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Ukraine: political gridlock with an ever-more radical Maidan in the background

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The proceedings of the *Verkhovna Rada* (Ukrainian parliament) on 4 and 5 February brought no substantial changes to the process of resolving the political crisis in Ukraine. The situation in Kyiv in recent days has remained relatively calm; a truce has been maintained on the Maidan between the protesters and the forces of law and order. After the resignation of the government and the repeal of the anti-civic laws of 16 January, and the adoption of the amnesty law, the process of negotiations between the government and the opposition has stalled. President Viktor Yanukovych remains firm in his belief that he has taken the first step towards compromise, and now blames the opposition for the lack of progress. The apparent deadlock and the dragging-out of the talks seem to suit him well: he has been using the time to discipline the ranks of the party, recover the initiative in the regions, and take measures to deepen divisions within the opposition. The continuation of the current situation is to the detriment of the latter, because in the absence of the President's consent to any further concessions, the opposition loses its influence over the Maidan (a list of the organisations present there is included in the Appendix). On 3 February, the president's representative in parliament, Yuri Miroshnichenko, suggested that Yanukovych was considering calling early parliamentary and presidential elections. Such a solution would be a compromise that all the parties to the conflict could accept, but at this stage it seems unlikely.

Against the background of the political opposition's helplessness, the most radical wing of the protesters is strengthening and maturing politically, including those linked to the so-called Right Sector. The members of this movement have not only begun to formulate political demands, including participating in the negotiations between Viktor Yanukovych and the leaders of the three opposition parties, but they have also held technical discussions with the authorities concerning the release of detained protesters.

In the western regions of Ukraine the will to resist the authorities remains strong, while in the eastern and central regions of Ukraine and Crimea, the authorities have been continuing to mobilise volunteer police forces and conduct selective acts of repression against supporters of the Euromaidan.

Yanukovych: consolidating his base and deepening divisions within the opposition

The session of parliament held on 4 and 5 February yielded no solutions. The lack of any votes during the session means it is also unclear how deep any divisions within the Party of

Regions may be. Previously, there had been signs of tensions within President Yanukovych's political base, but these have not yet had any public confirmation. These reports seem plausible, but it remains possible that the political situation in the country has not yet reached a stage where potential splitters would actually leave the party. The President has taken advantage of the suspension of negotiations with the opposition for some backstage disciplining of his party's MPs, in order to prevent individual deputies from leaving it. Reluctant to make any further concessions, the government's representatives are playing on the deepening divisions within the opposition, as well as between the opposition and the protesters, not to mention the fatigue of the latter. Although the risk of a state of emergency being introduced in Kyiv has declined, the authorities' media offensive is continuing, with the aim of presenting the protesters as posing a threat to national security. Selective repression against activists is also rising, including the arson in unexplained circumstances of cars belonging to participants in the *Automaidan*, and the Ministry of Interior issuing arrest warrants for the organisation's most active members. The appellate district courts have invalidated the creation of alternative representative bodies, the so-called People's Councils in western regions including Rivne and Ivano-Frankivsk. Meanwhile in eastern Ukraine, the local authorities have been taking action to mobilise their own supporters and intimidate activists, in order to restore full control of the east and centre of the country. On 1 February, under the auspices of the Kharkov regional governor Mikhail Dobkin (who represents those Party of Regions supporters who favour using force to disperse the Maidan), a congress was held of the party's regional organisations from twenty regions of Ukraine, at which a 'Ukrainian Front' was established. This organisation has demanded to participate in the negotiations between the President and the opposition leaders, and has set itself the goal of "cleansing the Ukrainian earth of those who came up with the plan of occupation". These words are part of the authorities' information policy, which aims to demonstrate the ongoing criminalisation of the Maidan, as well as its inspiration by Western special services.

The widening gap between the opposition and the Maidan

The opposition leaders, Vitali Klitschko of *UDAR*, Arseniy Yatsenyuk of *Batkivshchyna* and Oleh Tiahnybok of *Svoboda*, are trying on one hand to negotiate with Yanukovych on amending the law on amnesty and a return to the 2004 constitution which would undermine the president's powers, while on the other hand mobilising the protesters on the Maidan. After talks at a security conference in Munich with representatives of the EU and the US, on 2 February Yatsenyuk announced that a solution to the political situation in Ukraine would require four conditions to be met: a halt to the violence, the release of all detainees, the investigation of abductions, torture and killings, and a return to the parliamentary-presidential system. For his part, Klitschko has called for the organisation of public city patrols and the blockading of government buildings in the regions; whereas the leader of the Third Republic of Ukraine social movement, Yuriy Lutsenko, has called for the expansion of the Maidan self-defence forces from the current 10,000 to 50,000.

