

Interview with **Yevhen Mahda** (YM). Interviewer: Maryana Prokop (MP). Place of record: Warsaw.

MP: My first question is related to your political and non-political, scientific and non-scientific participation in the Ukrainian revolutions. In relation to which revolutions do you have your observations?

YH: [pause] The 1990 Revolution on Granite is known [to me]. I was a schoolboy at that time, and it so happened that all my classmates went to support the students, and I was ill then, and there was a loud announcement about them at the then Square of the October Revolution [pause]. It was not probably so swift floating at that time, as it was less relevant for schoolchildren. [pause] In 2004 I was already a journalist writing about politics, and I covered the Orange Revolution actively, and there was an indicator for me that my first teacher told me that when she was reading my articles, she could not understand whether I supported Yushchenko or Yanukovych. I think that this was correct in principle. Although [pause] when I came to the Ukrainian parliament in the midst of the Orange Revolution events, dressed in a light blue shirt and a blue tie, one of my colleagues said: "Aren't you supporting the Orange Revolution?". Then it was perceived in a way that you wanted to be dressed in such colours, those colours worked as an "indicator" of your involvement. On account of the Euromaidan events, I was at the Euromaidan several times. Although I did not participate directly in the active phase, for some reason or another it passed by me, I was actively writing about those events, and actively commenting, so I have a rather detailed impression of the events at the Euromaidan. I would not identify myself as a participant of the three revolutions, but I'd rather say that I am a person that saw those revolutions very closely.

MP: An active observer?

YM: Yes, an active and interested observer, I would even say a sympathetic observer, however, one issue should be pointed out. [pause] In principle, [pause] such a large number of revolutions within such short period of time is already a fact for Ukrainians, however, for our Western partners, and I think for Poland also, this is not always a positive fact. Among others, it illustrates that the democratic procedures do not work in Ukraine, that people have to come out to the Maidan and fight for their dignity, for democratic principles, and to create the prerequisite conditions for further development, so actually Ukrainians are in such a condition now that possibly they might not be able to realize that such a large number of revolutions within a short period of time is not always good.

MP: Since the certain sequence is important to us, so that the chronological order is preserved, let's discuss each of the revolutions in particular. The first one was the Revolution on Granite. Could you describe your feelings, your impressions from the first revolution, how did you perceive it then and did you think that some changes would be achieved, that something could be changed that way?

YM: In principle, the prospect of changes, it should have been obvious and many people expected that those changes would occur. This revolution drew heavily on Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika*, however, it was a local aspect related to Ukrainian specific features, it was a rise of the national democratic movement, and it was not a mere coincidence that the students, the most active part of the society, became the mainspring of this revolution. One cannot say that there were no changes at all, as the resignation of the Prime Minister Vitaliy Masol was a change already. The decision of the Verkhovna Rada that the citizens of the Ukrainian SSR should serve in the Soviet army on the territory of Ukraine was also a change. Clearly, the revolutionaries, the participants of this revolution demanded as much and as good as possible. They should have demonstrated that they strive for more. The motto of the 1968 revolution in France "Be realistic, demand the impossible" is relevant in every revolution.

MP: This revolution laid the foundation for the further course of events in Ukraine, and it is said that people realized that something could be achieved in such a way, so the revolution of 2004 broke out on a large scale, which at that moment raised believes that changes would come. How would you estimate the year 2004?

YM: 2004 was a logical year. Yushchenko's team was prepared that people would take to the streets to defend the results of election. Yet in my observation it was not prepared that the people's support would be on such massive scale. [pause] Thinking back, I remember that I worked in the office in the center of Kyiv at that time. I remember the first days, the whole mass of people who were encouraged to come to Kyiv, they were just walking around the city, like an orange wave, or possibly, an orange sea, and they were just crying "Yushchenko, Yushchenko..." without any constructive plan. This revolution was prepared if we speak about the possibility to set up a camp on the Maidan and to provide sufficient organization of it, however, in my view, the scale of this revolution was a total surprise for its organizers.

MP: From the time perspective, how would you estimate it, its course and your feelings and observations?

