**Interview with Volodymyr Chemerys (VC), Ukrainian politician and human rights activist. Interviewer Kateryna Pryshchepa (KP)**

**KP: We have here six general questions and while answering these general questions we are going to move on to details, if we make it. I believe we may start now. Once again thank you for consenting to the interview and as I have already mentioned what we are primarily trying to do is ascertain whether these protests which took place in Ukraine are genetically related to each other, and if so then in what way. Can we talk about a direct transfer of experience, like protest methods or rather imitation. And what do you think, what is your opinion, were these protests related or perhaps…? Mykhailo Vynnytskyi, for example, believes that they were not, that they were typologically different protests and it is a gross exaggeration and a kind of manipulation to analyze them together.**

VC: In my opinion, they had different causes, like journalist’s death, presidential election or dispersal of so-called Euromaidan, nevertheless, all these Maidans had social roots. I acknowledged it myself when during the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign I witnessed numerous people, for example, villagers. There is a film *The Face of the Protest*, I’m not sure whether you’ve seen it or not. The main heroines there are rural women for Zhytomyr oblast, who appeared to know nothing about Gongadze and obviously a monthly salary of a journalist from the capital city is the same as they would earn or at least try to earn annually. Yet they sincerely supported the protest, they joined it because they wanted to change their entire life. As a matter of fact, it was during the Ukraine without Kuchma protest that the slogan was verbalized: “change the system, change the social, economic and political relations”. The number-one demand was the president’s resignation, however, the main one was the change of the system. Yet in… at the beginning of 2000 in *The Den* newspaper, I published my articles on the revolution of 2000. It was immediately after that referendum arranged by Kuchma, which granted him virtually emperor’s authority. Still I think social controversies in Ukraine, where Kuchma was making progress in building a system of oligarchic capitalism, were meant to result in a social outburst. And it occurred indeed. It was sparked by Gongadze’s murder. Unfortunately, we failed to change the system and we realized what would happen afterwards, inasmuch the social conditions remained unaltered, and sooner or later they were to push the people to the streets again. We expected it would take ten years or so. It happened much earlier. So, in 2004 people went outside again. They were thrusted by social problems. By the way, among the first people on the Maidan were former participants of the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign. This time, however, the politicians put up a stage on the Maidan and restricted the protestants’ demands to a single slogan “Yushchenko, yes!” The president was replaced without any alteration in the system. People realized it very soon and actually realized that a new president does not imply a new life. Hence in 2013, the Euromaidan which started on 22 November was, to tell the truth, quite small. Actually, it was about to wind up. They resorted to demolition of the tent encampment and this triggered further events of 1 December, when, according to various sources, up to one million people flooded the streets. And again, the cause was different, but the reasons pushing people outside were social, as they had never changed. Yushchenko’s presidency in no way altered the oligarchic capitalism system. And as a matter of fact, now, on Maidan 2013-2014, the demand to change the system reverberated again and again as a refrain. In fact, the surveys carried out by democratic initiatives (they seem to have interviewed the Maidan participants about three times) proved the issues of the European Union, EU Association to be penultimate, the last one being that of Tymoshenko release. The dominant issue, as the protesters put it, was the change of their lives. Actually, the change of the system was again, appeared again in the spotlight. Now, two and a half years later we can ascertain that both the system and the social causes are still there. In other words, if a revolution means a changed social system and a social revolution is a change of the social system or change of the system of social relationships, we may claim that since 2000 the revolutionary situation has matured. There have been three revolutionary outbursts, which were triggered by different events but had the same causes. Up till now no revolution has been accomplished, so we can hardly talk about the Orange Revolution or the Revolution of Dignity. They were not revolutions as such. Because the system hasn’t changed, which means the social issues are still valid and sooner or later they have to come to their end. (I 6:28)

**KP: Do you separate the hunger strike on the Granite from the others…?**

VC: Yes, I do, because it was a different epoch. Actually, it was the hunger strike on the Granite that put an end to the Soviet Union. In other words, it was one of the factors contributing to the system change, which took place at the turn of the 1990s. Since then, since 1991 Ukraine has lived in a brand new reality, new social relationships have been evolving. I even once drew up a table of the data, even unofficial data on the social structure, on how comparable the changes were. I mean the changes in the lives of various social groups in the Ukrainian society. So, new conditions emerged in the 90s. And by the turn of 2000, the existing controversies, like those caused by sweeping privatization and sweeping changes in social relationships, brought about the clashes which eventually resulted in that first social outburst, Ukraine without Kuchma. And then followed others, which were not limited to just two. There were in fact more of them. Here we can recall the Tax Maidan, followed by Revolt, Ukraine and Rise, Ukraine campaigns. Then we can’t but mention the Chornobyl Maidan at the end of 2011. Even though less significant in scale, they were still social outbreaks, one way or another. Certainly, apart from explicitly political ones, of course, such as Revolt, Ukraine. The contemporary opposition simply wanted sort of get their own…, boost their rating or obtain power. They did not take into consideration the fact that there was no mature social tension and their slogans ended up suspended. (I 8:29)

