Interview with Volodymyr Berezin (VB). Interviewer: Vitalii Ovachernko (VO). Place of record: Donbas.

VO: Could you recall the most important events in your life, the ones that led you to work in the public sphere?

VB: The most important event was meeting Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov. We met in Moscow in 1989. I was able to attend a meeting of the interregional deputy group. Sakharov was the speaker there. And then I was standing behind him in line at the coatroom and we started talking. I was amazed by him and I realized that I should be doing what I'm doing right now.

VO: Which life events influenced you the most?

VB: I was born in Bahkmut; my father and grandfather were born there. And this fact alone influenced me a great deal. I'm a born and bred Bakhmutovite. And the city is the ancient capital of our region. Not Donetsk, that's only about a hundred years old. Bakhmut is 500 years old. And I was born in a family, surrounded by people who viewed the people from Donetsk as aliens who had come to our land, dug their mines, killed all of the nature and built their disgusting… And Bakhmut is an ancient centre of culture, of spirituality and trade. And we've never had any industry here, that's why the people from Donetsk seem as foreign as Americans to us. And that influenced me a great deal. I've been studying local history ever since I was a kid, I'm the head of the local history society in Konstantinivka, the city where I currently live, and I'm part of the regional organization. And that inspired me to learn more about ecology. Because I didn't just want to learn more about my homeland, I wanted to protect it. And this knowledge of ecology and local history gave me a lot of tools to work with. Our organization, the «Bakhmat» ecological centre, has done a great deal of good. We have fought against different radioactive problems, we had plans to bury the radioactive waste in salt mines. We managed to do a lot of good concerning the elimination of radioactive spots in the Donbass region. And, in addition to all of this, our most important task, something we're still doing, is what, for me, started with the democratic questions from Sakharov. We're very


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focused on public participation, on making sure that the public is involved in solving all of the issues that concern them directly.

VO: What topics were discussed in your family? What did people talk about during the Soviet times?

VB: If you take my parents, for example, I had a grandfather who went missing during the war. He was a communist of the Lenin Enrollment. That is, when Lenin died, my grandfather became a communist and was enrolled there. He was a simple man, he worked in the economic sphere in various companies, and he never got involved with communist issues, but he truly believed in the communist ideology. My father was just like that, too. He was a communist and he fought in the war. He was wounded four times. Our family never questioned the communist system. But there were certain moments. For example, Artemovsk, the city I grew up in, had originally been called Bakhmut. My family had always felt that it was wrong, that the Communists had no right to destroy the old name. Little things like that eventually shaped the entire attitude and, pretty much, my whole family supported me when I tried to get the city its old name back. Eventually, it did get its old name back. And they agreed with all of my democratic sentiments, because I worked with Rukh since 1987, back when it was called the People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction. So, my family supported me in a lot in these things, but then, unfortunately, they stopped supporting me when certain issues arose. When the question of Holodomor came up, for example, I immediately saw that they didn't understand me. They told me that there hadn't been an artificial famine, that the harvest was just bad that year. Even thought I had personally met people who had lived through those horrors, who had buried their loved ones. I had even made news about it for the local TV stations. But my family refused to accept that it had happened. And, of course, they felt very strongly about Western Ukraine and the local insurgent movement. They saw them as bandits, unfortunately… My father had been in the war for a while and they had fought against the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. And my mother, too… My mother was from Kharkiv, my father was from Bakhmut. She had spent some time in Western Ukraine. The Komsomol sent girls there, she spent a couple of months there before running

away. So, of course, my parents were strongly against the insurgency movement. But, with time, the longer Ukraine was independent, the more they, along with other old people, realized that the history of Western Ukraine is also our history. That the Soviet history was full of lies. And they agreed that there were lies in the Soviet history. But they didn't stop to think that maybe the history of Western Ukraine as they knew it was also full of lies? But I was very happy when they voted for Yushchenko in 2004. My old folks, God rest their souls, were always against these local thugs… But they were communists deep inside and they remained atheists till the end, but they never saw the communists leaders as… Symonenko was never… Well, for them, like for most people, communism was a religion. They had their own god. That was the atheistic ideology.

VO: Were there any examples in the Ukrainian history that inspired you? Or which you see as an example? Which ones?

VB: Of course, I learned a lot about the history of Ukraine. But most of the people in the Donbas region are nowadays ethnic Russians who grew up hating everything Ukrainian. I was surrounded by people like that when I was growing up. That's why, starting with the late 1980s, I started gathering information about different people from the region. Because everyone in Donbas knows that Lesia Ukrainka and Taras Shevchenko lived somewhere far away. And people think that nobody important came from Donbas. And so I started gathering information about the brave people of Donbas who had given their lives for Ukraine. For example, Oleksa Tykhiy… Stus. Those were our people. Oleksa was born here, he saw himself as a Ukrainian, he died for Ukraine. He was born and grew up about two kilometers away from where I'm standing right now. And there were others. Mykyta Shapoval. He was a great man, a minister of the Central Council. And Danylo Shumuk, he was one of the leaders of the prison revolt called the Norilsk Uprising. He was a colossally important figure. And he was buried not far from here, in Krasnoarmiysk, Pokrovsk, that is. And there are many local examples like that. Sosiura, for example, the great poet who pretty much formed… He is the founding father of the 20th century Ukrainian literature. He was born in Debaltseve, grew up here. That's an example for all of us. For the locals. But if we take more modern examples,


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just look at the guys who are fighting for Ukraine. The Battle of Donetsk Airport… that was truly heroic. I have no words to describe what happened there. When all of it was going on, I was in Galicia. I gathered all of the people from the Donetsk region, all of the migrants. We organized the funerals of all the boys, they brought their bodies here. And I feel all of it in my soul. We buried so many boys, and general Kulchytsky, and many others. Those people were real heroes. As soon as our region is free again, we have to make some shrine near the airport, some kind of church to commemorate the place where our boys gave their lives for the country. It was truly heroic.