The opposition leaders' initiatives have met with increasing distrust from the protesters on the Maidan, and the gap between the actions undertaken and the expectations of the most radical groups of protesters is widening rapidly. The lack of progress in the opposition's negotiations with Yanukovych is a source of annoyance to these groups: the well-known

Euromaidan activist Ihor Lutsenko (no relation to Yuri Lutsenko) announced that the negotiations will only bring results when the Maidan's commanders hold them (and not the opposition politicians). on 3 February, the *Spilna Sprava* [Common Cause] organisation's leader Oleksandr Danyluk, who has been in London for several days, fiercely criticised the opposition leaders and demanded that his group participate as a third party in negotiations with Yanukovych. On 31 January, similar demands were put forward by Dmytro Yarosh of *Pravy Sektor* [the Right Sector], which represents other groups on the Maidan, including Afghanistan war veterans. On the same day, *Pravy Sektor* held informal negotiations with the head of the Security Service of Ukraine, Oleksandr Yakymenko, and the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Viktor Dubkov. The talks focused on the release of detained activists, and on protesters leaving the government buildings they have occupied and removing their barricades from Hrushevsky Street. According to information provided by the group, a provisional agreement has been reached on informally suspending the street clashes until 7 February. Until then, the Right Sector expects to see the government start releasing the detainees. This shows that this movement's leaders are trying to build an independent political position (according to Ukrainian press reports, the Right Sector's representatives intend to register their organisation as a political party and stand in the parliamentary elections). In the worst-case scenario, this may lead to the further marginalisation of the opposition leaders and a change in the format of negotiations on the one hand; and in the case of failure, a return to the offensive on the other.

Prospects

The negotiating stalemate between the government and the opposition in Ukraine has now lasted for a week, and neither party seems ready to make concessions now. On the one hand, this has allowed a ceasefire to be maintained on the Maidan in the neighbourhood of Hrushevsky Street; on the other hand, however, it has led to a rising sense of irritation on the part of the protesters. The Maidan is beginning to resemble a fortress, and the leaders of organisations like the Right Sector and Common Cause are demanding to participate in the negotiations with the three opposition leaders and President Yanukovych. In the near term the divisions between the political opposition and the most radical part of the Maidan's civil sector can be expected to deepen further; and the authorities can be expected to exploit these divisions. In turn, any willingness to make concessions on the part of the ruling camp will depend on the discipline within their own ranks, and possibly on external factors such as economic and political pressure from Russia to resolve the situation by force. Along with the failure to achieve a political solution that would constitute a visible sign of success to the protesters in Kyiv, the risk will rise that their more radical part will use force against the security forces, which would thus start the process of escalating the conflict.

Appendix

The wide range of groups present on the Maidan defies accurate description. Their number can be estimated at several dozen; many of them were created during the protests, many have no organisational structure, and it is difficult to determine the number of their members, the names of their leaders, or their socio-political programmes.

A list of the most influential organisations and groups present on the Maidan:

1. Activists from the *UDAR*, *Batkivshchyna*, and *Svoboda* opposition parties, both from Kyiv and other regions of Ukraine.

2. The Maidan Self-Defence, numbering up to 10,000 people (in 35 'hundreds'). They perform the functions of keeping order and maintaining defence, and are located at each of the 10 barricades set at the access points to the Maidan and at subway stations. Its members include veterans of both the special forces and of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq (who mainly function as instructors), as well as students and young professionals from different regions of Ukraine. They take orders from Andriy Parubiy, the Maidan's commandant, who is a parliamentary deputy for *Batkivshchyna*.

3. The Right Sector, a league of marginal nationalist organisations such as the *Tryzub* [Trident] paramilitary organisation, Ukrainian National Self-Defence, Ukrainian Patriot, White Hammer, et al. The group's leader is Dmytro Yarosh, the leader of *Tryzub*. There are about 500 members of these organisations on the Maidan, and across Ukraine they may have mobilised around four to five thousand people. Some members of the Right Sector belong to the Maidan Self-Defence. They are extremely wary of the leaders of the opposition parties, and who have also been expressing their own political ambitions.

4. Common Cause, a little-known radical organisation, numbering up to several hundred members, and who can mobilise more supporters if necessary. Their initiatives have included the occupation of the ministries of agriculture, energy and justice. Like the Right Sector they are distrustful of politicians, and have called for their participation in negotiations between the leaders of the opposition and President Yanukovych. Their leader is Oleksandr Danyluk, who has left Ukraine and is now resident in London.

5. The Automaidan, a group of activists numbering up to 1000 people who protest by driving long columns of vehicles. They take part in protest actions, but do not have a permanent base on the Maidan. The vehicles block streets or picket the residences of Ukrainian officials; they have also organised raids on the so-called *titushki*. Their leader is Dmytro Bulatov, who was tortured by unknown assailants, and is now in Vilnius for health reasons. The Automaidan supports Vitaly Klitschko.