - there were many stories like that in Ukraine. It was considered, to be honest, like a normal state of things. When a person is murdered, then no one had any doubts that it was someone else, not Kuchma, who gave the order. Now because of some understanding of the situation, more information you have, *[you might think]* that they could kill 'for the tapes', that Kuchma could have been recorded, and then they could kill someone he named. It is quite possible. There was a moment then, when it became clear: this is the good, and this is the evil. Markiyan Ivashchyshyn was later one of the masterminds for the campaign "Rise, Ukraine!", in 2002, "Ukraine Without Kuchma" in 2001. It was all boiling, the country wanted changes (maybe, not the whole country, but the passionate part for sure). This active part understood that the movement went not where it should, even though Kuchma was not the worst president, as we can see from today's perspective. Kuchma had an approach of a state man, even though still of Soviet background. However, his multi-vector approach, which was promoted by people around him, resulted for us in this war too. That experience of integration with EU and NATO could have been much less traumatic than it is now. But he did what he wanted.

R. K.: Was there any talk that 'someone might be behind' the cassette scandal, Americans/masons?

O.B.: It was different. There was a feeling that this gang should be thrown out. The government showed itself in an evil light. It was not just that. There were the funerals of Patriarch Volodymyr near St Sophia Cathedral in 1995, when people were beaten in Kyiv for the first time in long time. It was very brutal, and it was brutal for no reason. And it was only accumulating in a pot that was going to explode. But in summary it did not explode during Kuchma's time, at least, en masse. He managed to stay till the end of his second term undisturbed.

R. K.: Did he feel that he could not run for the third term?

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: I had an illusion that he was getting ready for the third term. And that all that story with Yanukovych's nomination and collision of the sides was to show who was the real referee. Even when Yanukovuch was nominated for the candidate, it looked like an attempt to scare some elites with those dudes from Donetsk. To make them consent to changing constitution, and that would be how Kuchma would be able to run for the third time. Because even at that time many people understood that 'those guys from Donetsk' are not very nice. He did not do it for some reasons, and I guess the reason for those reasons lies outside of Ukraine. The 'Third Term' project was put on hold, because they knew that the West will not tolerate it. We are not Belarus after all, and it was considered that Ukraine has not been lost completely yet, so Kuchma because of some internal arguments did not run for the third term.
And then what happened has happened. It was taken too simply and flat in Lviv, as if it was the fight with the good and the evil. Viktor *[Yushchenko]* and anything connected to him were the good force, and Yanukovych and anything connected to him were the evil force.

R. K.: The Galicians are often the promoters of such emotional volcanic blasts, but they also burn quickly, like straw, and get disappointed…

O.B.: In "Ukraine Without Kuchma", and in "Rise, Ukraine!", and in Revolution on Granite the Galicians played a very important organizational role. As promoters, as ideologists, as organizers. The same goes for the Orange Revolution. The problem was that those **politicians who were the promoters of those processes did not have the ability or the capacity to create their own political projects**, being just the handmaids for others. They were, to put it boldly, the support personnel. They did not become the politicians of the first level, and no one looked up to them. They started the fire, but it was always someone else who baked the sausage in it.
Narodnyy Rukh *(People's Movement)* was not Galician. The first project so far is "Samopomich", but now it is hard to say that it is a Galician party. It is enough to look at the members of the fraction in Verkhovna Rada to understand that the majority of people there are not from Lviv, those who are really active. There is a problem with people from Lviv that those I see in the fraction are the former employees of Sadovyy from the city administration, whom he sent

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

from the city administration to work in Verkhovna Rada. They are officials, and not the clever ones, so to say. The guys from Kharkiv and other cities in "Samopomich" are more active.

R. K.: Let's go back to Orange Revolution, which was a surprise for all of us…

O.B.: Why? Let's be honest: it was prepared.

R. K.: But was it prepared by oligarchs?

O.B.: I cannot know this. There are things that are possible to do and those that are not. Let's start with "PORA" organization, which played its positive role in organizing. It created some network structures, attracted many young people. Though it separated into "Black" and "Yellow" one. It is also known that it was created using Yugoslavian experience, there were people from there who trained and schooled our people. Probably, there were also donor funds involved, including those from the West.