VO: Was there a difference between the official history of Ukraine, the one you studied at school and university and what you discussed at home, with your friends?

VB: I'll give you one example, but it was truly phenomenal. We didn't have history. The repressions and Holodomor taught us to be quiet and obedient. That's it. If you started showing too much interest, tried learning more than you were taught, you were getting political. And getting political was frowned upon. You had to sit quietly, otherwise you'd get in trouble. The main thing I learned back then, the main thing my family learned, was to be quiet. In the late 1980s things changed and I stopped sitting quietly. During my student years I worked a lot and I didn't really know history at all. I knew some things about the history of my region, but it was mostly the history of the pioneers, the Komsomol, the Communist party, the Soviet heroes and so on. The history of my town was censored. As always, we were told that there were Neanderthals and then the working classes were exploited. There was no history before 1917. Can you imagine that? And I was a grown man. I was about 30. And I didn't know much about history. I'm still ashamed of that, but I never liked reading about history. I hated history in school. I can't remember what we studied there. I got my «4» just to be left alone. I got okay grades during my school and university years, but I hated it. And I didn't know the difference between the baptists and the banderivtsy before I was about 30. Both terms seemed alien to me and I didn't really care what the difference was. I could sometimes call baptists banderivtsy and vice versa.


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VO: What kind of people surrounded your family during the Soviet times and what were those people interested in?

VB: I grew up in an ordinary family, I graduated from the Industrial Institute in Kramatorsk. I was an engineer. I had a goal. I got married, was enlisted in the army, came back and I already had a child. My mission then was to work. Nothing special. I started working, got into it. But I did feel like I wanted to do something a little different, I wanted to express myself somehow. Everyone tried to distract themselves with a hobby or something in the Soviet times, because the air was getting putrid. All of the party leaders, especially in the 1980s, they were so insincere, it was scary. They talked about being honest, but then would drink and mess around with girls. And everyone saw what was going on. They weren't leading secret lives, they each had three or five secret lives each. And everything that was said during the Brezhnev times was just lies. And we were still talking about communism, but what exactly we were talking about? We couldn't even afford shoelaces. And people found something to get distracted by. And I found a great distraction. When I was 26 or 27, I got involved with an amateur theatre. We put on plays, it was fascinating to gather, we would visit theaters in Kyiv, Moscow and Saint Petersburg. And being closer to art gave me so much. And that's why I'm not shy. I can speak in front of any crowd. I spent more than ten years in that amateur theatre.

VO: Did you know any priests during the Soviet in times? And how would you assess their role during that period?

VB: I didn't really know any priests before the beginning of the perestroika period, before1985 or 1986. I did walk into a church once or twice, just out of curiosity. The main church in Bakhmut had been destroyed. It happened in 1965, I was about 7 years old at the time, I remember it being destroyed. They said that the priests had worked with the fascists and that's why it had to be destroyed. When we started demanding for the city's old name to be returned in the late 1980s, there was a priest among us. He always said that he would say that they had to rename the city back in his sermons. He said that the city had been christened Bakhmut. And then the communists came and renamed it Artemovsk for some reason. The


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communists hated him because of it, they yelled that he had no right to say those things. He got into a lot of trouble with the KGB. But a lot of the priests supported us back then. But what amazed me was that when we started creating the People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction, we started learning the anthem and reading up on the history of Ukraine, it was in 1989 or 1990, we went to a village not far from Bakhmut. It was called Zvanovka and there were many migrants from Western Ukraine there. The lemky people, the boiky people. When the Polish border was being laid down in 1950, they moved the whole village here, along with all of their traditions. And so we went over there. And our guys, members of Rukh, took the blue and yellow flags, even though it still was the Soviet Union. And we got off the train and were walking through the village and suddenly the locals ran out to meet us and started getting down on our knees and hugging us. I was confused about all of this. For me then, Ukraine hadn't really existed before, I hadn't really known much about the history of it. And then the local Greco-Catholic priest went up to us, started hugging all of us. And then he said that they would never betray us. And you have to keep in mind, that was back in 1989, it was still the Soviet Union. And, after that incident, every Christmas I gather my children and take them there for the holiday. There's a cathedral there now and a monastery. We often go there and live with different families. It's fascinating. They have nativities every Christmas. And getting in touch with religion during the Soviet times made me see the history of Ukraine differently. There were different priests back then… There was one priest of the Moscow Patriarchate who went over to the Kyiv Patriarchate later on. I asked him… Well, I knew he had spoken out against the government there. I asked him to join the Ukrainian parliament. We would have supported him. But he refused. That was back in 1989. And when the city Party Committee asked him to join the city council, he agreed. And then he suddenly joined the Kyiv Patriarchate. But I think that everyone has their own path not only to God, but to Ukraine, too.