**KP: And the one referred to as the Language Maidan?**

VC: Well, the Language Maidan. Yes, but the point is that the Language Maidan is a different story. In fact, that law, so-called Kolesnikov’s, is in effect up till now. And its cancellation wouldn’t change anything really. The life of Ukrainian speaking or Russian speaking people did not change. The administrative procedures did not change, nor the amount of press, whether in Russian or Ukrainian. It was rather a demonstration of the people who felt offended that they had been led up the garden path and it had been done quite impudently. Therefore, it was rather a rally… of a narrow stratum of people. Surely there was a certain dissatisfaction with the current situation but there were no prospects for a broader outcry.

**KP: And the neologism “titushky”, it seems to be rooted in the Language Maidan, in those times when Bohdan Titushko…**

VC: Yes, I believe it was then.

**KP: If you do not mind, allow me to return to you personally, to your involvement. I mean you were quite active as a commentator, as a participant in protests. Is it possible to trace out the genealogy, how it all began. What were the origins, what were the reasons? (I 10:11)**

VC: Why me? I reckon, well, firstly I studied at the faculty which, frankly speaking, abounded in dissidents. It was the physics faculty. The head of the department at that time was Senshelskyi (unclear reference – editor’s note). I didn’t know him personally. He was later excluded from university for nationalism. He took up a job at the Institute of Theoretical Physics, founded by Shelest for his son and there were the representatives of such dissidents… It was there, at the Institute of Theoretical Physics that the first 200 copies of the first Dziuba’s *Internationalism or Russification* were printed on an offset press. I myself was twice expelled from university for similar activity. And by the way, we launched the first students’ organization Hromada, though still non-formal. It was set up on 9 March, 1988 at the faculty of physics. We arranged the first strikes at the military training department. To be honest, I was expelled from the military training department. And our achievement was that the military training ceased being obligatory for students at all. Hence, it was logical that I took part in the students’ hunger strike. After that I became the head of the Ukrainian Students’ Union. As I see it, in 1991-1993 it was quite a powerful organization, which united the students from all regions of Ukraine. Well, later on, I mean after those events… I was in the Verkhovna Rada, and also in Kyiv City Council. And so we established Institute Respublica, a public organization, which became a launch pad for various initiatives. For example, owing to, owing to the fact that I, for example, initiated the law on the status of Kyiv and, hence, owing to contemporary mayor Omelchenko, we received premises in 12B Gorkiy Street. So we gathered there, the UNSO on the one side and the Trotskyites holding meetings on the other side. Apparently, we were not a mere public organization carrying out a kind of research or coming up with kind of initiative. We were the grounds for organizations of various kinds. And then, in 2000 Georgi Gongadze disappeared. We knew him very well, as he was among the activists of Lviv Students’ Brotherhood. Then followed journalists’ protests, then Moroz demonstrated the so-called Melnychenko’s tapes, and then it all set out rolling. One day, I guess it was in 2000, Mykhailo Sestovych, a participant of the students’ hunger strike, one of the activists, visited us at 12B Gorkiy Street. There were four of us, including Mykhailo Sestovych, Oleh Livytskyi, and Andriy Pidpalyi. We all belonged to the students’ movement of the late 80s-early 90s. And then Sestovych uttered apparently grandiloquent words, as they may sound nowadays. They didn’t sound so grandiloquent at that time, though. He said he would be ashamed to look in Georgiy’s daughters’ eyes if he didn’t do anything immediately. And even if we fail the Ukrainian democracy, we would at least save the unity. So on 15 December we decided to put up tents on the Maidan. Why tents on the Maidan? Because we had already had the experience of the students’ hunger strike. The latter idea, to be honest, was taken over from Bulgarian and Albanian students who had earlier put up similar tents in their country. And so we did. Why 15 December? Because on that day Kuchma was closing down, stopping the Chernobyl power station and Kyiv was swarming with foreign journalists. We called everyone we knew, counted, and the estimated number was one hundred and fifty. Well, everything has to be divided by three, therefore about fifty were expected. To tell the truth, we were able to put up the tents mainly because there were socialist deputies. Otherwise, the militia probably wouldn’t have allowed us to do that. But for the deputies. Only owing to them were we able to put up the tents. Now, let me recall the date, I guess it was 18 December when a huge meeting was held, involving about twenty thousand. And then was the first large-scale march to the Verkhovna Rada on 20 December. The number of protesters reached about fifty thousand. (I 15:51)

**KP: I know a few students, as I studied at Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, who, as far as I remember, spent a few nights there in the tents on the Maidan. Were there a lot of young generation?**

VC: Kyiv-Mohyla Academy was widely represented. We can mention Vasyl Cherep, Yevhen Kuts. Well, they all are now in the center of general culture. And Yevhen Kuts,

**KP: I know him**

VC: You do? Well, we can name lots, lots of students, even if only from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy. Yeah, they were students then, they aren’t students anymore.