Revolution is impossible to plan, but you can create the tools for it. No one knows when it is going to explode. They, probably, knew that they will have to defend the election results. Maybe, they thought that Yanukovych would win, and that preparation was necessary. But it exploded on its own at that time, and it is important to remember that the last two Ukrainian revolutions were not about Yushshchenko or Yanukovych. And not even about the European Union. Each time Ukrainians went to the streets to defend the right to choose. It was clear in 2004 that the voice of people had been stolen. And when Yanukovych decided to turn the country around, people saw that their right to choose was being stolen. That there would be no more elections in this country, we were becoming Belarus.
Here we have this interesting Ukrainian paradox: **we know how to defend out right to choose, we have defended it well, but we do not know how to choose.**

R. K.: How was Orange Revolution covered in Lviv?

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: I had a problem. When it started, I came to the editorial office, and about half of the journalists told me they were going to Kyiv. Bright-eyed. I understand that I cannot stop them. I tell them: I understand that you want to stand there waving the flags, but remember that you are the journalists first of all! And only after that you are the activists. You can be more useful for your country, if you inform your citizens in an informative and honest way, than if you go to Kyiv and stand on the square. Some of them got it, some did not and went. Some of them wrote to newspaper being there, dictated the texts, but some of them just did not bother. There were many people from Lviv there, it was not a problem to get information on Maydan.

Looking back, **I feel guilty: we as media and journalists put people in some pink trap, gave them too much hope.** And unfortunately, we personified that hope. There was a problem with reality perception. It seemed that we stand for the choice of Yushchenko now, Yushchenko as a choice, and everything will be great, it will be fantastic, the country will start its great life. The country, by the way, started living better, a significant economic growth started, which was connected to Yushchenko too, and also with the previous steps Yushchenko took as a Prime Minister. The freedom of speech got strengthened for some time.

But then the oligarchic media started to gain power, more than it was in Kuchma's times. The importance of the media became clear at the time of Yushchenko, and they have received more investments. Political shows appeared primarily as an element of defense of the oligarchs themselves. The example of 2004-2005 showed them how important the TV channel can be, as the 5th channel, which became the main information source without being a big channel.

We understood many things, but we closed our eyes. We understood something about people around Viktor *[Yushchenko]* or people around Petro *[Poroshenko]*, for example, who Yevhen Chervonenko was and similar personalities. Society wanted the victory, something positive – unlike now, when they search for betrayal. I remember when Serhiy Leshchenko wrote an article "The son of God", about the son of Viktor *[Yushchenko]*, and we published it in Lviv. Oh what I lived through the following day: the advertisers and subscribers were massively refusing to work with us, and because Lviv is not such a big city and the distance between the reader and the editor is also not too big, I listened to the bunch of calls: are you crazy, let the child play, God damn you! But who has made people this way? We did! For a year we have been telling them that Yushchenko is the hope of the country and he will save us, we made people this way!

R. K.: It seems to me that such taboo themes are also born in the places where there is no discussion among the media outlets, when they pretend that competitors do not exist.

O.B.: Such problem exists. But we did not do it in Lviv, we 'fought' everyone. Besides, "Express" and "Vysokyy Zamok" had 'circulation wars', when they described what circulation each one really had. I do not know now if that still exists. But as for the politics… at that time in Galicia not to support Yushchenko (!!) Now I remember some things that I am ashamed of, I am thinking why I have done that! When Taras Chornovil became an advisor for Yanukovych and then became the head of his campaign, I wrote a column (we used to be in friendly relations with Taras before that), and as a chief editor I placed it on the front page. To put it shortly, its meaning was the following: you scum, don't you ever come back to Lviv again, and not a single decent person should shake your hand ever again. We did not talk to each other for many years afterwards.

