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«NEITHER WITH EUROPE NOR WITH RUSSIA»: TRACKING VIEWS IN KHARKIV**Filippova Olga** – PhD in Sociology, Associate professor, Department of Sociology V. N. Karazin Kharkiv National University**Giuliano Elise** – PhD, lecturer Department of political science, Harriman Institute, Columbia University

Традиційний поділ України на Захід і Схід не враховує, що кожен регіон, особливо на сході України, є досить гетерогенним, з істотними відмінностями між сільськими і міськими районами та етнокультурним розмаїттям їхніх мешканців. У традиційній схемі аналізу визнається, що історична спадщина європейської імперії вплинула на певну узгодженість поглядів жителів західних регіонів, однак, як і раніше, залишається неясним, як історична спадщина дорадянського і радянського періодів формує велике розмаїття думок по всій Центральній, Південній та Східній Україні, тобто на значній території країни. Подібний підхід не може також пояснити наявність широкої різноманітності поглядів в окремих регіонах України. Дана стаття є певним кроком у цьому напрямку, оскільки в ній здійснюється аналіз поглядів мешканців одного із міст Східної України – Харкова. Дослідження включає в себе кілька методів: вторинний аналіз даних соціологічного опитування, що проведено Київським міжнародним інститутом соціології навесні 2014 року; кібер-етнографію і текстовий аналіз - вивчення публічних обговорень певних проблем в соціальних мережах (той же період). Хоча дослідження, що представлено в даній статті, є попереднім, воно наочно показує, що харків'яни демонструють різні думки і погляди, і Харків не вписується в поширені стереотипи «проросійського регіону». Загальновідомо, що взимку і навесні 2014 р. Харків став свідком великих демонстрацій, як за, так і проти Майдану. Однак, мало відомим є той факт, що за умов досить сильної опозиції Майдану серед значної частини населення, в розпал кризи в 2014 р. більшість харків'ян виступала проти сепаратизму і приєднання до Росії. Таким чином, «антимайданні» установки не слід просто прирівнювати до проросійської позиції. Очевидно, що потрібні більш глибокі дослідження для розуміння характеру опозиції Майдану і того, як це впливає на відносини з Києвом, Європою та Росією. Серйозна занепокоєність харків'ян корупцією режиму Януковича, економічними проблемами регіону, а також підтримка ними децентралізації говорить про те, що вони готові вирішувати ці проблеми, отримавши посилений контроль над місцевою політикою та більш широке представництво в політичних установах. Крім того, на тлі того, що значна частина населення Харкова виступала проти інтеграції з ЄС, існувала досить сильна підтримка членства в ЄС. Аналіз публічних обговорень в соціальних мережах ще раз демонструє те, що опозиція ЄС не обов'язково тягне за собою підтримку Росії. Для багатьох харків'ян лояльність до України як до незалежної держави не пов'язується априорі з необхідністю вибору між ЄС і Росією, і багато харків'ян не хочуть робити такий вибір – феномен, що заслуговує на більш глибоке дослідження.

Ключові слова: ідентичність, Харків, Майдан, анти-Майдан, федералізація, політичні орієнтації.