**KP: And what about other universities? Was there anybody from them or mainly from Kyiv-Mohyla Academy?**

VC: Yes, there were. There were students from University, that’s what I am used to calling it, just university, because at that time there was only one university in Kyiv. From University and from linguistic faculty, yes, they were. But certainly repressions were launched against the students. We actually started a project together with Institute Respublica, we started a human rights campaign, primarily protecting the students whom the universities were trying to expel for participation. It didn’t apply to Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, though, mainly to the university. And we even published a book under the title *I have the rights*.

**KP: I remember.**

VC: There we collected relevant topics, documents to help the students to protect their right, the right to study.

**KP: I came across commentaries that the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign at some moment was apparently overtaken by the oligarchs who wanted to get rid of Kuchma and simply used that opportunity to exert more pressure on him.**

VC: You know, it has been repeated quite a lot of times. Then not long before the Ukraine without Kuchmaprotest, Dmitriy Kisilev arrived in Kyiv and there was another man with him, I forget now. But he didn’t try to excruciate the man. And as a matter of fact Dmitriy Kisilev joined a TV channel - which belongs to Pinchuk. I remember Kniazhytskyi scurrying to my home and saying… And it was before… Well, it was either summer, or beginning of autumn 2000… And he announced, “I’ll show you the only opposition in Ukraine”. There was virtually no opposition. Indeed, there was the *Ukrayinska Pravda*, and the *Hran* was published by the socialist party. By the way, Gongadze was engaged in both. On the whole, there was no other opposition. We gathered on call. In summer, in June 2000, the Verkhovna Rada implemented the result of Kucma’s referendum of March 2000 by an overriding majority of votes. It was supported among others by the proponents of both Tymoshenko and Yushchenko. In January, however, when accompanied by the Ukraine without Kuchmademonstration, the Verkhovna Rada voted down the implementation of Kuchma’s referendum in the second reading. Due to this, they say, Ukraine still retained certain elements of democracy in the last years of Kuchma’s presidency. And you know, nowadays, speaking of [Pavel] Sheremet’s murder, a lot of people draw parallels with Sheremet’s murder. As both journalists worked for the *Ukrayinska Pravda*. Sheremet was murdered with a view to destabilizing the situation in Ukraine. And I share the opinion of these people, some of whom took part in the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign. Kiselyov voiced the same on TV, claiming that Gongadze was murdered in order to destabilize the situation in Ukraine. Well, the point is, that everything was more or less clear, I think. I mean the motives and what exactly led to the concrete event of killing Georgiy Gongadze. That’s what Kuchma talked about. And he was justly accused that it was him to have arranged for Gongadze’s contract killing. But it was just a burning match set to a barrel of gunpowder, a barrel filled with gunpowder to the brim. All it needed was a burning match. And this match turned out to be Gongadze’s murder. If Gongadze hadn’t been murdered, something else would have happened. Something like following presidential election or dispersal…

0006. MTS II [interruption in audio]

…like the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign. Yushchenko was the prime minister, and Yulia Tymoshenko was the vice-prime minister. Yulia Tymoshenko was implementing the policy of promoting her own business interests, which were at odds with Kuchma’s and his people’s interests. And she was made to leave the post. She was dismissed and, let’s put it like this, she joined the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign in her own way, establishing the so-called National Rescue Committee. I was part of it. Unfortunately, that was a mere attempt to extend own control over the protest. She failed to do that, but as a result the Ukraine without Kuchmaprotest started to fade away. In fact, Yushchenko, who stayed in the government and was really afraid, was holding on to the prime minister’s chair. He, president Kuchma and speaker Pliushch signed a so-called letter of the three. It seems to have been 13 February 2001, where they branded us fascists. All right, they did it. It started off a wave of outrage among the protesters. Later, Kuchma dismissed Yushchenko, but he did not do this under the pressure of the protests. As far as I remember, it happened on 26 April, 2001, while the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign was fading away.

**KP: Was it then that the Rada voted at an offsite session…?**

VC: No, it was in Kyiv.