YM: I am very glad that the revolution did not end with bloodshed. At that moment it once again proved that Ukrainians are able to come to an agreement, that Ukrainians are able to achieve some common actions, common goals. I am glad that Ukrainians did not cross this line, but on the other hand, looking from the current perspective, I'd say that the implementation of the achievements of the revolution was weak, in other words, we did not see such changes that [pause] would substantially enhance the country. Largely due to the Orange Revolution, Ukrainians had the illusions that now we were welcomed in Europe and NATO, that there were orange carpets rolled out for us and that we would be invited to Europe in such way. I also fell

under that impression, a very positive aspect, that we had, so to say, demonstrated that we belong to Europe, and that Europe would of course support us in that.

MP: Why was it weak in your opinion? What was lacking?

YM: What was lacking was specific actions, our revolutionaries lacked specifics. What was lacking was specifics which would demonstrate that not only revolution could bring changes. The revolution alone was not sufficient, further steps for its implementation were needed.

MP: So it was not the fault of the revolution, but only of what happened after the revolution, right?

YM: The revolution as such proved to be a huge uplift, a great advantage in my view, however, you know, like a wave; a wave can be just a matter of aesthetic pleasure when you simply admire the waves lapping at the shore, or can be a matter bringing energy, like power plants operating on the wave power. This wave power, of the revolutionary wave, was simply wasted on the shore.

MP: Was not used efficiently?

YM: Yes. It was not used efficiently.

MP: What would you say about the third Ukrainian revolutions, about the way you felt?

YM: To a large extent it was unexpected to me. I did not think that Ukrainians would react in such manner to the whole course of events. Yet I would say that in my view, the revolutionary events did not begin as the group of activists came to the Maidan on the anniversary of the Orange Revolution, when it was announced that Ukraine would not sign the Association Agreement with the EU. They began with the beating of the students, this act of unjustified, irrational violence had a great influence on people. People just felt that they were involved in that, that it affected many of them, and respectively they took to the streets. I do not advocate conspiracy theories, but turning back to the Euromaidan events, I would say that, [pause] at the present time, some outside influence could be seen there. The revolution was declining, beating of the students, another outbreak, dissatisfaction, a large number of people who could still be restrained. After that, beating near the Administration which only enhanced the revolutionary process, although it was not logical from the government's perspective. Then the authorities and the opposition try to find a common language, try to reach mutual understanding, looking for some compromise, then beating of Tetiana Chornovol. [pause] She is a person who is judged ambiguously by all sides, but the very fact of beating a woman. Of the opposition-minded woman, the woman that tried to get into the Mezhyhirya, it is like some sensitive body parts were deliberately pressed in order to rip up and get a respective reaction. [pause] This is understandable. Then again, the peaceful New Year, the concert of Okean Elzy at the Maidan, then quietly, and then the first deaths at the Maidan. Then the situation intensified again on the Epiphany. Afterwards the situation was beyond control. In my opinion, this was the Russian influence. Russia tried to maneuver and buy time, I think it already had the plan to annex Crimea, I mean that it was already in place and they were trying to implement it.

MP: You mentioned that you were very surprised by the way the Revolution of Dignity broke out, its scale and the process itself. Why did you think that Ukraine was not prepared for such turn of events, for choice of the European thought on such scale, why was it so...?

YM: I understood that the Association Agreement was [pause] rather a declaration of good intention than some concrete political plan. The Ukrainians at that moment, I could not say that were extremely passive, but they got somehow used to the fact that they live in their paradigm and the authorities in their own paradigm. When the authorities do not violate rights of ordinary Ukrainians, they react to such things much quieter. And we got such situation. I will repeat myself, the point of the European integration, of protection of the European choice was not alone [pause] so particularly effective. Then in late November the opposition brought quite a lot of people to the streets, but instead of bringing them solely under Ukrainian or European flags, there was the show of the standard-bearers with party standards, that is, who managed to mark as many of their people as possible. The further progress of the Revolution of Dignity demonstrated that the leaders of opposition, the triumvirate of Yatsenyuk, Tyahnybok and Klitschko, was often uncoordinated, split, I think that the Revolution of Dignity was possible due to ordinary people, and not due to actions of those revolutionaries.

MP: So the Revolution of Dignity did not have its leader, did it?

YM: No, there was no sole leader, I mean there was no such sole leader, symbol like Yushchenko. By the way, the Revolution on Granite did not have its leader either, there was Oles Doniy who spoke from a rostrum, but he was not a sole leader for 100 per cent.