В традиционном разделении Украины на Запад и Восток не учитывается, что каждый регион, особенно на востоке Украины, является весьма гетерогенным, с существенными различиями между сельскими и городскими районами и этнокультурным разнообразием их жителей. В традиционной схеме анализа признается, что историческое наследие европейской империи оказало влияние на определенную согласованность взглядов жителей западных регионов, однако по-прежнему остается неясным, как историческое наследие досоветского и советского периодов формирует большое разнообразие мнений по всей Центральной, Южной и Восточной Украине, т. е. на значительной территории страны. Подобный подход не может также объяснить наличие широкого разнообразия взглядов в отдельных регионах Украины. Данная статья представляет собой шаг в этом направлении, поскольку в ней осуществляется анализ взглядов жителей одного из городов Восточной Украины – Харькова. Исследование включает в себя несколько методов: вторичный анализ данных социологического опроса, проведенного Киевским международным институтом социологии весной 2014 года; кибер-этнографию и текстовый анализ – изучение публичных обсуждений определенных проблем в социальных сетях (тот же период). Хотя исследование, представленное в данной статье, является предварительным, оно наглядно показывает, что харьковчане демонстрируют различные мнения и взгляды, и Харьков не вписывается в распространенные стереотипы «пророссийского региона». Общеизвестно, что зимой и весной 2014 г. Харьков стал свидетелем крупных демонстраций, как за, так и против Майдана. Однако мало известным является тот факт, что (при достаточно сильной оппозиции Майдану среди значительной части населения) в разгар кризиса в 2014 году большинство харьковчан выступало против сепаратизма и присоединения к России. Таким образом, «анти-

майданские» установки не следует просто приравнять к пророссийской позиции. Очевидно, что требуются более глубокие исследования для понимания характера оппозиции Майдану и того, как это влияет на отношения с Киевом, Европой и Россией. Серьезная озабоченность харьковчан коррупцией режима Януковича, экономическими проблемами региона, а также поддержка ими децентрализации говорит о том, что они готовы решать эти проблемы, получить усиленный контроль над местной политикой и более широкое представительство в политических учреждениях. Кроме того, на фоне того, что значительная часть населения Харькова выступала против интеграции с ЕС, существовала достаточно сильная поддержка членства в ЕС. Анализ публичных обсуждений в социальных сетях еще раз демонстрирует, что оппозиция ЕС не обязательно влечет за собой поддержку России. Для многих харьковчан лояльность к Украине как к независимому государству не связывается с необходимостью выбора между ЕС и Россией, и многие харьковчане не хотят делать такой выбор – феномен, заслуживающий более глубокого исследования.

Ключевые слова: ідентичність, Харків, Майдан, анти-Майдан, федералізація, політичні орієнтації.

Traditional dividing Ukraine into West and East fails to take into account that each region, particularly in east Ukraine, is highly heterogeneous, with differences among rural and urban areas and diverse residents. While legacies of European empire influence the coherence of popular attitudes in the west over time, it is less clear how the many historical legacies of pre-Soviet and Soviet rule shape the wide diversity of opinions across central, southern, and eastern Ukraine—i.e. across the majority of the country. Nor can such explanations make sense of the wide diversity of attitudes within individual Ukrainian regions. This paper represents a step in this direction by identifying and analyzing popular attitudes within one region in eastern Ukraine: Kharkiv. The research involves several methods: secondary data-analysis from sociological surveys conducted by Kiev International Institute of Sociology (a survey from spring 2014); cyber-ethnography and textual analysis – examination of the social media discussions from the same period. While the research presented in this paper is somewhat preliminary, our analysis clearly demonstrates that the residents of Kharkiv region display very diverse opinions and attitudes. Kharkiv does not fit simple stereotypes as a pro-Russian region. In winter and spring 2014, Kharkiv witnessed major demonstrations both for and against Maidan, and the city was home to extremely committed activists on opposite sides of the political spectrum. What is less well-known is that at the height of the crisis in 2014, a majority of Kharkovites opposed separatism and joining Russia. Perhaps most interestingly, these opinions co-existed with a current of strong opposition to Maidan among a significant segment of the population, as well as support for Russia's annexation of Crimea. Thus, anti-Maidan attitudes should not be simply equated with a pro-Russia position. More research is required into understanding the character of opposition to Maidan and how these attitudes bear upon relations with Kyiv, Europe and Russia. It is apparent that residents of the region shared strong opposition to the corruption of the Yanukovich regime and a high concern with economic issues. The population's strong support for decentralization suggests that residents were (and are) prepared to address these issues by obtaining increased representation in political institutions and taking increased control over local politics. In addition, there was, and continues to be a significant part of the population in Kharkiv that opposes integration with the EU. There is also strong support in the region for EU membership. But the data and the statements revealed in our analysis of social media suggest, once again, that opposition to the EU does not necessarily entail support for Russia. Loyalty to Ukraine as an independent state, beholden to neither Europe nor Russia seems to resonate with large numbers of Kharkovites; instead, growing numbers of citizens do not want to make a choice between Russia and the EU – an issue that deserves more research.

