



“Ukraine’s Lessons Learned: From the Orange Revolution to the Euromaidan”

February 12, 2014

The tense political standoff in Ukraine, a result of President Yanukovich’s uncompromising stance and use of violence against protesters, could lead to a further escalation of conflict and the “militarization” of Ukrainian politics, cautioned Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellow **Sergii Leshchenko** in his February 12 presentation. “The only way for Yanukovich to stay in power,” he added, “is through radicalization and provocations.”

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“Now more than ever, it is crucial that the United States and the European Union assume an active role in condemning violence and supporting a peaceful, democratic solution to the crisis. Implementing targeted sanctions against corrupt oligarchs and perpetrators of violence, for instance, would send a strong message to those in power. In addition, it is vital that democracy assistance organizations continue to support an ‘infrastructure of democracy’ by providing material and technical resources to NGOs on the ground.”

—Sergii Leshchenko,
Journalist and press freedom
activist, Ukraine

Drawing on his experience as a prominent press freedom activist and deputy editor of *Ukrainska Pravda*, Ukraine’s largest independent online newsletter, Sergii Leshchenko offered insights into the structure and causes of the ongoing “Euromaidan” protests, as well as potential scenarios for the future. After identifying differences between the 2004 “Orange Revolution” and the current protests, he pointed out that weak watchdog institutions and limited civil society engagement allowed for the return of anti-democratic forces in 2010, leading to the present crisis. Leshchenko noted that the creation of a unity government and early presidential elections would be an ideal solution to the political stalemate.

First discussant **Nadia Diuk**, vice president of programs for Africa, Latin America, and Eurasia at the National Endowment for Democracy, highlighted the need for the institutionalization of reforms, noting that Ukraine is a changed country, no matter the outcome of the Euromaidan. Second discussant **Matthew Kaminski**, editorial board member of the *Wall Street Journal*, offered insights into the role of Russia and oligarchs and stressed that, despite some democratic gains, it would be tough for Ukrainians to unravel an “entrenched political/business/oligarchic system.”

In response to questions, Leshchenko stressed that the diverse population of protesters—hailing from all regions of Ukraine—was a key strength of the Euromaidan and that it represented the beginning of the end for the Yanukovich administration. In addition, Leshchenko identified a return to the 2004 Constitution as an essential first step in negotiating a long-term resolution to the crisis.

The Reagan-Fascell Democracy Fellows Program enables activists, practitioners, scholars, and journalists from around the world to deepen their understanding of democracy and enhance their ability to promote democratic change. The views expressed in this presentation represent the analysis and opinions of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.