VO: Why did people gather into independent groups during the Soviet times?

VB: We called those people «informal». As I've said before, they wanted to express themselves. We had a theatrical society then. And we read banned books there, and even put

on banned shows later on. I would walk onto the stage, I played some kind of writer that time, and I said: «Does the world really belong to the party committees? » And the viewers all wept and clapped, it was so brave to say something like that back then. And we also created political clubs, different organizations where we would discuss different things. We learned so much new information, we thought our brains would explode. We had spent all of our lives believing in one thing, and then it suddenly turned out that the world was nothing like we had thought it to be. That's why we needed to communicate with one another. People from the Memorial would come to us, we would find people who had spent 30 years in the prison camps, who had seen all of those horrors with their own eyes and had lived to tell the tale. We wanted to hear their stories. We suddenly understood that everything that had been written was a lie. Almost everything. We wanted to talk to the people who had been in prison and had seen all of it. The ones that had fought for Ukraine. The ones that had come from Leningrad, from Moscow, from Kyiv, had come to our towns and joined in on the different democratic movements. We knew that they had renamed Leningrad Saint Petersburg, they had held a referendum. We wanted to hold a referendum like that. We had similar organizations. We wanted to express ourselves, we wanted to find something fresh in the stale air. We didn't want to be parts of the system. We wanted to be ourselves. Everyone tried to express himself. I liked the green movement, someone became a nationalist, someone was a democrat. Someone was concerned with economic issues, someone joined cultural organizations. It was a natural process.

VO: What books or magazines influenced you at that time? Maybe, something from the samizdat?

VB: The first thing that influenced me a great deal, back in the Soviet times, back in 1975, was reading all of Dostoyevsky. His 'Demons' influenced me the most, it was the most anti-revolutional thing you could imagine, it showed all of the revolutionaries as idiots. And then I read his diaries. I read all of his works and became a true fan. I loved it. For me, those were the first books that I read that didn't fit in with the Soviet standard. And then, starting in the late 1980s, literature that hadn't been printed before started getting out and everyone was reading


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it. Pasternak's 'Doctor Zhivago' and Rybak's 'Children of Arbat'. The whole country was reading the same books. They came out in bits in the large magazines and the whole country was reading them. The motto then was 'Reading is more interesting than living'. And, of course, Solzhenitsyn's 'The Gulag Archipelago' and his other works. And those things were, as you'd say today, what changed our fate. We learned from them. The world opened up to us and we started understanding what was going on. For example, you'd be reading Stus in 1989 and then you'd realize he had died in 1984. Just a few years before. And there was nothing you could do about it. And then some people started denying everything. Some people stopped believing Solzhenitsyn. Or the Ukrainian historical works concerning the Insurgent Army. We all read the same things, but some people would stop and say «No, that's enough, I'm a Soviet person, I don't want to hear this. I don't want to know». We were all the same up to a point, we read the same things and listened to the same music. But it changed us in different ways.

VO: Did you hear about the Revolution on Granite?

VB: Of course. We had created a local Rukh group in 1989 and we had a political club where we would meet up, everyone would be there. The protesters from Kyiv would come to us and our guys would go over to Kyiv. Unfortunately, I didn't join in then, I was busy with something. But we supported them. They would come to us, busses full of them, we would talk, a lot of our guys would join in. And that was when our own miners' movement began here. So we saw the Revolution on Granite as part of the general movement towards democracy. I understood it very well, it was exactly what Sakharov had spoken about.

VO: Did you participate in the «Ukraine without Kuchma» movement?

VB: I was in Kyiv at the time and I joined the demonstrations several times. They would walk down the streets with the posters and I would join it, that's it. I was busy with the eco-movement then. We had our own leaders. And the Green Party was still what it was supposed to be back then. We've all left it now, it's a sell-out. As members of the Green Party back then, we felt we were a part of the general democratic movement. And we supported the


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«Ukraine without Kuchma» movement as the Green Party. And after Gongadze's murder, we supported the protests as the Green Party.

VO: Did you participate in the Orange revolution?

VB: The Orange revolution was all about the election. We attended the protests. We the election started, before the people started protesting, I was a public observer from different international organizations. My job was to work in a commission and take notes of all the cases of fraud, gather all of the information concerning the Donbas region. Well, you know what was going on there. It was scary. All of the fraud that was going on. We made sure the international observers were doing their jobs. And we went to Kyiv, I remember very clearly the day the people went out onto the streets. We were living in a hotel then. And then all of the people from the first two floors were asked to leave the hotel and the riot police took up all of the rooms. Right then we understood how serious the situation was. Had they been given the word, everyone would have been arrested. And we knew it. But we were living in the same hotel as international observers. We had constant coordinating meetings. I was totally busy with the election. Everyone had their own job to do. But what blew me away… It was the middle of November, dirt was everywhere, everything was grey, and suddenly people went out onto the streets with these orange scarves, these orange hats and other things. It was like being hit with this wave of colour, boom! I really hit all of the Yanukoviches and their cronies. A visual blow to the head. It was mind-blowing. Just a great move.

VO: What, in your opinion, motivated Ukrainian citizens to start protesting?