MP: After Ukraine declared that it would not sign the Association Agreement, there were sentiments in Poland that the Ukrainian society would not react, because for how long it could raise such storm of revolutions, so such reception was a great surprise. Do you think that Ukraine is ready for the next revolution or has it exhausted all its ... strength?

YM: You know, in the current situation, I would say, [pause] that people proposing another revolution, the third Maidan, they rather play against Ukraine than for Ukraine. The fact is that directly in the context of the Russian aggression, there is an ongoing war for three years already, a local, not an unusual war with weapons, there are tens of thousands of people who have experience of using weapons, and just playing with them is short-sighted.

MP: What can you say about the experience, the experience that Ukrainians and Ukraine have gained in those revolutions? Would this experience be useful to the Ukrainian people, or was it an unnecessary experience?

YM: You know, I often say, people, the best time for the community is when it grows. Perhaps if we consider objectively, such short intervals between revolutions, our society grows during this time. Having written a new book about Ukraine's search for its own image, I can say that we continue looking for our place in the world. This non-stop process should continue, and when we do not know where we are heading, it is not very good in my opinion. One of the grounds for the Revolution of Dignity was that we could not tell where we were heading.

MP: And if we take all three revolutions and look at them in the light of the reasons for their outbreak, will we see any similarities or did each one have a different reason?

YM: The authorities did not want to hear people. A classic definition of the revolutionary situation: when the tops cannot rule, and the bottoms do not want to abide. It is also necessary to understand that when particular politicians try to exploit exclusively political energy of the masses, or revolutionary energy of the masses, they take risks to find themselves in a situation of a boy from a well-known tale, who cried "wolves, wolves..." and then was in hot water. One cannot speculate with a revolution all round, it should be a genuine outburst, it should be a leap over several steps in the social development, otherwise a revolution might soon change into stagnation in one case, or counterrevolution in another.

MP: You talked about characteristics of the Ukrainian society, and that if everything is fine, it is not interested in politics, but when its vital interests are destroyed, that the largest outburst occurs. Can we say that these three revolutions were such three interests of the Ukrainian society that were violated, or there are any other interests, in respect of which the society also reacted in such manner?

YM: One may say that the Revolution of Dignity continues, it is very illustrative for me that as of now, Ukrainians have spent an unknown, but huge amount of money, around at least tens of millions dollars, in order to support the Ukrainian army in 2014-2015. This is very illustrative for the society. It shows that Ukrainians care about the fate of their country, that they will not just sit and watch. It means that the society, the nation grew with the period of 1917-1921, when following the world war, the Ukrainian revolution was rather intensive, but it was local, participated only in some military actions, in other words, people tried to sit out, people often forfeited their lives for attempts of sitting out, as it happened after the Bolsheviks occupied Kyiv in February 1918. Paradoxically, the civil war was not a common cause, not everyone participated. This considerably influenced the further course of events. And now in the age of information society, everyone individually decides on his involvement in the revolution. I think it is like in the Soviet mythology, there were many people who carried blocks with Lenin, probably thousands of people. As a matter of fact, I believe that not the number of people who participated in the revolution, and possibly not even the way they participated in the revolution matter, but its results to the society.

MP: And your personal involvement in revolution? Maybe those ones that you experienced more consciously, what impression did they make on you?

YM: Perhaps I'd prefer devolution to revolution, I cannot say that I was an active participant, but [pause] commenting on the events as a journalist, as an expert, particularly on the events of 2004 and 2013-2014, I sought to look for the positive, I tried to find opportunities for compromise between the authorities and the opposition where possible, because during the Revolution of Dignity I saw that the opposition did not have a clear vision, and that it could be better for it to find a common language at some stage, but [pause] it all happened differently. However, I do not believe that the speech of Parasiuk acted as a catalyst for Yanukovich's flight. In my view it was rather a manipulation. I am sad that more than two years passed since the Revolution of Dignity, but the society still does not know who gave the order to shoot at Instytutska street, or who carried it out, these question lie with whole Ukraine.

MP: Another question: the Orange Revolution did not lead to the implementation of what the society was expecting, as there were great expectations for change, and that everything would be fine, and that by electing Yushchenko, everything in the state will change, but in various aspects those changes did not occur. Then the Revolution of Dignity takes place in 2014. So my question is, where did people get strength and faith that something can be done? The previous revolution did not meet their expectations, but they came to the Maidan again.