**KP: No, it was here. I do not remember the reason, but they were voting in the Ukrainian House convention centre…**

KP: No, it was at the beginning of 2000. It was, actually, before the referendum, when Kuchma was trying to gain control over the parliament. And the parliament split up into two parts, one led by Medvedchuk, and the pro-Ukrainian one. It was one year earlier. So he dismissed Yushchenko. Apparently he was afraid to do it while the protesting campaign was in full swing, so that those protests would not protect Yushchenko. But Yushchenko then called the people, who in a way supported him, fascists. So actually, every politician was trying to pursue their own interests. It does not seem uncommon, because everyone wants to make use of the existing circumstances. A few traits to the portrait: I recall one moment when Lutsenko and I met Kuchma. Kuchma had arranged a crisis headquarters, which was brooding over what to do under the current circumstances. There was a kind of balance. What I mean is we could not make Kuchma go, whereas he could not suppress the protest. Such was the moment. Among the people who were part of it was Dmitriy Kiselyov. I believe there was also Kniazhytskyi, and Mikhushok. And they suggested meeting together. We all arrived and voiced our demand that we want the president’s resignation, and resignation of “siloviki” Kravchenko (minister of Internal Affairs) and Derkach (head of the Security Service). To our first demand Kuchma replied with a smirk, “You’re a smart aleck”. As for Kravchenko, he said, “We’ll send it over to the Cabinet of Ministers. Let the prime minister prepare a motion and I will dismiss him”. We went to Yushchenko and Yushchenko said, “Well, you see, he wants to set me up. If I do prepare such a motion, I’ll be simply… thrown away… I am not going to prepare any such motion”. By doing this he proved his position, how he sticks to it. Later on Kuchma dismissed both Kravchenko and Derkach himself without Yushchenko’s motion. What is really interesting is that Yushchenko did sign a motion to dismiss a minister, but another one, the one for energy and power industry, Tulub was his name, I believe. Just because such a step was in the best interests of the business-group congregated around Yushchenko. He was afraid to confront Kuchma, indeed he was. Such are the details to characterize my fellow-countryman Yushchenko. (II 5:30)

**KP: In 2004, even if there were other reasons, I mean social reasons for the protest, still the key note of the protest was Yushchenko’s election as a president. And you never hesitated whether to support it, did you? At that time apparently your personal opinion of Yushchenko was not quite positive.**

VC: I would like to add a few more words about the *Ukraine without Kuchma* protest. Actually, what the regime was scared of most of all was the union of the right and the left wing supporters. So, owing to the fact that Institute Respublica was de facto the headquarters of the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign, it was a gathering place for, as I’ve said, the Trotskyists, the socialists, the UNSO. They all were together during the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign, they shared the tents…

**KP: The Trotskyites? Can you name any?**

VC: Well, among them was Zakhar Popovych, for example. But I can just recall a member of the socialist party, a certain Oleksandr Tyyenko, we called them “zotsok”. And Nusovets and Tyshchenko (?), they called him “natsok”. And they are still friends. However, some of them were supporting different sides in 2013, just take that Topolya from the UNSO and the socialists. I think that’s what scared the regime most of all. There were Komsomol members, such as Starynets, who is now working in the Verkhovna Rada secretariat, or in one of the Verkhovna Rada committees, or Poykha, also a Komsomol member, who now represents Lutkovska, an ombudsman. That’s why Kiselyov then came up with a Russian-style “krasne kaliche”. In Russia they liked giving such names, because for them it was the most painful point. Because people stood up for democracy and did so in all parts of the political range, which posed a threat of a huge outburst. That is why they were going to act like that. As for 2004, I didn’t join the Orange events. Numerous activists of the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign were there. It’s not that they took part, they were rather in the first rows. We then initiated the movement against everyone and published the leaflets “shame to vote”. And speaking of the statement, which was key during the Ukraine without Kuchmaprotest, claiming the necessity to replace the system, rather than the president. They all, Yushchenko, Kuchma and Yanukovych represent the interests of big capital, all of them. I had numerous disagreements and, frankly, arguments with my colleagues, but still… Some of them later admitted I was right. Yeah. I remember Yushchenko getting nervous as soon as he heard any hints about changing the system. The way he mentioned the salacious joke about what to change, like you needn’t change the bed, you just need to change the girl. And so he kept saying that no, that what’s necessary is a replacement, just put us in, as we are so honest and handsome, and then we’ll do everything. But… well, you know, people soon saw him through, that it all was… a lie. (II 9:52)

**KP: So is it possible to conjecture that you were not disappointed with the results of the Orange Revolution, because you didn’t expect anything from it? All in all how could you evaluate the outcomes?**

VC: The society experienced huge disappointment. Enormous. It was a disappointment with the Maidan… the Maidan as an event. Actually after the *Ukraine without Kuchma* campaign people were not so strongly disappointed. Just the opposite. You see, some people claimed that the *Ukraine without Kuchma* campaign failed, but I do not think so. Apart from tangible results, the outcome which I believe was the most important was the prevention of Kuchma’s referendum results implementation. Such partial results, I mean partial satisfaction of our demands like Kravchenko’s and Derkach’s dismissal… I think the most essential outcome was that while that referendum allegedly proved the majority of Ukrainians to be in favour of a strong leader, strong presidential power, already in May 2001 the sociologists remarked the prevalent support for the parliamentary republic. And it was during the *Ukraine without Kuchma* campaign that we went out with a huge banner “Ukraine a parliamentary republic”. I think the most significant change occurred in the heads and souls of people and that what made a difference. It was not a disappointment, while after the Orange events enormous frustration engulfed the society. It was reflected in the results of the parliamentary election at the beginning of 2010. (II 11:33)