VB: Well, if we're talking about the Orange revolution, then it was the lies and fraud during the election. And the lies of the people involved with the fraud. And that's why the people went out onto the streets. Because they were sick and tired of it. And in Donbas… Everyone understood it perfectly. The people had no rights whatsoever, they couldn't change anything in life. This huge machine, the judges, the prosecutors and cops… All of these people, these civil servants were suffocating the people, taking away everything. They had taken away the


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peoples' right to influence the government, to elect their government. That's what public participation is all about. And they took all of that away from the people. And the people started protesting because they were getting sick of being lied to. And, thank God, Western Ukraine supported the cause. And all of Kyiv joined in. And we're thankful to all of them. We saw this battle, we saw it all from the inside, we saw all of our observers getting beaten up and all of the other problems.

VO: Who was in charge of all the political decisions during the Orange revolution? From the protesters' side and from the government?

VB: That's a difficult question, because there are different levels of responsibility for political decisions. The political decision to start protesting was made by the people. They were responsible. They just went out onto the streets. That was their move, their choice. That was definitely their political decision to make, their responsibility. For a Soviet person, who had been a part of that system, that was a very serious step to take. And a very risky one. Because we knew then what Berkut were capable of… Ten years later, it turned out that we were right in being afraid of them, they killed people… But obviously the whole political system, the Party of Regions which was headed by Yanukovych and backed by Akhmetov. They were pretty much continuing what Kuchma had done. All of them were a group of bandits and they should be politically responsible for what happened. The fact that Yushchenko and Tymoshenko somehow ended up at the top of the pyramid was purely accidental. They were in the right place at the right time and there wasn't much of an alternative. What they turned out to be later is a different question entirely. But they did manage to unite a lot of people around themselves. And even if people say that they split up the country, I don't believe them. They united Ukraine and that process is still taking place, Ukraine is still forming and uniting itself. And the Orange revolution started that process. And that is very important.

VO: Who, in your opinion, was the leader of the protests?


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VB: There were leaders on the national level, regional leaders and leaders in separate cities. There were leaders that were needed at that time. It was a good thing that the Orange revolution led to new, younger faces on the political scene. Oles' Doniy… A lot of young people. My friends… And, keep in mind, those aren't people who are politicians… I mostly work with ecological issues and I once worked with this tourism company "Compass". There was this guy there, the head of the company, and he was asked to help put up the tents. Because he knew a great deal about tourism. So he helped them with the tents. And then he told me that he was really inspired by what he saw there. He became one of the leaders of the movement. Because he saw the movement from the inside. And he saw that it was honest, that the protesters really meant all of it. And that really contrasted with the reality around him, with all of the lies. You could feel that it was a protest against lying, against all of the stuff that was going on. And that's how the people joined the protests and became leaders of the movement. Even in our organization, young people had to deal with huge problems. This young girl went out handing newspapers. The local "Our Ukraine" organization, the ones that were being paid for it, they took the newspapers, hid them and didn't bother handing them out. And this young girl, she was only about 19 or so, she saw what was happening, took a stack of newspapers and went to the city centre to hand them out. She got beaten up, they burned her newspapers, but she was a true leader. She's one of our activists now. Troubled times like that always lead to the emergence of new leaders.

VO: You mentioned helping foreign observers move around Ukraine. Could you tell us why you decided to get involved with the election?

VB: Well, I've already mentioned meeting Sakharov. By the way, we were traveling with the theatre then, the one I told you about. I was an activist with the theatre too. And then, naturally, I became a deputy of the city council. I was on the executive committee. There was a small group of us and that was what we were responsible for. So, starting with 1987, it wasn't a question of getting involved anymore. I was directly responsible for organizing the election. We saw what was happening in the higher tiers and we could see the consequences for Bakhmut. That's why we did all we could. That's why I joined in. Our main goal was to


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get the city involved, to make sure that all of the reforms involved it, so that the people understood what was going on and were involved with all of the changes that were happening. Why did I do that? Because this land is my home. And because, all that was taking place in my homeland, in the Donbas region, in Bakhmut, I've always been involved. It's my choice since 1987. I swore to myself… People can be different. You could be a communist or… or someone else… But one thing has to be holy, the place where you grew up. And you have to serve it. My Bakhmut is my holy place. That's the end of it. I started serving it the way I felt I could.

VO: What, in your opinion, was the role of the most affluent Ukrainians during the Orange revolution? And which affluent Ukrainians played a role?

VB: Some of them played a role, others didn't. Some made a career out of it. But you have to understand some things concerning the geography of the region. Until about 2004, our businessmen, the ones who were well-off, they understood what was going on, but had doubt whether they should support Yanukovych or not. In 2004, they saw that the situation was good for them. They decided to get rid of the old power, they were young and wanted to get rid of the old oligarchs. "Choose us, we're the young businessmen, we want to come to power. We don't want Yanukovych, we don't want Akhmetov". But then Yushchenko did a very strange thing. He said that they were changing things all over Ukraine, but that they wouldn't touch Donbas. "You have Akhmetov there, make deals with him." And he appointed one of the local guys governor. The guy who used to be a high-ranking official in the Party of Regions.

VO: What, in your opinion, were the goals of the Orange revolution and what made it different from the other protests?