Keywords: identity, Kharkiv, Maidan, anti-Maidan, federalization, political orientation.

In winter and spring 2014 Kharkiv witnessed major demonstrations both for and against Maidan, and the city was home to extremely committed activists on opposite sides of the political spectrum. In general, the region has been described as divided and polarized. It also has been described as pro-Russian due to the strength of the anti-Maidan forces and popular sympathy for Russia. To what degree are these characterizations accurate? By focusing on the dramatic events of 2014, we obtain a particular picture in which political attitudes mirror each other by aligning along a single dimension—pro-Russian versus pro-Ukrainian. It is important to understand the disagreements between these two camps. However, it is also important to dig deeper into residents' political attitudes to try to understand why they hold the ideas that they do. People are neutral about some issues and maintain firm commitments about others. Which issues evoke intense commitments and which do not? What does it mean to be pro-Russian? While the attitudes of Maidan supporters have been relatively well-documented, we know less about the attitudes of those of citizens who opposed Maidan and supported Russia. We also know little about the attitudes of people who are not necessarily pro-Russian but maintain anti-Kyiv attitudes. Our research attempts to fill this gap by investigating, at a more micro level, the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens in the region of Kharkiv.

Methodology. The research involves several methods. To obtain a general picture of peoples' attitudes in Kharkiv we analyze data from sociological surveys conducted by Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS)

in spring 2014. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of people's attitudes, we use cyber-ethnography and textual analysis to analyze data from social media, methods that are derived from the interpretive paradigm. We examine social media discussions from the same period as the surveys – spring 2014.¹

While secondary data analysis is a widespread method, cyber-ethnography is not used extensively and should be described in more detail. According to R. Gajjala cyber-ethnography is a methodology that studies online interactions in different ways [1]. Also L. Kendall emphasizes that online interaction cannot be separated from the offline social and political context [2]. As regards to Ukraine, some authors underline significant role of organization, mobilization function, and effectiveness of the Internet in the resistance to the authorities [3], or examine «to what extent the ideology (or other factors) of a particular [social media] group shapes its network structure» [4, p.21]. Our study is different. We analyze 'content', which appears in cyber-space, and particularly in discussions that are engendered in social media. Numerous groups and forums appeared in social media could be viewed as a platform for producing different discourses. With such research optics we focus on social media not so much as a mobilizing resource or a platform to create a group with particular structure but as a resource and space for *negotiating identities and debating* Ukraine's 'choice'. Thus by considering the content of social media discussions as discourses and narratives of a grass-root population that is not organized formally or institutionally, we offer a new lens of seeing society not in a highly-polarized dimension, but tracking of 'in-between' spectrum of public opinion.

We ground our approach in the idea that narratives-discussions are one of the significant supplements to the official public sources [5, p.103]. Applying such supplements permits us to utilize a 'cross-referential' approach that assesses a society not only on the basis of its official discourse and information, but also helps us better understand not only 'what happened', but also 'what it felt like'. As regards to our research case we assert that discussions generated in social media can assist in the deconstruction of numerous hegemonic myths.

Presenting the benefits of the cyber-ethnography methods one should point out some methodological doubts which arise (particularly regarding Ukrainian context). Earlier cyber-ethnography researches on Ukrainian society alongside with providing with the new empirical data also had to convince whether or not a cyber-space could be regarded as a worthy and relevant field-site for researchers' examination, and grounding what exactly might it provide for a potential study [6; 7]. Being generally recognized as a relevant form of field research during the last decade, nowadays the ongoing hybrid war in Ukraine has engendered new challenges and doubts about cyber-ethnography: How to deal with 'fake' participants? Could we regard such sources as reliable ones to ground our conclusions?