**KP: And how can you explain the fact that despite the Maidan 2004 frustration, so many people rose again in 2013? On 22 November only few people were there, whereas on 1 December the number soared to a million?**

VC: The reasons are social. Disappointment is a matter of awareness. It may put you off for some time, but social circumstances are still there. And that’s when they broke out. You know, nowadays people are also greatly disappointed. Enormously. Maybe even more than before. Whenever I glance through the social networks, I see people accusing us as well, saying that the *Ukraine without Kuchma* campaign actually initiated the string of Maidans. And who says that? The people who claim to be reserve patriots and Maidan activists. What did the Maidan result in? As a matter of fact, Maidan 2013-14 is associated with violence, which had not occurred before. It involved the loss of territory, the war, this horrible socio-economic conditions we are experiencing. Actually, Ukraine… well, you know, together with the Centre for Social and Labour Research – I’ve mentioned Yushchenko, so you know – we are maintaining monitoring, internet monitoring of protests, of how the freedom of peaceful meetings is upheld. Actually, I remember a press conference on the survey results at the beginning of 2013. We were talking about the existing preconditions for a social outburst, because social causes were out there, and the protest and meeting trends were gathering momentum. Hence, it appeared quite possible that in 2013… as long as now the dominating demands were of socio-economic nature, we came up with an assumption, even almost certainty that a social outburst has to take place in 2013. And what a surprise, it did. Nowadays, in a recent joint press conference we announced that everything is rolling down back to the situation in 2013. The protest trends are escalating, the socio-economic problems tend to become top burning issues. If we leave out the yesterday’s sacred procession, on 9 July there seems to have been the largest demonstration since the Maidan 2013-14. The trade unions led at least 30 thousand people into the streets demanding the tariffs reduction. And the strike movement is escalating. Specifically we can talk about the workers’ movement. The examples are numerous, like Novovolynsk miners, Kryvyi Rih miners, Dnipropetrovsk rocket builders, Kyiv transport workers, the latter stopped the transport movement. So everything is only beginning. I think that Ukraine is again rising to the flashpoint. What’s different is that now people are disappointed with the Maidan as a phenomenon, moreover they are certain there will no longer be a peaceful Maidan, because there are millions of guns out there and there are genuine Nazis from Azov roaming around ready to do anything once ordered by the minister of internal affairs. This all may scare people off for the time being, but it may only hold back the imminent outburst. This way or another the social causes are still exerting their influence. And they will push people outside. They were the reason why the 2013 outburst did occur despite the 2004 disappointment. (II 15:55)

**KP: Could you estimate the role of certain groups of Maidan participants? What I am trying to ask is how essential was the role of oligarchs, because part of the costs seems to have been… what part of it was a genuine protest of people? Obviously there were a number of earnest participants, it can’t have been all orchestrated or anything, but what part of it was guided or attempted to manipulate?**

VC: Well, look here, look at the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign. Yes, self-financing was huge, meaning people kept bringing in money… besides, obviously there was, so to speak, material support on behalf of the socialist party. Nothing from others, because Yulia was in fact trying to financially sustain her own projects, like the National Rescue Forum. I remember they were trying to do it separately. At the very outset we had a deal to run the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign without party flags or without any flags at all. And initially they stuck to the agreement holding only blue and yellow flags. But later, when Yulia appeared, when she was released, other flags sprang up, first of all three-colored ones, as she didn’t use the heart at the time yet. She financed her own projects, not the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign. As for 2004, a lot has already been written and said. Nobody seems to be denying the fact that those events received direct financing. During the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign big capital wasn’t involved and didn’t provide the support it did in 2004. So the representatives of big capital stood on the stage next to Yushchenko. They were standing behind his back and they were providing all the finance. 2013… And 2004 was in this respect more or less centralized. The stage ruled. In 2013-14 people were already disappointed with the stage remembering 2004, so the stage was booed more than once, when the three were speaking, a three-headed dragon, as they were referred to. There were a lot of centers, which were trying to coordinate their activity. There, I don’t know, Demolyan put up his own tents and held his own meetings separately. He went on pickets to Klyuyev’s dacha or something else. He didn’t participate in larger, more general meetings. There were a lot of different centers. Each of them was financed this way or another. It was often the case that they came into conflict, rivalled. When, for example, something had to be done by joint efforts, like occupy a ministry, and there came Svoboda activists, they were pushed out resorting almost to fire guns. And so on. There were such different centers. Each of them was either self-sustaining or under somebody’s control and financing. Certainly, the so-called stage was under a more tangible control. Why so? Because the stage was isolated. Firstly, it wasn’t so easy to approach; and secondly, the representatives of the parliamentary opposition gathered there along with the big capital representatives, including Poroshenko. And certainly both the financing, and administrative possibilities were most extensive. Everything was there, even though they were so diverse. (II 20:08)

**KP: And how do you estimate the role of a jointly created body, a Maidan Council? They said that during the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign there was a similar committee, and certain representatives of the contemporary parliamentary opposition were trying to get it under their control. Hence was it necessary, did it accomplish its purpose or was it an instrument?**