VB: I've said it before. The main goal of the Orange revolution was to have an honest election. For the election to really be held. And then, of course, another goal was for democracy to win in this country. Everyone was involved in the rigging of the election. The judges, the prosecutors, the police. The whole law enforcement chain. And the tax collector. It

was a huge gang, a mob that had ruled over us for years. And the Orange revolution had tried to put a stop to all of that. And the main goal was to change the system. Starting with the election. The goal was just to get a fair election. And that part was done, Yushchenko one after all, but then… There were certain reforms, but they didn't include Donbas. I tried talking to Yulia Tymoshenko personally. And I tried talking to Zhulynskiy, he was the deputy prime minister at the time. And Pavlo Movchan. Yavorivskiy. Colossal people. And they all told me I had to talk to Akhmetov, make a deal with him. How could I make a deal with him. Nobody tried to change anything here, nobody tried to do anything in the Donbas region. You can see how that turned out.

VO: How would you assess the involvement of Western politicians in regulating the Orange revolution? And which foreign politicians deserve special mention?

VB: I saw that Kwaśniewski visited Ukraine during this time. The Poles were very active. There were many of their observers present during the election. I took them around. And they were shocked to see calendars with Yanukovych's face on them being handed out in churches. They were just shocked. Poles understand what churches are all about. And they see the churches telling people to vote for Yanukovych… It's difficult to say who was more involved, but the Poles were very active, and we're very thankful to them for that, we felt their support. Really. I personally took several Polish groups around Donbas, they were journalists and observers there and they saw all of the things that were going on there and they were just disgusted by all of it. And all of that went into the protocol they wrote for the ENEMO, the European Network of Election Monitoring Organization. And then that information was passed on to the prosecutor's office and to various European courts of law. And all of it influenced the outcome.

VO: Apart from the things you mentioned already, what disappointed you in the Orange revolution?


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VB: Everything. First of all, the fact that they excluded Donbas and didn't change anything here. And, secondly, they didn't do anything about the communists. Those guys were running around yelling about Lenin and getting their kids involved in all of that. So the basic things weren't changed. And that was very sad to see. Of course, you had to think about the economy. But we saw that Ukraine was being lost. That was disappointing. Yushchenko is an easy target to blame, but I'm not going to blame him. At that time, he had nobody else who could have united us.

VO: Did the events of the Orange revolution change the political system in Ukraine? Did they change them at least partly? Or, if we look at the results of the 2010 election, did they strengthen the oligarchy?

VB: The results of the 2004 election and the Orange revolution itself showed that the people, despite everything, were capable of something. Before that, everyone just gave up and thought that it was pointless to fight. And then they suddenly achieved something. They achieved the re-election. They saw the system shake a little. They saw that you had to fight the system and work. I got involved with a lot of organizations then. The Kharkiv Human Rights group, for example, I personally know Eugeniy Zacharov. We worked on protecting human rights. And the Helsinki Union. In a way, it was simpler when Yushchenko was president. Civil councils were created. Ones that controlled the police, for example. We had mobile groups that controlled the police. We made sure nobody was being tortured and so on. And it worked, more or less. We achieved all of that. And we felt how it should always have been. Turns out, there's nothing scary about discussions on Shuster's show… It's okay when everyone can say what he feels like saying. We felt what freedom of speech was about. It didn't mean that everyone had to yell or lie and that you'd sink in all of that stuff. No! Freedom of speech is how it's supposed to be. We finally got a feel of that, and that gave us a lot. It made us realize that we were on the right track, that for once we knew, what normal life was like and what wasn't normal.

VO: What were the main reasons for the Euromaidan protests of 2013-2014?


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VB: Generally speaking, they were similar to what happened in 2004. Yanukovych had once again created a very rigid system. Once again, there were lies in courts, lies in the prosecutor's office, lies in the police. This rigid system was destroying everything. Actually, it was the imitation of a state. In reality, it was the rule of a mob, a mafia, a criminal gang. Of course, when Maidan started, when they beat up those kids on the 30th of November… To me, it was all clear. I had been in the Kharkiv Human Rights organization and had battled against torture and cruel treatment before that. And I knew all about it how those guys, the Berkut, would come over to the prisons, how all of the doors would be opened for them. They'd come inside wearing masks, with truncheons in their hands. And then they'd beat the prisoners up, beat them up so badly that there'd be about five of seven corpses left after they were finished. And that's a preventative measure, so everyone knows to keep their mouth shut. You had to keep your mouth shut in prison, you had to be quiet. And then we saw the same things done to the protesters. The same ones! There are even videos comparing the methods they dealt with prisoners and the protesters. And then Yanukovych admitted that the Berkut forces had violated the protesters' rights, but nothing was done about it. In the beginning, the people started protesting because they wanted Euro-integration, but then it wasn't about that anymore. Then the people started protesting the whole machine, the whole system. The law enforcement system mainly, because it was violating their rights. And that's why the people went out onto the streets. And I think that… We saw what was happening here and we were holding protests in our city and we saw the role of the police and the courts and the prosecutors. How they faked cases and kidnapped people. We saw that it was a protest against the decaying political system. And, most importantly, the law enforcement.

VO: Could the political crisis have been solved in any other way apart from the Maidan protests?

