

Interview with Andrzej Brzezicki (AB) Interviewer Iwona Reichardt (IR)

IR: How did it happen that you started being interested in Ukraine?

AB: When I was a student, I worked for *Tygodnik Powszechny* and... I simply went to Ukraine with the Batory Foundation which had such programmes, these were such programs, there was this journalistic triangle which was gathering people from Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine. And I was simply going to Ukraine, but not only to Ukraine, as we would go to Germany and those kinds of things. And this is how I started writing about Ukraine, I was very shy about it in the beginning, because I was working for the domestic department and I was dealing with domestic issues, but started writing about Ukraine, first once or twice, I remember that they once did an supplement about Lviv and as I was there somebody asked me to write about it. Also, before 2003 I was writing texts about Ukraine and so on, but at the time when the revolution erupted it was actually quite natural that *Tygodnik Powszechny* had to send somebody there and this is how I was selected, as I was there before and that's the way it was. But I have to admit that already then it did not seem to me that this Eastern Europe will not be my main interest in life, and indeed the revolution in Ukraine was this breaking point.

IR: Before we move on to this revolution, let's talk about this period of your studies, was this the end of the 1990s?

AB: No, early 2000s.

IR: OK, so you've been interested in Ukrainian affairs, more or less, since the early 2000s.

AB: Yes, yes, yes.

IR: And how did it happen that you went there, I know that you were not there by yourself, but with Małgosia, and that you were on the Maidan in 2004?

AB: It happened that somebody had to go; I was actually supposed to go with Krzysiek Burnetko, he was an editor with *Tygodnik Powszechny*, but he – because of some problems – could not go, and Małgorzata wanted to so she volunteered to go, saying that she is soon graduating from Russian studies and is interested in these matters and really wanted to go. So we went.

IR: So you are arriving...

AB: It was the end of November 2004 and of course craziness as we were going there by a train that no longer goes from Kraków to Kyiv. It was a train that would leave Kraków at night. It would depart every other day as it would take it 24 hours to get there, so it was around 1pm when we arrived in Kyiv and because *Tygodnik Powszechny* had earlier contacts with a local parish Catholic newspaper there, it was published by the Dominicans, this was, in fact, our first contact. And there was an opportunity to use their guest rooms, the guest rooms of this newspaper, they would rent it out; a two-level apartment, it was a large apartment above this editorial office and this is where we could stay over. It was meant to be a trip for one week, something like that. Oh and let me add, as it now came to my mind, that I was meant to go to Ukraine but only to Odesa for this meeting of this club from the Batory Foundation. I was supposed to go straight to Odesa and in Odesa there was supposed to be a meeting; they had planned it before the revolution, there were even dilemmas whether to cancel it or not, but overall they agreed that as there was no bloodshed they could have convene this club. And as the revolution exploded and the idea emerged to go to Kyiv and it was like this: go to Kyiv and later, a week later, make a trip to Ukraine and this is how much of this Ukraine was planned.

So we went to Kyiv. Of course the railway station was occupied by the pro-revolutionary forces, everything was full of orange, there... I do not know.... They were occupying these main strategic objects and the driver was waiting there, from this parish newspaper, he was working for these Dominicans who had this small empire there, if I can say so, they had a driver with a good car, and they picked us up and drove us to Spaska Street, which is in Podole, not far away from the Kontraktova Ploshcha metro station, very close to Yushchenko's headquarters which was placed at Liwicka Street in such a school, I think it was... So this is how we arrived and on this first evening we went to the Maidan, in the evening..

IR: And what it looked like?

AB: It was extraordinary. Of course because.... So we took the metro to the Maidan and we got out to the surface... and those thousands of people there... It is difficult to say what was the actual number on that day....

(Short break in the interview)

AB: Tens of thousands of people then on this.... And this amazing atmosphere, simply. Even though it was such a strong frost on that day as the winter was very strong... but what was strong was in fact this enthusiasm... there were bands playing at that time... (incomprehensive)... and later when we found out there was this cool band and this is what it looked like.... We stayed at the Maidan until 10pm, or something like that, simply....

IR: But when you look at the organisation of this Maidan, as back then there was no Facebook, how did it happen that these people, that they called each other and organised themselves?