VC: Well, it was… The Maidan Council was set up by the leaders of the stage, in order to demonstrate a democratic approach, a broader participation. On the other hand, it was a subordinated and rather even a decorative body aimed at passing some decisions and upholding their validity. It included mainly the representatives of… Well, the ultra-rights are a separate issue. They had been regarded as provocateurs until the events of 19 January. They were not represented in the Council. However, there were representatives of so-called liberals, who were also referred to as “grant hunters” (II 21:22?). Even though I’m also a “grant hunter”, well, you can hardly avoid it. There were people who later… And, they were said to arrange themselves social lifts from the Maidan to the Parliament, where we can see them now. Why was that body merely decorative? I’ll give you just one example, which is widely known. That Maidan Council pretended to take democratic decisions. On the other hand, it wasn’t able to control the entire Maidan. That is why there were other centers, and the people of the Maidan had little trust in the stage. And so, when the leaders set off on yet another trip to Yanukovych, to the administration, and under the pressure of foreign ambassadors, primarily [Jan] Tombinski, who was then the head of the EU delegation to Ukraine, they agreed with Yanukovych, among others, to make Yatsenyuk the prime minister and hold a snap election… Yanukovych was to remain in power till the end of 2014. Then they returned, convened the Maidan Council. The Maidan Council approved of that decision, however, the Maidan rejected it. In other words…

0007.MTS III [interruption in audio]

…that was the role of the Maidan Council.

**KP: There wasn’t a similar organization, a similar body, if we may call it so, in 2004. So were there any special… peculiar circumstances, which gave rise to the establishment of that body in 2014?**

VC: Well, in 2004, the stage, actually, controlled everything. People trusted Yushchenko. There was centralized financing, centralized information feed from the stage. In 2013, it wasn’t there anymore. After the 2004 experience, people had lost trust in the stage and there were numerous centers, which were trying to act their own way or even coordinate a bunch of other centers.

**KP: Is it possible to compare the Maidan Council with the National Rescue Committee?**

VC: No, for me they are different. The latter one involved Tymoshenko’s attempt at leadership, although, certainly she had to include the people who wouldn’t agree to her leadership. Like Moroz… The goal of the Council was apparently different. The Maidan Council, as I have mentioned, was a mere pretense of democracy and validation. While here it was an attempt to take the lead. That’s how I see it.

**KP: All right. If possible, I would like to go back to 1990. The social circumstances might have been different, but you said it yourself that the experience, the protest activities started in 1990…**

VC: For me they started in 1982. But it’s alright.

**KP: I am talking now about the forms, the protest forms. Just to mention the tents on the Maidan. I am trying to reconstruct the events. To be honest, so far I’ve spoken only to Mykhailo Kanafotskyi from the other side. But I am going to Lviv in August and I wonder if you could describe the origin of the ideas, how preparations were made, if there was any thorough preparation at all? (III 2:30)**

VC: Let me put it this way: the main driving force, organizer was the Lviv Student Brotherhood. You know Markiyan Ivashchyshyn for sure. Where did I last see him? In 2013, in Lublin. And I guess it was in Lublin that we first started planning. Actually, it was their idea, and they were organizing everything. As for Kyivites, well, it was really necessary that Kyivites be there, people from the East were also required. Actually, Oleh Barkov from Dniprodzerzhynsk was one of the co-heads. All the preparations were held mostly there. And as for the idea of tents, it was already in the air, because we could witness similar protests in Tirana and Sofia. And I can’t even tell where they appeared first, maybe yet in Tiananmen Square. As a matter of fact, such students’ demonstrations with tents swept many a country in Eastern Europe. Therefore, the idea was ready at hand, just to be grabbed.

**KP: Could I ask you a question, which may sound not very prudent? I was a small girl then and do not remember everything. Was it possible to learn about the protests from the news, or maybe listening to Radio Svoboda, how did people learn about them?**

VC: Well, firstly, how did the students learn about everything? They shared the information by word of mouth, because such student unions, which were already full-fledged organizations, existed practically in every university. They were in Kyiv for sure, and of course throughout Galicia, and also in Dnipropetrovsk, Dniprodzerzhynsk, Kharkiv, and Donetsk. There must have been newspapers that highlighted the events, I guess even official periodicals. I mean evening papers were bringing something out. Radio Promin was broadcasting something. And there were self-published papers, samizdat andleaflets. The events were widely known among students. I remember arriving at the site, placing tents, sitting on them… They once wrote about photos, so I recalled one of myself with my wife. We had just got married and we were sitting there on the scattered tests until the Kyiv City Council with the democratic majority voted for the permission to put up the tents. So we put up the tents and left.

**KP: And speaking about the proportions, were the majority the members of Lviv Student Brotherhood…?**

VC: Even on the Maidan, the majority were from Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk. Slavko Holovatyi was the leader of Ivano-Frankivsk Brotherhood. Synyutka was also active. And now he is the head of the oblast state administration.