For the social media analysis we considered examining three main social media sites which are popular in Ukraine: *Vkontakte*, *Odnoklassniki*, *Facebook*. According to the survey conducted by GFK the most popular social media among Kharkovites is *Vkontakte* (VK) [8, p.9]. Examining VK we found out that there are several groups that refer to Kharkiv. We distinguished three possible groups to examine: *Kharkiv is Russian city*, *Kharkiv is Ukrainian city* and *Tipichnyi Kharkiv* (Typical Kharkiv). Because we seek to analyze ordinary people talking to each other in a neutral forum and want to avoid so-called «activist» groups for this paper² we selected a single VK group – *Tipichnii Kharkov*. The group *Tipichnyi Kharkov* was founded on Dec 16, 2011 and describes itself as «News, open discussion, photos, and humor about Kharkov»³. It has 257 445 subscribers (information as of June 12, 2017).

Popular Opinions in Kharkiv. Does Kharkiv fit the stereotype of an eastern Ukrainian region, oriented toward Russia [9]? And to what degree is the population there polarized? An in depth examination of a KIIS survey on political opinions conducted in spring 2014 [10] indicates some critical ways in which Kharkiv does not fit these stereotypes and some ways in which it does. Even at the height of the spring 2014 events there are some critical issues about which Kharkovites agreed. Conversely, there are important issues about which residents serious disagreed.

In terms of issues and events about which a majority of Kharkovites agree, opinion data clearly show that very few people supported separatism or joining Russia during spring 2014. When asked whether they believed that «their oblast should separate from Ukraine and join Russia» a clear majority – 66% - answered no. Only 16% of respondents answered that they either definitely or probably supported separating from Ukraine and joining Russia. An equal portion of the population (17%) remained noncommittal, saying that they partially supported and partly opposed joining Russia. (Q20,2) In answering another question about whether they were «prepared to take to the streets and support demonstrations to unite the region with Russia», an even larger majority (76%) answered negatively, reflecting the population's aversion to the use of violence to accomplish political goals. (Q21)

¹ Our future research will track local attitudes up to the present and will be supplemented by secondary sources including media reports, and interviews conducted by the authors.

² Existing research [4] examines only *activist* groups on social media rather than non-activist groups.

³ This group does have an account in Facebook as well <https://www.facebook.com/groups/Tp1chnly/> Nevertheless there are no discussions there.

Similarly, there was little support for the violent seizure of administration buildings in Kharkiv. A clear majority of respondents—73%—reported that they opposed «the actions of those who used arms to seize the administration buildings in Kharkiv» while only 10% of the population supported them. Seventeen percent of the population, however, answered that it was hard to say and that they partially supported and partially opposed the armed seizures Q13,1.

This question seems to refer to the seizure of the administration building by pro-Russian, separatist forces. Thus, a majority of citizens again indicated their opposition to establishing a separatist republic along the lines of DNR and LNR. On the other hand, the answers to another survey question suggest the complexity of challenging authority at this time, and even of seizing government buildings. It is important to keep in mind that before separatist forces took the oblast building, pro-Maidan activists also held the building in an attempt to expel current anti-Maidan authorities—a strategy that took place throughout Ukraine’s regions including in the west. In another question respondents were asked whether they agreed with three different statements about the «justice of the armed seizures of administration buildings in their region». In the most popular response, 58% of respondents agreed with the statement: «There are no circumstances in which the armed seizure of administration building should be allowed. All problems should be addressed through diplomatic means». However, 22% of respondents stated that the seizures «could be justified insofar as the western regions did the same thing during the revolution». Also, 17% said that the seizures could be justified because «there was no other way to get the center to pay attention to the problems of the regions». The last two alternatives (which were articulated by surveyers not respondents) suggest that some local citizens felt that Kyiv was ignoring the concerns of their region – a common refrain heard in Donbas at this time, and also during the Orange Revolution. None of the statements in the survey mentioned the seizure of administration buildings in connection to establishing a separatist republic, nor to Russia’s role (Q13,2).