AB: You know there was no Facebook, but the Internet was already functioning quite well. It was 2004 so there were websites, there were cell phones so all this somehow functioned, quite well. It seems to me that there was no problem with organisation. And everything was going on smoothly, meaning there was a stage organised. This was something that the so-called Lutsenko's attamans of the revolution were responsible. And these kind of people. And they were... and there was crowd and of course this was a bit more spontaneous and honest. I remember these moments, things that from the perspective of 2013 or 2014 do not make such an impression, but it made an impression on me; that people were coming and you could tell that they were rich; they had SUVs, those four-wheel cars, and they would leave little notes that you can get into their cars and warm up for ten minutes or so, and they were simply warming up the engines and were leaving these notes and people could get in and sit in a warm car and warm up for some time. This is what I remember. I remember that there were moments that someone would come, maybe an owner of a restaurant or a bistro and open up a trunk and was taking out bags of pierogis, or warm rolls etc. And this is how it somehow functioned, of course there were elements of tent camp. It was

differently arranged than now as at the Maidan there was a stage and people while this who camp walked down the Khreshchatyk, from – more or less – the Maidan Nezalezhnosti to this building where the Khreshchatyk can be found and radio Svoboda and McDonalds, if I remember correctly. I do not know if they all are still there, but to such a building, or maybe a bit further, maybe to the mayor's building, but I doubt that it was reaching further... that it would be reaching to the CUM building, as there was a CUM at Khmelnytsky street, the tent camp was, as if, in this direction.

IR: You managed to spend some time in those tents, yes?

AB: We would walk around a bit from people to people. We had two techniques, so to say. One was to catch those big ones, like Lutsenko, Tymoshenko, Poroshenko and so on. The second was to catch the middle-level people; the organisers, creators of websites, activists and so on. And our thing was to go to these people; approach them and talk to them. So we would go to those tents and talk to people. And, as I am recalling now, the second part of this demonstration, this revolution, took place at Bankova street, there.. where the presidential administration is located and people were also standing there so we would also go there to talk to them, as there was such a large Maidan left to itself, while this Bankova Street was protected by the forces and there were people as well.

IR: OK, let's then divide the protesters into these three groups. Let us start with the highest. What was the dynamics that you caught among those atamans of the revolution? Now we know what has happened later, but to what extent were these things visible, those conflicts between them, these personal ambitions? Or at that time it was a consolidated team?

AB: At that time it was of course a consolidated team. After the poisoning of Yushchenko it was clear that everybody felt solidarity towards him. And this is maybe my personal naivite, maybe I did not know everything so well, but indeed I had a feeling that they were such a tight group, but what – from the beginning left me with no illusions was that was not, even though there were comparisons, Polish Solidarity of the 1980s. I remember even when I was making this comparison that the talks in Gdańsk shipyard were transmitted by the radio receivers so that people could hear

everything and everything was quite clear, while the negotiations that took place in the Mariyinsky Palace, and later at the Parliament, were transmitted on a large video screen which was placed on Khreshchatyk, also to avoid the feeling of secret talks, to make an impression that they were transparent, clear. And what to say more it was clear that these people are not the poor workers, or some kind of intellectuals from the Committee of Defence of Workers, wearing worn out sweaters, it was quite clear that these are very rich people. I remember when I was walking up towards Verhovna Rada and there were those cars with orange flags on them and these were the cars that I cannot find even today in Poland, very expensive ones. So it was such a contract that these are the defenders of the people, and here it was so clear that these were very wealthy people and for sure not representatives of ordinary citizens.

IR: And the second group?

AB These were people who were around 20-30 years old. They were some kind of advisers (incomprehensive recording)... or something like that... Now I do not remember many of their names, I would have to think about these names; Andriy Gnatov from this organisation Maidan.org if I remember correctly. And these were people who were responsible for such technical, organisational so to say, things. They were also Opora activists too..

IR: And what about journalists? Were they engaged?

AB: Yes, they were engaged to. For example this is when we got to know Vakhtang Kipiani. So yes, they were engaged too.

IR: And what about the ordinary people?