**KP: Indeed, a lot of people made such careers. (III 6:12)**

VC: Well, some got even higher. Maybe I mean the *Ukraine without Kuchma* campaign, but… yes. And some perished, like Taras Protsyuk.

**KP: I see. There appear to be a lot of such outstanding biographies. Does it mean that people arriving at the Maidan were already unique, or was there following experience unique. Quite a lot have distinguished biographies. At least interesting…**

VC: Well, Tyahnybok was there, for example.

**KP: What was it all about, I mean not many Ukrainians are prone to die in Iraq, like…**

VC: Like Taras did, yes he was killed. At that time, he came to join the Ukraine without Kuchmaprotest. He lived in Poland. I met him and wanted to know, “Did Reuters send you here?” And he replied, “I asked myself. Because when my friends…” (and the initiators of the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign participated in students’ hunger strike) “when my friends are here, so I’ll be here as well”. And on 9 March 2001, there were no Ukrainian journ… Ukrainian TV channels near the President’s administration, it was Taras Protsyuk himself and his cameraman who were filming. He appeared in the frame, showed up signaling “stop”, he was shooting. Then he distributed the cassettes among the Ukrainian TV channels. Because the Ukrainian channels couldn’t make such a video. But he asked not to reveal his name, so that Reuters wouldn’t know, because it was a clash…

**KP: And you, how could you estimate the number of the hunger strike participants?**

VC: Hunger strike participants? Actually the number of people on strike was changing every day. Some would start the hunger strike, some would stop. I guess about one hundred. At least that’s what I remember, a hundred and twenty seven or a hundred and eight, or so. I mean the people wearing white bands and participating in the hunger strike. (III 8:40)

**KP: And the general quantity?**

VC: The quantity of people… well, look, the quantity of people who permanently stayed on the Maidan could also fluctuate, but I reckon it was about a few hundred… And when the meetings were held, it wasn’t every day though, the gatherings were more plentiful, the number reaching maybe fifty thousand or even a hundred thousand. Such was the case during all Maidans. During the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign a certain number of people lived in the tents on the Maidan, with more people flocking during the day, their quantity varying over days, or coming to the meeting. The same was in 2013-14 with its Sunday Maidan, everyday Maidan, some other Maidans. People assembled for Sunday meetings. On working days, there were fewer people. Sometimes, if you just looked around, roamed throughout the Maidan in the evening, it seemed empty. Empty Maidan with empty tents. Everything was changing. You cannot say how many people were involved. Indeed. (III 9:50)

**KP: A few more rather technical questions. I would like to know about Oles Doniy. How did it happen that he spoke from the Verkhovna Rada podium?**

VC: Sorry?

**KP: Oles Doniy. How did it happen that he ended up there?**

VC: Oh…

**KP: … was there any voting, did you choose the time or was it coincidence?**

VC: No, it was…

**KP: It’s not a question about him personally, but about how people posed…**

VC: It was necessary that the co-heads were one from Kyiv, one from the East and one from Galicia. And the one from Kyiv was to speak. There was no voting as such. Certainly, there were some competitive aspects. But nothing special. I did not get involved in any competitive aspects.

**KP: So, what is your opinion? Do you think the hunger strike achieved the goal it had set? Can you summarize those events? What was the outcome?**

VC: The outcome was that out of five official demands only one was formally satisfied. I mean Masol’s dismissal. But what is salient…

**KP: What about the military service in Ukraine?**

VC: We did not have it then. But what is salient is that nine months after the students’ hunger strike ended Ukraine declared its independence. Isn’t it symbolic? As for me that was the major outcome.

**KP: Do you trace a direct connection between these events?**

VC: Certainly. Because everything had been leading to this. The hunger strike became one more contribution, and quite an essential one. It wasn’t just another drop, rather a barrel or a cistern which brought about those events.

**KP: And finally. Looking at the participants you know in person, can you say that for many of them it was a push to pursue a certain career, to achieve some vital goals, which wouldn’t have happened but for the hunger strike?**

VC: Do you mean the students’ hunger strike?

**KP: Yes. There are quite a few names, but not so many. Maybe ten or fifteen names which you can still hear quite often. And their biographies contain the fact that they took part in those events.**

VC: Well, you see… You do understand there must be people who had… Everyone must have wanted. Somebody refused from the career. Others, conversely, put more at stake. Moreover, it was a way of thinking, a lifestyle. Markiyan Ivashchyshyn seems to have been a deputy of an oblast council. He seems to have found something more important in life than Mykhailo Svystovych, to say nothing of Taras Protsyuk, or many others. It essentially illustrates the current situation in Ukraine. In my opinion, the present day circumstances in Ukraine are permeated with intolerance and violation of civil rights, what makes them much more aggravated compared to Yanukovych’s or soviet times. Previously I did not feel the atmosphere I am experiencing now. The atmosphere of intolerance, with only traitors around and only those who insist on the necessity to fight till the end, to ban everything and everyone who is deemed unrighteous, like those in the cross procession. (III 14:06)