R. K.: But someone put Yanukovych on his golden toilet, and such people were among them…

O.B.: Yes, of course. I am saying that it was impossible not to support Yushchenko in Lviv, no media outlet could do it. Because you think about the audience, and you cannot be against 90% of your audience, because you are not an idiot. So we became hostages of the situation we created ourselves. We blew it out of proportion, and then became the hostages of it. Another thing was that media in Lviv always had the guts. Ihor Pochynok **[chief editor of "Express"]** could take the liberty of writing a big front page article before the Kuchma's second tour (1999), sign it with his own name, and that article told that you couldn't vote for that scoundrel. I would like to see where else in Ukraine a chief editor of the independent media outlet was able to do it. When you understand all the risks of such article.

R. K.: Galicia remained the outpost for Yushchenko up to Yanukovych's presidency…

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

O.B.: Yes, when I told my relatives in 2010 that Viktor *[Yushchenko]* failed everything he could, and that there was no sense to vote for him, they considered me nearly a traitor. And that was mainly us who pumped the Galicians up like that.

R. K.: Can we say that Yushchenko brought Yanukovych to power?

O.B.: Of course. Certainly. Without any doubt, and moreover, he did everything for his victory in 2010. First, by his personal appeal to vote against everybody, which hurt Yuliya Tymoshenko exclusively and not Yanukovych, because pro-Yanukovych voters could not care less what Yushchenko said. But as for 'democratic' voters, some part of them listened to Yushchenko. Second, now we can see what was happening according to so called 'spreadsheet' of the Party of Regions, which started to emerge in bits. Without the president's sanction it was impossible to corrupt Central Electoral Committee, the courts and the law enforcement system. So Viktor *[Yushchenko]* did not fight at least because administrative and other state resources started to work for Yanukovych. In his head he decided for some reasons that personally for him, or for the country, I cannot get into his head, it was a more comfortable option than Tymoshenko. There is an anecdote, and I cannot prove if it was true, but they say that he uttered that Yanukovych can be turned into Ukrainian, but Yulia Tumoshenko cannot be. I heard this statement from the politicians few times.

R. K.: Marcin Wojciechowski wrote for "Ukrayinskyy Tyzhden" ("*Ukrainian Week"*) that Yanukovych can become the second Kwaśniewski.

O.B.: Wojciechowski, despite he has been here a lot and wrote about Ukraine, probably had a vague knowledge about Yanukovych's biography and Donetsk clan, so he did not understand where it can lead to. Perhaps, no one expected that it would be so messed up **[more like 'fucked up' in the original]**, but it was clear for everyone that such darkness descended at that moment. With his mindset he was in the 'Russian world', and for the country, which has not been formed as a political nation yet, which was swinging from one side to another in terms of values, it was dangerous.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

R. K.: Yanukovych has managed to learn Ukrainian.

O.B.: Everyone has learned the language. There is some state politesse that the President should know the language. But there were no illusions that he could be Ukrainian Kwaśniewski. There was an illusion that it would be a variety of return to Kuchmism, that it would be oligarchate, but without unnecessary wars. For a short while they tried to imitate adequacy. I attended for some time off-the-record meetings with Lyovochkin, they gathered the chief editors, told them how they would make reforms, that what **Yanukovych said that 'the sheep should be fed first, and only then sheared'…**

R. K.: Was it in the framework of work for LB.ua?

O.B.: Yes. Lyovochkin also told how they hire Western auditors who write the draft reforms for them, those McKinsey and similar structures, and this is the same, by the way, what Petro *[Poroshenko]* and Lozhkin did later. Only the Yanukovych team faked 'sanity' for a very short time. Very soon the appointees of the son [Oleksandr] came to power, who were completely reckless people with no strings attached. With my negative opinion towards so called 'old Donetsk people', they had some constraining factors in their head. 'The young' believed that they can buy anything for dough.

R. K.: So Kolesnykov and Azarov can be considered 'the intellectuals'?

O.B.: Yes, compared to those ones. We recently remembered how Kolesnykov said on one of the party meetings in Donetsk that 'the death triangle' – corrupted courts, militia and prosecutors – should be destroyed. It is hard to imagine this. But they quickly moved away from 'democracy', and the first thing they did was anti-constitutional overturn. There is no single doubt that having changed the Constitution by illegal decision of the Constitutional Court, they made coup d'etat **[it is about the return of Presidential-Parliamentary Republic, as in Kuchma's times]**. And then

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

all hell broke loose: Yanukovych hunted in Sukholuchchya and relaxed in Mezhyhirya, while his gang was robbing the country, which could last for a long time.