AB: These were people mostly from Western Ukraine, or Kyiv and the latter just simply came to show support, meaning they had a sense that they were, of course, robbed of victory and they were not accepting that the matters will go forward. I have a feeling that these were just such

simple responses: that they stand here because they were robbed of victory. This revolution was of a very personalised nature. The focal point was Yushchenko and the main message, quite simple, was included in this song, what is it called, oh I forgot now. This one famous song: "Yushchenko our president. Razom nas bahato" and that was the main message of this revolution. And these people were repeating that they were not goats, and so on, and so forth.

IR: And those slogans: Yushchenko, Yushchenko.

AB: Yes, plus I also remember, maybe this is childish, I do not know if this fits the protocol, but you were asking about this team of the leaders of the revolution. There was such a cool joke that Tymoshenko and Yushchenko are lying together in one bed and they are all relaxed and Yushchenko says: "Listen Yulia, maybe once more?" and she responds: no, I cannot any more, too tired. He goes on: common Yulia, I beg you, one more time! But I am tired. Yulia. All right then: YU-SHCHE-KO! (*laughing*) as indeed it was like this that she was standing at the stage and screaming like this. So...(*laughing*)

IR: Before I move on to my questions about Yushchenko I would like to ask you one more things: you went there as Andrzej Brzezicki of course but were seen as a journalist from Poland. What was the perception of Poland at that time?

AB: Very good! *Tygodnik Powszechny* gave us stickers Poland+UA. There was a hear or something like that and one more thing – something which the Ukrainians did not understand – there was the writing: 89/2004. It was a reference to us that Poland 89 is Ukraine 2004, but this we had to explain to them as they really did not get it. But the journalists from Poland were very warmly welcomed and this was this moment when it was actually quite easy to get interviews with these people, maybe with the exception of Yushchenko whom we interviewed in April when he was already president but from all these remaining leaders we managed to get interviews. At that time they really cared, and then it was a matter of a week, two weeks, that we had to wait for an interview, but we have managed to do them all. What is interesting is that when they won then the line was suddenly cut off and they became unreachable, busy with their own matters, and these words that Europe must be with them, that Poland needed to be with them, they seemed to

have lost the meaning. This was a little distasteful. Maybe, of course, they took the responsibility for the state and they had millions of other tasks which made it impossible for them to talk but there was a feeling that during this revolution they cared more and it was indeed easier to make an appointment.

IR: Coming back to Yushchenko. This scarf that you showed me, did you get it or bought it?

AB: I do not remember. Maybe I got it at the headquarters as we were passing by. It was there at Podole. We would go there quite often. This was still the time, today things are very different, but then we did not even have our own computers and we were taking advantage of the hospitality of this Catholic newspaper or going there as in Yushchenko's headquarters there were computers with the Internet. At that time these were cable connections, there was no wifi so we had to go there to learn things. There were small announcements there too that somebody will come, that there will be a press conference... So maybe this scarf is from there. There were tons of gadgets there as far as I remember. Some kind of pins, stickers, brochures, there was this programme "Ten steps to meet people" which probably was not implemented at all. I remember that one year after the revolution, I do not know now if I wrote that or read it somewhere, but there was a kind of summary of what had been achieved from those 10 steps of this abridged programme. And there was a lot of stuff: posters and calendars. Lots of stuff, indeed.

IR: And tell me more about Yushchenko in November-December and then Yushchenko later. How did you look at this politician.

AB: A saviour.

IR: In November?

AB: Yes. For sure a man who is.... a historic hero. Experienced, serious. With a masked face. I have a picture from the headquarters which I took of him and all these scars were visible, hard to

recognise this man, at that time it was really making an impression. He is quite large so he was really making an impression of the nation's leader and this is how I saw him then. Later I saw him, for example, at the Maidan stage. He would stand there and we were underneath, there was a kind of mould there – between the stage and the people. Like during the concerts. There was a cameramen and journalists. So we were able to see him from quite a short distance. I remember in these headquarters, when they were announcing the results or the end of elections in late December, how he would come in. He coined it quite cleverly that he was greeted with the trumpets, the music was coming from the speakers, as if the king was coming. And indeed it was like this that when he would show up for a moment, said something and this was accompanied by music. This is how I saw him then. But this image got worse very quickly and he turned out to be a man, completely... I do not know... he later proved to be... indecisive at times, devoted to symbolic matters...