VB: There were two possible scenarios, either we had to have a normal, honest election, or we'd have the protests. We weren't given an opportunity to have an honest election, so we had to protest. That's it. There wasn't a second option, we had do go out onto the streets and


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protest. And I'm thankful to God that we have a piece of Europe in Ukraine and that… Russia keeps forgetting, it keeps thinking that we're one people and that we've had a common history. But a huge part of Ukraine is like the Baltics, it's like Poland. It's the Western Ukraine, which has been under Soviet rule for a much shorter time and is much closer to Europe. Thank God for that part of Ukraine. And we've accepted that part of Ukraine's mentality as our own, we're mentally identical with Galicia now. And the guys from Western Ukraine admit that a new Ukraine is being created right now and that this union is real.

VO: Were the protest leaders likely to try and reach some kind of compromise?

VB: Of course they tried to compromise. We saw that they were trying to reach an agreement. We tried to reach an agreement here, in the region. Because all of the work had to be coordinated somehow, we had to plan somehow and solve the tasks and issues.

VO: What were you doing during the Euromaidan?

VB: During the Euromaidan I was trying to hold a local Euromaidan here. And now that the war has started, people have finally started understanding why that was necessary. I went to Kyiv twice, I lived in a tent for a short while. But I told the guys there I'd prefer to work in the Donbas region. We felt it was more important. And now that's obvious. We were in Donetsk when the first Euromaidans started. And I started protesting before Yanukovych failed to sign the Association Agreement with Europe, I went out onto the central square in Donetsk wearing a plastic bag on my head and I made a speech. With the plastic bag on my head. I said that the people who were saying that we didn't need Europe needed to know that if they ever get arrested, the police would put a plastic bag like that over their head and shock them with electricity. And then they'd think about how dumb they were not to want a normal life, a lawful life. And how they wanted that plastic bag over their heads and the electricity. I remember… My friends from the West sent me this photograph, it had gotten into an American newspaper, I was burning Yanukovych's portrait on it. I remember, we got the portraits and then dried them up for a long while, I'd take them to the library and dry them out

there, and then we'd burn them. We did participate in things like that. I celebrated the New Year on Maidan, in 2014. I came there to celebrate it with our guys from Donetsk, with our friends. Now I'm a member of the European Party. Our tent, the European Party tent was there, straight near the central post office.

VO: Was Maidan as well-organized as everyone seems to think? How would you assess the self-organization of Maidan?

VB: There are certain things that are hard to put in words. There wasn't that much money involved. I know how people would save up their own money, come from other cities and nobody paid them to. It was like this in 2004, something was just in the air. Suddenly everyone was united by the orange color. You put on an orange scarf and you were a part of the movement, it was that simple. And the same thing happened in 2013. When Maidan was still peaceful… I could feel the solidarity between the people. You could feel that the people were united. You could see their eyes. You heard their speeches. The songs… And you could feel that you were surrounded by truly honorable human beings, beautiful human beings. And you were a part of that. It's very difficult to put into words. Because Maidan was a complicated process. Everyone saw what they wanted to see. Someone saw someone pissing on the porches, someone saw someone hate Russia, but I never saw any of that. I brought my nephew from Murmansk, Russia to Maidan. And he fell in love with Maidan. The only thing he didn't like was that it was New Year's Eve and nobody was allowed to drink.

VO: How you family, your friends react to your involvement with the protests?

VB: My wife supported me. They all asked me, of course, to be careful. My old folks were already dead during Maidan. That's why all of the people close to me supported me. There were no problems. But then problems with my sister and her family arose. Here, in Donbas, things like that happened to every family, when people started identifying themselves with Ukraine or with Russia. That was when the problems started.


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VO: During the protests, who was you main enemy?

VB: Just like it had been here, the enemies were the people, who… Well, I had been involved with a programme against torture and cruel treatment of prisoners, I had seen what the police and the judges and all of that gang was going. This mob of civil servants, they were… Well, it's like you have the Nazis and the Fascists, it's obvious that they were to blame. And here, it was also obvious what was happening and who was to blame. The structure that called itself the Party of Regions was to blame, it was the enemy.

VO: What role, in you opinion, did religion play in the protests?

VB: It's pretty much like what happened in 1989, when the priests hugged us and told us that they would never betray us. I saw priests live in tents. I saw priests on the barricades. Mostly they were Ukrainian priests, but there were many Protestant priests there, too. That's why I think the role of the priests and religion was huge. Another side of that was the Moscow Patriarchate. That was something entirely different. They were already laying the groundwork for what happened later in Crimea and Donbas.

VO: What was the role of art during Maidan?

VB: Well, Maidan was a work of art in itself. As Lenin once said, "the living art of the masses". It was just amazing, a fantastic thing. I was so happy I spent New Year's there. It was a celebration of the spirit. People were constantly reading poetry, playing guitars. Not only during the New Year's celebration, all of the time during December and January, before the killing happened. We saw new poetry being born, new words being born. And all of this was Ukrainian, we saw a new Ukrainian spirit being born. And art was a huge part of that. We all saw the role of Ruslana and the other poets and singers who didn't just stand on the stages, they were on the barricades as well. And things like that happened all over the place, in different cities.


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VO: What was the role of Ukrainian history during Euromaidan?

VB: Then and there, we saw that we were creating history. It was clear then, clear that this was going to be a huge part of our history. And that we were a separate state that had a right to have a history of its own. It didn't matter if people said that Mazepa was our hero, or that Petlura was our hero or that Bandera was our hero. We could all agree that the guys who were on Maidan and who died there are our heroes. That is our history. And we saw it with our own eyes.