****

REVOLUTION OF DIGNITY

R. K.: Was Euromaidan spontaneous, or was it also prepared? Was the opposition ready for revolution? I remember when on May 18, 2013, much more than a thousand people came to the streets and the opposition leaders (Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitaliy Klychko, Oleh Tyahnybok) did not know what to do with them.

O.B.: I guess, no. At least, definitely not at the beginning. They thought the following: we will be in the opposition, because we cannot get to power anyway. Each of them believed that Yanukovych was something serious and long-term. They were getting ready to play their role, and I suspect, they fought not against Yanukovych, but for a comfortable role of the opposition. But those 'orks' did not want to give the comfort to the opposition, that was why all 'titushkas' and others appeared, because **they were uncomfortable with any opposition**. So this trinity had to sit quietly and keep silent. And they negotiated with Yanukovych basically up to the moment when the mass killings started on Maydan, they all were afraid. Let us be realistic, all of them are not poor people, to put it mildly, with some resources, assets, they have something to lose. They understand that the whole repressive apparatus was in his hands, and they saw that both Yulia [Tymoshenko] and Yuriy [Lutsenko] could get to jail and the West could not help them out. Of course, they ran up to negotiate with him. As people say, they even arrived in the car trunks. It is important to understand that there were not only their enemies in Yanukovych environment, but there were also their acquaintances, their friends, their partners, and they had a long-term, close and mutually beneficial friendship with many of them. Each of them. Both Poroshenko and Yatsenyuk, and even Tyahnybok, not to mention Klychko and others. Each of them had their confidents, partners, and friends on the other side. People we often spent the time with. Sometimes it can also be mutually beneficial.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

That is why **the quality of people's protest of Maydan and the quality of the people who appeared on stage, that was the biggest contrast** in this whole story. I remember it well, because I could see it close **[Lb.ua office is located 150 m from Maydan]**, there was a possibility to go to revolution headquarters and watch it all there too. Very often they did not understand what they should take onto the stage. The standard schedule: singing the anthem, then this, then that, 'community', 'we defend'… and then no idea what do next. When the shootings started, the massacre, they all were so lost, I will not call the names now, but I remember that animal fear in their eyes. I say: So what are we going to do now? And they reply: run, run away from Kyiv, you are the chief editor of the opposition media, you are so dead! Some of them ran to Canadian embassy, which is located nearby, some of them wanted to leave Kyiv. We could not understand clearly what was going on, - we stayed in Verkhovna Rada till the end, I came to write something for the newsfeed, Koshkina **[Sonya Koshkina, the chief editor of LB.ua]** says that she is going to Maydan and I should go to sleep. That night had an overwhelming sense of irrationality, as the previous 4-5 days had too. Before that, it was possible to structure the reality: police fights, we protest, police puts pressure. But what happened afterwards was absolutely mind-blowing. That was outside the common sense and outside of any logic. In general, there was no logic in the actions of the authorities during that revolution, because each forceful attack, each attempt to disperse Maydan with force or brutally pressure it, ended with nothing. If they ignored it from the very beginning, it would splutter.

R. K.: Some people believe that those attacks were provoked by someone on purpose, 'to make Maydan last'.

O.B.: I don't think so. It is a kind of Donetsk dude's nature, 'what's that, eh?' Even though, during the last stage it could happen. I do not rule out that Russian advisors got involved at some stage, because it we unroll the chain slightly further – how fast the special operation for Crimea was launched. It was not possible to prepare it in few days, obviously some plan existed. At some stage for them it was advantageous, having created mayhem in Kyiv, to get Crimea quickly and with no special efforts, grounded on the fear of 'Bandera's Kyiv', and ignite the war in the Donbas, even though they wanted to ignite the whole East and South of Ukraine. And it was

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

possible to ignite only after people in Kyiv would do something extreme. During the night of anger in Kyiv, in Lviv, when people occupied the offices of police, Security Service of Ukraine and the rest, which happened after the mass shootings. So I don't rule out that at some point the Russians got involved, and they did it themselves, or advised Yanukovych to use the harshest scenarios, advised to shoot. To shoot down. Because, in fact, the murder is very scary. No one shoots to make someone run away. Any person who gives an order to kill (even though I understand that half of them are bandits, with blood on their hands, and each one has some story buried in the slagheap), and that person who executes the order, still has a fear. It is a very scary moral choice, and a person understands that there is no going back any more. He **[Yanukovych]** was driven to the edge, where there was no going back.
Even though, if we take a look at how that protest logic was developing, then if he did not do anything, it would be over after the New Year. He just should not have touched people.