IR: Moving on to an evaluation. Do you think that this revolution led to any change in Ukraine?

AB: Yes, despite everything I think it has. It has led to an emergence of a group of journalist, I am looking at it from this perspective mainly, a group of journalists who are not afraid to write or say whatever they want and like...

IR: Can you give any examples? Whom do you have in mind?

AB: For example Vakhtang Kipiani. This is my impression as before this was limited a bit to Lviv-based media which already were... but they had limited impact. Or it was limited to *Ukrainska Pravda*. The one who fought and later it got indeed somehow more relaxed and it seems to me that something got overcome... a social belief that things are not worth it. This was over. It became clear that things were possible that people can come the streets and can even overturn. Of course this was a whole process, but that they could fight by standing on the Maidan and it seems to me that this was a very big breakthrough. Additionally, thanks to the revolution the two camps were created: the blue and the orange camp and this led to pluralism both in the public and political life. I am not saying, it is clear that the negative stamp should be put on the

blue ones rather, I am not saying that the orange camp were all saints but there was some kind of competition, which translated into competition in the media and this competition in politics. And I think that this is a huge contribution of this revolution. It overturned this Kuchma-dominated system where everything worked. Kuchma was dividing and ruling, there were some conflicts, etc. but he for sure was a kind of hat over everything. And later this got freed out and many people were repeating, these are not any revelations what I am saying, but indeed there was something like that. Of course all the media were, to a large extent, controlled by the oligarch because they had different interests so these media spoke differently. So some kind of objective spectrum could emerge from that. Just from there mere competition between them.

IR: And this is one of the processes which has not stopped developing..?

AB: In my opinion it has not stopped as of course in politics things were of all sorts, but here things were much better. And, nonetheless, Ukraine became more open, more, I do not know, friendly, accessible....I do not know how to call it. So in the end I believe that this revolution changed Ukraine.

IR: Looking at the last two revolution, as you took an active part in both, at least as an observer, please tell me at what point Ukrainians start going to protest at the Maidan? What is the cause? Economic factors? Or political ones? Or maybe each revolution is so different that we cannot even compare them?

AB: It seems to me that they were different but there seems to be a conviction in the Ukrainian nation, as the name Revolution of Dignity came up, that some things cannot be done and that this nation cannot be deprived of dignity and why in the case of the Orange Revolution it was the stealing of victory during the Euromaidan it was probably the beating up of those students in late November as all analyses suggest, or at least this is what the witnesses say, that after the call of Mustafa Nayem this could have dispersed easily but at the moment when these students got beaten up that was when the society got heated up and people went to the streets. And this is when the Revolution of Dignity got it speed and temperature, so it seems to me.

IR: Moving on to the Euromaidan. Were you surprised by its outbreak?

AB: Yes, of course. Of course. For sure. Overall, I think most people were surprised. At times all these analyses seem useless but a very well known political commentator, shortly before the Revolution of Dignity, talked at a conference, with a visible resignation, that things were bad in Ukraine, that everything under Yanukovich was bad and nobody was reacting to it. And he said that if today an Orange Revolution erupted, it would have 100 thousand likes on Facebook but nobody would come to the streets. And shortly after it turned out that they went out. It seems to me that...that we cannot foresee. I have a feeling that all these analyses, sociological research – they are not convincing to me, even though I was once at a lecture at the Mohyla Academy and there was a girl, she was a Ukrainian from Canada, from diaspora, she came with... she was saying that she can assess when will a revolution erupt. She provided some kind of sociological factors, was adding them up, foretelling....But I am not sure if she foresaw the Revolution of Dignity...

IR: You arrived in Kyiv in December 2013. Please tell me what was the difference between this December and the events from nine years before?

AB: The difference was that everything was as if from this film Mad Max. Mainly because everything had this more post-apocalyptic image. Those walls, or what they were called, the barricades, because of that...

IR: So you arrived already after all this singing? There were already street fights, yes?

AB: Right after those fights...

IR: The first ones?