VO: What was the role of the media and the Internet during Euromaidan?

VB: Back in 2004 the Internet was still a weak influence, even though I've used the Internet since 1994. And even in 2004 I used it very actively. But in 2014 the Internet played the key role. You could watch constant streams from Maidan. Even if you were at home, you could still be a part of Maidan through that. And we all could feel it. And I remember the first deaths on Maidan, it was nine or ten in the morning and we saw the corpses being carried away and I could hear the birds singing outside my window… It felt as though I was there. And that was the role of the Internet.

VO: How would you assess the foreign policy of the other countries towards Ukraine during Euromaidan?

VB: We all saw the foreign leaders visiting Ukraine during this time, the Poles helped out a lot, and so did the Baltic countries and the Americans and certain European countries. Rebecca Harms, a Member of the European Parliament and someone I know personally was very active. I even visited her home once. Because she's a member of the Green Party and so am I. And they wanted to bury the radioactive waste in the salt mines and we also wanted to do something like that here. So she visited my home and I visited her home and we kept in touch during the election. I saw how much people like that did. They did everything they could. They talked to the protesters and visited the tents. And we felt the support we were getting


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from Europe and the USA and that was great. Of course, then Russia started demonizing all of that, but that's their problem. Russia is a country which is fabricating its own history and it wants us to be a part of that. But we have to create our own history.

VO: How did you imagine the results of the protests and what disappointed you the most? And what was a pleasant surprise?

VB: The biggest disappointment, of course, was the war. We never wanted the Maidan to lead to that. And nobody there ever said anything bad about Russia, not a single word. Yes, we said that we were Ukrainians and there were vague jokes about Russia. But it was because we just couldn't understand why Russia had accepted the Baltic countries desire to join Europe and didn't accept ours. Why did that happen?

VO: What was a pleasant surprise after the revolution?

VB: The most important thing that happened during Maidan in 2014 was that it was a colossal blow to the whole system. The law enforcement, the judiciary system. It was a huge blow. All of them were watching it happen, on different levels, all of the policemen and judges and prosecutors in different cities were watching all of it happen and they knew it was the end. Things would never go back to the way they had been before. And that's a good thing. And, despite the war, the process is still going strong. It's a painful, difficult process, but it can't be any other way. The corruption and everything had gotten too deep.

VO: What would you consider to be Maidan's breaking point?

VB: The breaking point in the history of Maidan and the breaking point in the history of all Ukraine was, pretty much, the moment when the war began and when the corpses started piling up. The breaking point was when blood was spilled. It was clear that it was it. A line had been crossed, there was no going back from that point. It was the beginning of the war. It

was a difficult, a painful moment and we still haven't gotten past it. So much time has passed, three years have gone by…

VO: For the Ukrainian waves of protests, were the earlier revolutions important, or were the protesters inspired by other historical events?

VB: The most recent protests and the war that we're currently at, put all of the puzzle pieces together. It made the long war for independence, all of the struggles look crystal clear. If it wasn't clear before, it's obvious now. Now we understand, now we can feel this… This is just the next part of the struggle, this is a continuation of the struggle that has lasted since the 15th century, maybe even earlier. And we can see that it's just one long struggle.

VO: Which of the events that occurred during the last period of the Soviet Union's existence influenced the protests that took place after 1991?

VB: It's not that easy to say. The crumbling of the USSR and all of that was something that happened because it was meant to happen. The USSR was doomed to crash down. I was an ordinary engineer, and we were all surprised that the big factories were still working. The first shift was working while the second and third were out drinking and doing God knows what. The economy was crashing down all around us. It was all doomed and we knew it. And the protests… For us, ordinary students and workers, engineers, the most important protest was the Voice of America. We listened to it and started believing what was said there and not what we were being told here. Because the Western voices were telling us the truth. And I think the USSR was doomed. It imploded on itself. And the people looked at themselves and realized that the lies couldn't last forever.

VO: What were the protesters' and government's attitudes towards the Soviet heritage and the imperial role of Russia?


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VB: The early protests of the late 1980s and the early 1990s didn't have much to do with historical issues. It was more about economic issues. The USSR came crashing down and finally we were allowed to own private property and everyone dreamt that everything would get better after that and the economy would start working and everyone would start doing business. But the old system came back and the most profitable business to be in turned out to be the business of courts, prosecutors and policemen. And we saw the prosecutor come in to his office driving a huge Jeep with a sailboat attached to it.

VO: Where there any organizations in the history of Ukraine, maybe, Rukh, for example, that influenced the development of civil society and the protest activity after 1991?

VB: The were small organizations prior to 1991, discussion clubs that organically became parts of Rukh. And that was a great thing, it was a real movement. And it influenced the political structure, new leaders started emerging. It was a great thing, a strong movement. But, unfortunately, though it's not really good to criticize Viacheslav Chornovil, he pretty much decided that Rukh shouldn't exist anymore as a common movement, as something that used to unite and coordinate all of those organizations and political parties. They decided that Rukh should be a political party. And it stopped uniting people. That was a bad thing. After that, people weren't as united, everyone started doing their own thing.

VO: In your opinion, does oligarchy exist in Ukraine?