R. K.: But what did he hope for, or what was he told to expect, when he packed his suitcases in Mezhyhirya, - for Crimea, for Donetsk, for Rostov?

O.B.: I guess when he packed his suitcases in Mezhyhirya, he only had one wish, to save himself and the suitcases. He panicked after what had happened here. He would not be alive here. Later due to the incompetency of Ukrainian authorities they came back to life and started grumbling from Moscow: 'Klymenkos', 'Zakharchenkos', giving out interviews, creating media outlets. But at that time they had an animal fear. Such an amount of blood was unthinkable. To have so many people killed in one or two days in the centre of the European capital, during the day of 20-21 they flooded Maydan with blood. After that the only thing they had was fear.

R. K.: How well did we use the chance of revolution?

O.B.: We were never able to use the revolution; **we have never used any of our revolutions.** Because we were not able to. When the revolution started, its conditional 'tribune' (meaning, people who went on stage and made the decisions) was soaked with oligarchs' people and oligarchs themselves. There was no chance. It would be possible, if revolution grew into a totally

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

uncontrollable cult, when the mere affiliation with the elite would be the ground for physical liquidation, and history remembers such cases. The society is strong when it is necessary to destroy, when destruction is necessary, the demolition of the system. But when it is about administration, some factors come into place, and we are not united any more. Because what was that united people? They came to Maydan, they stood there and left. What can they do institutionally?

R. K.: But each time more thoughts appear that the civil society is born, that volunteer movement has saved the country…

O.B.: Yes, it did save the country. Because there would be dozen times more victims without it, not a dozen more, but dozen times more. Because they saved our army from freezing and total annihilation at war. The main problem of Ukraine is that we never had a full-fledged civil society. We still don't have it. Volunteer movement is the first case, when a healthy civil activity started to emerge here. Not an activity that is directed towards grant consuming, but the one directed to dedicated activity to do something, without an intention to get some political dividends for it. Because all that gang from Reanimation Package of Reforms and other 'grant-eaters' do not give a damn about this country – I don't mean all of them, but most of them. They are professional grant consumers. For them it is important not to change the country and have a positive effect, but to report about some number of steps taken. We held this many round tables, had this many articles – give us your next grant! This is a problem – active civil society is when people gather together to protect someone, and then do something positive, and with their own money. Because when the donorship starts, no matter whether it is domestic or foreign, and not an aid to each other… In healthy countries civil society is when money for some civil initiative travels from home to home: "I am responsible for my district, I go around all the neighbours, we collect money for the veterans, for the church, etc." You collect money from each one, collecting it for yourself, for your activity, which is also their activity too, and you carry a responsibility. But when you are accountable to uncle Soros, you do not care about all your fellow citizens and their activities. You do not have to persuade anyone, only the Renaissance foundation committee. And you should learn to persuade your neighbor, and not that committee. Volunteers are the first who came to

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu

people and said: guys, please donate money, because our soldier at the frontline does not have a thermographic camera. This is the first full-fledged civil activity in this country.

R. K.: Will we learn to control the government?

O.B.: Has anyone learnt to control it anywhere? We are very critical toward authorities, but we do not know how to choose. Because some man comes and gives 400 UAH, and a common Ukrainian signs up an agreement on social partnership to vote for him, which we saw at by-elections in Chernihiv in summer of 2016. Have they learnt to control the authorities in Poland? I don't see that.

College of Europe
Natolin Campus
ul. Nowoursynowska 84
PL-02-797 Warsaw, Poland
Phone: +48 22 54 59 401
Email: 3r.natolin@coleurope.eu