AB: Yes, this was the very beginning of Decemeber, I think. And it made an impression of such a village, a small town almost, this Maidan. And later it was done more professionally, also because the buildings nearby were taken over and there were the waiting rooms and all this infrastructure, which was lacking during the Orange Revolution. So this is what was striking to me. It was not funny, because there were not that many colors, and more medieval so to say. Those people they were dressed up, bundled up, making an impression as if these ten years... as if.. I had a feeling, which was very subjective of course, but as I was often seeing these people dressed like that, bundled up, I had a feeling that we were in medieval times...

IR: Professor Hrycak told me that to warm up they were putting mustard seeds into their shoes.

AB: I do not know (*laughing*)

IR: Apparently, they can heat you up. But maybe it was colder in 2013?

AB: No, in my opinion it was colder before. There was more snow during this...

IR: Orange ?

AB: Yes, yes.

IR: But the atmosphere was warmer, yes? During the Orange one. Maybe here there was more fear?

AB: But also determination and conviction that a use of force is probable. Something like that.

IR: You could feel it already in Decemeber?

AB: This was already after the beating up of the students.

IR: But no one had been killed yet. Or were you there at that moment?

AB: I do not remember, I do not remember, but I do not think that they were. Or it was like this: as far as I remember, for example during the Orange Revolution the train station and those kinds of things were occupied, in this case they were not. I remember the airport, as I flew in by a plane and if I remember correctly because then we came by train, but at the airport there were no traces of a revolution, but I can be wrong here..

IR: But now looking at the leadership of the Orange Revolution. It was quite visible. And we even divided the protesters into three groups. Here, I would say it is much more difficult to talk about the leadership. How do you assess the role of the politicians who later, theoretically, became the face of Maidan but in reality were not such a face.

AB: It seems to be that they were greeted with lots of scepticism, even in the beginning. And Yatseniuk and Tiachnybo and Kitchko even... Maybe Kitchko was the most welcomed; such a strong man who is not afraid of anything. While the others... much less. Especially Yatseniuk was probably the least convincing. So it looked as if they were somehow attached, but at the same time somebody had to tame this protest and give it some kind of a political form and talk to the authorities.

IR: And these real leader who were in charge, they could not do that? Was is a dispersed leadership?

AB: Yes it was dispersed for sure. And they were not partners because those these politicians they were representing some kind of parliamentary opposition and automatically became involved in these negotiations which were led by for example Sikorski when he went there to do the mediation and so on. I think that they were simply the people with whom negotiations were possible and Yanukovych talked to them to a certain point.

IR: You were observing Yanukovych from at least the Orange Revolution. Did he surprise you by not signing the Association Agreement with the UE, by the course of the Euromaidan and his escape? Was it all a surprise for you or were you prepared for that?

AB: I do not want to talk post factum to present myself as a kind of a wise man who was able to predict and so on. But, first of all, he surprised me earlier when he managed to raise again after a defeat during the Orange Revolution and managed to become a prime minister with Yushchenko in power, for a short time in 2006. That he could do that and that he could reach an agreement with Yushchenko despite being offended. That he was able to change the Party of Region so skilfully and change himself by hiring specialists from America and win in presidential elections...

IR: ...And make a European impression..

AB: Yes, but I remember that I lost my illusions very quickly realising what his intentions were. Also because I saw the course of elections, one of the first ones after his victory, these were local elections in Ukraine and I saw all kinds of things there and I remember that with Piotrek Andrusieczko we wrote a text to *Rzeczpospolita* that things in Ukraine are a cover-up. That was a title, I think. That things are being covered-up in Ukraine and how everything was there. We described all kinds of examples of how things were being covered-up and I remember that I later met Adam Michnik and he said to me: What did you write about? We have to be supporting the pro-European aspirations... And so on: you guys are accusing this Yanukovych... so this article was probably a piece of evidence that..

IR: Very realistic.