VB: Of course it does. The people who visited Europe were astounded by the fact that there are no millionaires in countries like Finland, Sweden or Norway. People here stole money in plain sight and the whole law enforcement system worked for them. It's obvious, of course, but, if I were to touch up on the matter briefly, the problem used to be that there was one thug. One thug that made all of the other thugs work for him. That was Yanukovych. We had hoped that maybe there would be a time when there would be several thugs, not just one who controlled everything. And that time is now. When there are several thugs, the judges start


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thinking which one they want to support and they start being more careful. That's the first step.

VO: What role did corruption play in the protests? Did it cause them? What is the meaning of corruption in Ukraine?

VB: The main thing about corruption in Ukraine is that the people have been taught not to take part in deciding on important issues. Starting with the election and on to the registration of enterprises. The people aren't involved, everything is decided by officials. I'll give you a small example concerning the battle against corruption. In the sphere of landscaping ecology. We managed to get me on the landscaping committee. Without my signature they can't cut down a single tree, the can't close down a single park. That's what fighting corruption is all about. When the public is involved in making all of the important decisions. When the public can influence the situation. But that's more of an exception.

VO: Could you compare the protests that took place in Ukraine after 1991 and explain their importance?

VB: The protests that took place in 1991 had been brewing up for a very long time. They pretty much happened by themselves. It wasn't the political system that failed first, it was the economy. It couldn't exist any longer and that's why everything happened. Even the fact that the USSR crumbled into little countries was a way to solve these economic issues, because small counties are better at solving their economic troubles. And that's why everything that happened in 1991 happened and that's why there was no bloodshed. Because we wanted to survive. There was no money. No war could help. And no noble ideas. We had to survive. Of course, there was bloodshed in Georgia and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh. But that was there. And Chechnya… But that happened in 2004… In 1991 the basis of the economic system was changed. That is, private property was finally allowed. Privatization started, certain processes were jump-started. But there still were lies, mostly in the law enforcement. I keep talking about the law enforcement, but it's one of the most important parts of the state. And those lies


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were there in 2004. I remember clearly seeing tents being put up in Donetsk against the Maidan in Kyiv. We were surprised that someone had put them up. And they were very well-organized. And they were filled with these young guys with crew-cuts. And then I saw that Malyshev was checking up on those tents. He was a general back then, head of the local police. And all of the guys there were from the police academy. He had organized all of them. He was the Deputy Chief Minister back then. And as soon as the Orange revolution won, the very next day Malyshev left the ministry and went off to work as Akhmetov's head of security. I saw all of that from the inside. That's why I didn't have any questions about that.

VO: How did the people know how to protest?

VB: The people didn't know, they just couldn't sit around at home doing nothing. The first step was to go out onto the streets. There were street demonstration, people talked there, they decided on things, decided when and where to protest. They decided what their demands would be. There were coordinators, there were things, but mostly it depended on the situation itself. There was no chosen strategy, no concept. Nobody knew if it would be a long-term thing or a short-term thing. It was just a reaction to what was going on in the country.

VO: Did taking part in the previous protests motivate people to participate in the next one?

VB: Yes, it was like a rehearsal. We were surprised that not much had happened in Ukraine back in 1991. That nobody had started protesting. But we knew that all of Ukraine had been on the streets in 1989 and that they were carrying three caskets. They had burried Stus, Litvin and Tykhiy. And that was a real protest. And then we had the Revolution on Granite.

VO: Why do some people choose not to join in the protests?

VB: Well, first of all, what kind of people are we talking about? The older people have this genetic fear that you can get in trouble for speaking out like that. That there'll be repressions. The older generation is afraid. Well, at least the people who are older than 50. The younger


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ones are mostly cynical. Some of them don't believe in anything at all. They think that the oligarchs or the Russians or the Americans are behind whatever is happening, and that fighting the system is a waste of time. That anyone and anything can be bought or sold. A lot of them kept telling us that we had been bought. By whom? If I'm out on the street protesting, I know that nobody bought be. What more questions could there be?

VO: What was the main division between the society and the government during the protests?

VB: All of these waves of protest were entry into power. The people practiced and they understood that they would go on to be deputies. And the active political powers were created here. Because of the protests, the demonstration, the people got together and formed new political parties and so on. I think that was the most important thing. If you really want to change something, you have to come to power. And, in the end, people understood that.

VO: Who did the government and the protesters depend on during the protests?

VB: During that time the government relied on the law enforcers, the ones who had sold themselves to it and were serving it. And the protesters relied mostly on the young people. The young people who weren't spoiled, who had ideals. And the young people who understood that something depended on them. They were the main force behind the revolution.

VO: Who were the protesters? What were their goals?

VB: Well, I can say that the people who protested in 1991, in 2004 and in 2013 were sane Ukrainians. The others were either insane, or they didn't identify themselves as Ukrainians. Because the people who saw themselves as Ukrainians and saw what was going on in the country, they just couldn't have stayed at home and be passive. They went out onto the streets and became part of the general movement. And that, in a way, was the birth of a new Ukraine.

VO: What was the meaning of the latest protests in the evolution of the Ukrainian society?


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VB: We can now see that the protests were a part of the history of Ukraine. These processes were as natural as the christening of The Rus' or the emergence of the Cossack republic. And now we see that all of these grand historic events, the Ukrainian National Republic and the Kholodnyi Yar republic were just links in one chain of events. All of these events united the people, united them with their history. And now we don't need to read anything, there is nothing more to learn. We have learned all we needed to learn. And we know what we're doing.


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