Related to the issue of the relationship between center and region, survey responses indicate that most Kharkovites (71%) supported greater decentralization of power. Of this percentage, 32% backed federalism and 39% supported a unitary state that would «decentralize power and widen the rights of the about oblasts». Only 23% of Kharkovites favored maintaining a unitary state and the status quo. (Q29) In line with increased support for local control, a large majority of respondents (83,6%) agreed that governors should be elected (Q30).

Discourse analysis of discussion on VK at the moment when separatist forces had seized the oblast administration building suggests that not all Kharkovites equated federalization with joining Russia or with the weakening of the Ukrainian state. There was, however, significant disagreement on this subject. For example, one man posted: «*Right now, Russian-speaking residents of east Ukraine went to protests to support the expansion of the powers of local authorities, for the federalization of the country.*» [A]⁴.

Another man posted in response: «*...Federalization is the beginning of the division of Ukraine*» [E]⁵.

Some people connected the question of federalization to Russia’s annexation of Crimea, fearing that federalization would encourage Russia to seize more Ukrainian territory (see discussion on Crimea below).

Other issues about which there was much common ground among Kharkovites were corruption and Yanukovich. Fully 87% of respondents answered positively to a question about whether, «in addition to former President Yanukovich, the ministers, governors, prosecutors, judges, who during his reign participated in corruption activities and violation of laws, should answer before the law?» Only 3,2% of respondents disagreed with this statement Q14.

Disagreement. Responses to the survey also indicate that there were critical areas of disagreement in 2014, not just among activists who took part in the demonstrations, but among ordinary citizens in Kharkiv. The population in Kharkiv was almost evenly split when it came to the issue of Crimea. Forty three percent of respondents agreed with the statement that Crimea united with Russia as a result of illegal annexation, whereas 44% said that annexation was the result of the Crimean peoples’ free will. (Keep in mind that this survey took place before the ATO began.) An exchange on VK succinctly captures the character of strongly divergent views about Crimea. One woman wrote:

«*Now we are really rescued only by being a unitary state, otherwise Russia would snip off not only Crimea*» [T].

«*Russia did not ‘snip off’ Crimea. The Crimea itself expressed a desire to join Russia; no one pushed it*» [P]⁶.

Opinions were also divided when it came to the Maidan: 48% agreed with the statement that the Maidan was «a citizens’ protest against corruption and the arbitrary dictatorship of Yanukovich,» while 43% agreed that it was a «state armed coup, organized by the opposition with the help of the West». It is important to keep in mind that the survey prompted these answers by supplying these alternatives to respondents. Still, the fact that only 8% answered that they didn’t know or found it hard to say illustrates that already by spring 2014, people held firm

⁴ <https://vk.com/wall>

⁵ <https://vk.com/wall>

⁶ <https://vk.com/wall>

opinions about Maidan. There was also a marked difference of opinion with regard to the group Right Sector and the importance of the role they played in Maidan and in Ukrainian politics.

Opinions about the legitimacy of the new leaders of Ukraine's central state also divided Kharkovites. Half of respondents considered both Acting President Oleksandr Turchynov and Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk illegitimate. Smaller percentages considered these leaders to be legitimate: 31% for Turchynov and 34% for Yatsenyuk. (14% and 12% found it hard to say). (Q1) The low legitimacy of Ukraine's new leaders in spring 2014 did not mean, however, that Kharkovites retained support for the old regime. On the contrary, fully 77% of respondents did not consider Yanukovych to be the legitimate president of Ukraine (Q2). Taken together, these answers suggest a serious crisis of confidence in the Ukrainian central state among Kharkov residents in spring 2014.