AB: Coming back to Yanukovych's intentions, I also seemed to me... I remember, as it came from some very petty things, from which we could build a very false image, but I remember that, I do not know, I took part in a poetic evening and there, this rebellious youth was reading poems... and these were the poems, I do not know was it Zhadan who was performing there, but maybe

not, but it was in a kind of a building, a bit ruined, and the secret police came and were filming it. And it was clear that these were typical secret service guys. They had these hats, leather jackets and those characteristic shoes. They were different than this youth which already had this slogan for Yanukovych to go away. And they were all filming it as it was clear that the invigilation was reaching simply... well to a poetic evening of a rebellious youth. This was the level it was reaching to. It was quite visible that it was the secret service. It was visible from the purchases that were being made for these services; equipment that was being purchased for them, water cannons, and from these things you could say that the state was securing itself and these intentions were clear in a certain way, that this regime can answer with force.

IR: And Yanukovych's escape? Were you surprised by it?

AB: hmmm. Yes, I was surprised. But, what is worse, I was surprised by it as I was skiing... so I do not want to..(laughing). I remember it was like this: Piotrek Pogorzelski had not taken vacation for a very long time and really wanted to take one. He was waiting and waiting and finally came to the conclusion, built on millions of analyses, that nothing will happen and it was that we went skiing while he came to Kraków to take a rest. We left him keys to our flat in Kraków and when I was skiing I got an SMS, with millions of swear words he is writing that Andrusieczko, Szczerek they all are there... Yanukovych is in Russia and Andrusieczko and Szczerek are touring Mezhygore, are looking at this... and I am in a shopping mall in Kraków and you are skiing, things like that... I will commit suicide, or something like that indeed. Of course from a journalistic point of view this was a failure.

IR: But you survived...

AB: Yes, we survived somehow. At that time, which does not matter for this project, but at that time I was finishing a book on Mazowiecki so I was detached anyway. I even remember that I had a conversation with Vitaliy Portnikov, I think it was when he went back to Ukraine, as he had this moment when he left Ukraine, as his life was endangered..

IR: Wasn't he in Warsaw at that moment?

AB: He was, but at that point for sure not, as he was already a persona non grata and later he left Ukraine saying that his life was in danger as there was some kind of provocation against him. So I am saying to him: listen you know, maybe what I will say will be disrespectful for my assessment of the situation, so he said to me: you can go back to Poland from this revolution as there are thousands of journalists here but this book of mine about Mazowiecki will be one of its kind, it will survive the texts which will drown among millions of other texts, and I was aware of that and this detached me a bit from these events.

IR: Tell me one more thing: do you think that another revolution of this kind is possible? An urban one, at the Maidan?

AB: I do not want to foretell the future. I cannot. I remember there was a moment when I was at a meeting a few months before the revolution. It was a meeting of a journalists' club, as at that time I knew journalists from Ukraine, and there was this guy, Oleh? I do not remember his name now. He was from Tarnopol and he was handing out flyers with Yushchenko and I thought to myself: My Gosh I feel so sorry for you. Nothing will come out of it. And this was about half a year before the revolution and the campaign started and the flyers with Yushchenko, not orange, because this color appeared later. So I think that when it comes to predicting, I am completely hopeless in this regard. And there is this famous saying about the economists that no economist will foresee a collapse of the stock exchange but the day after they all can tell you why it happened. It seems to me that the same is the case of Ukrainian revolutions. Nobody can foresee them, as the Third Maidan was brought up after Poroshenko's victory, after the victorious Revolution of Dignity. People were saying that there will be a Third Maidan and there were analyses of serious people. Two years have passed, almost three, and there is no Third Maidan, right? So it is hard to say...

Let me add one more thing, as I remember one thing regarding the Orange Revolution. You asked me what has changed so many things came to my mind. People got changed. What I said before;

now they can fight for their own matters which translated not only into state matters, that they can come to the streets and overturn a president, but I also remember that during this whole period between the Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity there were many of those local things, let's say in defence of an old building, as for example in Podole, in Kyiv, or in defence of a park. This was most against the greedy developers as it was aimed at defending these things.. but the people learned that they can defend something... just by gathering and demonstrating. There were not many texts about it in Polish media but in Ukrainian provinces there were these kinds of actions so there was a feeling that people can and that was not only in regards to large things, but also smaller matters...

IR: These are these urban movements, as they are called these day..

AB: I do not understand what these urban movements are (*laughing*)

IR: That would be all for me. Thank you very much.

AB: No problem, at all.