**KP: Maybe it is the psychology of a besieged fortress, because we are at war. We take a good deal of risk.**

VC: That’s right, but the questions is that… I think war could have been ceased, I do not know, in some two hours. Because its causes are internal. But these people do not say that the war needs to be ceased, they appeal to the war instead. They say that we have to keep fighting. As for those against the war, like Ruslana, it will take some thinking. I was interested in the response from my old friends from the times of the students’ hunger strike and then the Ukraine without Kuchma campaign. Most of them remained normal people. Actually I mean, we were against any ban. For example, I find the French slogan “Forbidden to forbid” of 1968 absolutely essential, because for me, for many it was sample students’ movement. Actually, that was the reason why we confronted the Communist Party, the USSR, because they spread bans. And that’s not what we wanted to impose on others, like we never wanted to ban others, to imprison others, to kill others. And very many people remained… normal. I reckon most of my acquaintances did. The majority of the students’ hunger strike participants simply did not join those, who keep screaming for arresting everyone, or executing everyone and so on. (III 15:55)

**KP: And one more technical question: Oksana Zabuzhko, I don’t know where she got this information, she said that during the Maidan-1990 hunger strike former dissidents helped with the planning, such as former dissidents of the 1960s and maybe even old UPA soldiers, whoever was still alive.**

VC: Since the Hromada times at Kyiv University, we have kept in touch with Les, Sverstyuk, of course Oles Shevchenko, and Dziuba has been active since he was let out of prison, and Levko Lukyanenko. But these people are incapable of such plots. And… Svystovych also seems to have said that when it got down to such planning, we would never be able to outwit the intelligence service. We would just lose time and efforts on unnecessary things. There was no plotting. Some may have attempted to play conspirator, but in fact there was none. And thank God, it was unnecessary. So all these old UPA soldiers, plotting, it’s…

**KP: Then it means that nobody was afraid, is that right? It was not as if you could be prevented from going to Kyiv or detained for five days for something like an administrative offence?**

VC: You know, when I was detained for organizing an unauthorized meeting at the beginning of 1990, it got things rolling. A few fellows arrived from Lviv only to be held and put to prison. So such things, they did… I am not sure, maybe yet in 1988, when I was travelling to Lviv wearing a blue-and-yellow self-made badge, a man approached me on the train, took me aside and said, “What on earth is that? You can’t get about like this here”. I was coming from Kyiv and could not do that in Lviv. But I could. Back in 1988. Firstly, all such events, such as detainment or the like, stirred the public. The KGB was not allowed to act like they used to. Secondly, I believe certain processes were under way both inside the KGB and the central committee of the Komsomol. I mean there were people who insisted on changes. (III 18:24)

**KP: What was the nature of the reasons why they became more lenient? Were they economic or of any other nature? From what you have said, it might be concluded that the KGB just relaxed or became less…**

VC: Indeed, relaxed they were… You see, the General Secretary had declared the perestroika and glasnost, hadn’t he? Hence certain publications were able to appear, some things could be discussed openly, no protest remained unheeded, and everything would have been given attention to both by the public and international law enforcement bodies. That’s number one. Besides, the publicity was rising, so on the one hand they were kind of cautious. On the other hand, you see, the communist party and the Komsomol members were now among the first to vote for decommunisation, (I myself saw Matviyenko there, who was my opponent, the first secretary of the central committee of the Komsomol while I was the head of the Ukrainian Students’ Union). I am opposed to decommunisation, as I consider it unacceptable to forbid anyone to have their own views. He was among the first to support it. Just like that. I think they have never changed, they remained, and they are used to forbidding. They used to forbid then and are forbidding things now. But at that time they had become aware of what is necessary, of what processes were under way and they had realized what such processes result in. They had to take the lead for personal reasons. It was the people mostly related to the Komsomol, who in fact became major businessmen and top capitalists. They were just corrupt…

**KP: I am going to finish with a distant retrospect. You have already mentioned that you were expelled from university twice. What about your parents? What was their attitude to those events? I mean, did they support you or were trying to discourage you?**

VC: I come from provincial town Konotop. My father died when I was not even four and it was extremely hard for my mother to get through. She was working as an engineer at the Konotop electro-mechanical factory, and they showed up there, including the local KGB. She experienced a few extremely unpleasant moments, however, she never resented what I was doing.

**KP: You can often hear, “Yeah, it was in our family too, for example…” I don’t know, some listened to Radio Svoboda together with the parents, some read forbidden publications…**

VC: I listened to Radio Svoboda, but not together with my mother. She never mentioned anything about it, but it was really troublesome. But I could tell, she was gravely concerned with the Ukraine without Kuchmacampaign. She was afraid. But way back then it didn’t use to be as frightening as in 2001. Maybe in 2001 things changed a little, I guess so.

**KP: Thank you.**