While many of the Tipichnyi Kharkov posts suggest that the opinions of citizens are entrenched and polarized, some people articulate a more nuanced view in which they express frustration, or alternatively, support for both «sides» of the conflict. For example, a person who posted in February 2014 while Yanukovych was still in office wrote: *«I for example do not support the current authorities nor those people who are trying to seize them with the help of Maidan. Our police, corruption in our country, and many other things are disgusting to me. Europe is closer to me than Russia but I do not consider Russia an enemy. I have many friends there...»*⁷[P]

Some of the other posts from this period show a similar tendency insofar as their authors avoid explicitly siding with either Europe or Russia.

Europe versus Russia. On the issue of Ukraine's geopolitical orientation to Europe versus Russia and the former Soviet states, Kharkiv region was closer to the latter in 2014. However, support for joining the Customs Union was significant but not overwhelming. Respondents were asked: «If a referendum were held today, whether they would join the «Customs Union, with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan», the EU, or choose not to participate in the referendum. A plurality of respondents (46,5%) chose the Customs Union, while 26,5% favored the European Union. Seventeen percent said that they wouldn't take part in a referendum and 9,4% found it hard to say. (Q32) When asked in general about relations between Ukraine and Russia, most people (71%) stated that they should be that of «normal, friendly states, with open borders and without a visa requirement». It is important to emphasize that the survey was conducted in April, before the ATO began in earnest. (Q20.1) When asked «which factors attract you above all to Russia?» the most popular answers were «the high salary and pensions (33%), followed by «the stable economic situation (28%), and then the culture (18%). Nearly a third of respondents, however, stated that «nothing attracts me to Russia (30%) (Q23). The following emotional exchange captures some of the ways in which locals thought about Maidan in terms of loyalty to Europe versus loyalty to Russia:

I: *«Why do Russia-lovers not go to Russia?»*

O: *«Probably because they think that Ukrainians came to Kharkov from elsewhere but that Russians (Rossianin) are indigenous here».*

V: *«I, why do Europe-lovers not go to Europe, and instead go out to Maidan to protest?»*

I: *«V, probably because they dream of building a European state in their country and do not search for someone to beg from who treats them as an appendage».*

A: *«I want to live in Kharkov, Ukraine, but I don't want to live under Putin's dictatorship and in Russia! I do love Ukraine! [No one] has to separate Kharkov to join Russia».*

V: *«So people who remember their own past and want to re-unite with the fraternal people are 'vatniki', but maidan scum, who betrayed their own people and all the Slavs, preferring to crawl to Obama are normal people?»*⁸

Some Kharkovites, however, rejected the either – or choice of Russia versus Europe, expressing instead a commitment to Ukraine remaining independent of external states. A woman posted a comment in Tipichnyi Kharkov in January 2014 stating: *«We only have one Ukraine and we don't have the right to pull it between Europe and Russia. The main thing is not to sell Ukraine. In both western Ukraine and eastern Ukraine live the same hard workers and we cannot allow them to suck everything out of us».*

Another man expressed similar sentiments about the need to avoid selling Ukraine's economic resources in exchange for control by another state: *«I don't want Europe or Russia. I want the state to develop and not to sell itself out as it has been doing for the past four years. We need to start with ourselves [...]. And the situation in Kharkiv with the authorities is well known».*

The statement here combines a plea for Ukraine to remain independent of external states with a critique of local government leaders.

Concluding, various areas of general agreement in 2014 consisted of strong opposition to separatism and joining Russia; opposition to the seizure of local administration buildings and to the use of force, anti-Yanukovych attitudes and hatred of the corrupt practices of the Ukrainian leaders. In addition, large numbers of people favored decentralization, and some even backed federalism as solutions to improved governance in Ukraine. Loyalty to

⁷ <https://vk.com/wall>

⁸ <https://vk.com/wall>

Ukraine as an independent state, beholden to neither Europe nor Russia seems to resonate with large numbers of Kharkovites; instead, growing numbers of citizens do not want to make a choice between Russia and the EU —an issue that deserves more research.

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