YM: I consider that [pause] Ukrainians have been underestimated in this respect. When we are called a nation of grain farmers, we are somewhat lied to, in the sense that Ukrainians are not only little grain farmers, but representatives of one of the most skillful – in the military sense – nations, and that is why this spirit of resistance is actually strong. And in my view there is a combination here that you cannot beat defenseless children, and the need of change, that changes should move forward. I think this is an important matter for the whole society, those are the things that I would count as the collective subconscious. It does not mean that people agreed among themselves whether they would carry out a revolution or not. Even the course of events demonstrated that those who called themselves the leaders of the revolution were far from always such leaders.

MP: Is it because a revolution does not always require a leader like in 2004? Is the general opinion of people sufficient or would this revolution develop differently, were the opposition more united?

YM: Unfortunately our then opposition, when it partially became the authorities, it was largely [pause] connected with the then authorities, with Yanukovich's team. This is generally a problem that the Ukrainian authorities are the connecting vessels, and the flow of people between them is constantly ongoing. We do not have ideological parties. The existence of political projects for all the good and against all the bad results in, respectively, narrowing this political field, so I think that this in principle will be interesting to talk now, however, the truth is that the history is not familiar with the word "if", in conditional mood. We can evaluate the revolution, the changes that took place, that our country took the path of change, however, it pays a heavy price, the heaviest today, for the European choice, for the aspiration to implement the motto "Away from Moscow". The country pays not only with infrastructure losses, but also thousands of lives of its citizens, so the price is really huge.

MP: What do you think about social causes, declining in people's lives, the current situation – were those causes a pretext for such a large-scale outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity?

YM: In fact both during the Revolution of Dignity and the Orange Revolution the economic causes were less relevant. There was economic growth, and during Yanukovich's rule there was total economic stability, and now many people remember the US dollar exchange rate of 2014, as Ukrainian hryvnia's rate is three times worse. The 2004 revolution succeeded precisely because there emerged the layer of national business that was ready to finance the revolution. Carrying out a revolution only at cost of Boris Berezovsky would be impossible. So one has to look for positive aspects and understand that those revolutions were not attempts to get a larger bite, but they were aspirations to achieve those values. I think that the Revolution of Dignity shocked Europe, since people died for the European values, which have largely devalued here in Europe, and this devaluation is noticeable.

MP: So the European values surpassed the social, economic needs of the society, right?

YM: In practice, yes. The economic needs could be resolved without a revolution, but the need to observe certain rules of the game and move towards Europe was more evident.

MP: What European values are we talking about? What values were the most important in your opinion?

YM: As a matter of fact, Ukraine's belonging to the European community, democracy, the right to make choices and evaluate own choices. Economic appeals came secondary, except that the fight against corruption is popular now, however, this fight has been so lengthy and so ineffective that this issue has fallen by the wayside to a great extent.

MP: As part of conclusions: was the Revolution of Dignity more significant for the society because many people died, or the Orange Revolution, which had its leader and clear boundaries: who is who – the opposition and the authorities, against which Ukrainians revolted? In 2014, there were also the authorities and the opposition, but there was no such distinctive leader, yet it turned to be bloody for Ukraine.

YM: It is difficult to compare them. However, without the Orange Revolution, there would be no Revolution of Dignity.

MP: In other words, they are connected?

YM: Yes, but this is rather a subconscious than a conscious connection, and not a deep one. It is based on a perspective, I believe this is the perspective of our growth. I'd say that the problems of Yushchenko

as a president, who allowed a huge drop of his ranking after his victory on the wave of the Orange of Revolution, and further rise to power of people like Yanukovych, led to such development that we have witnessed.

MP: It is said that the society had no one to choose from, as it lost hopes in Yushchenko, and as it turned out, Yanukovych did not meet expectations either, so the problem arose who could be a leader, who could change something, however, the society made this move and wanted these changes, not knowing whom it could count on.

YM: I think that not a surname is important for the society, but the function, change as such is important for the society. Otherwise, if we cling to a certain surname, we would turn into Russia, when the cult of Putin substitutes everything. I would not want this.

MP: Do you think that these revolutions, these outbreaks can help the society realize that it can build its own state, somehow achieve its goal, or can these changes be reached in such a democratic manner?

YM: I think that only Ukrainians need strong Ukraine.

MP: Well, it is so!

YM: This is the aspect that we should understand [pause], that we cannot rely on external assistance all the time, it is counterproductive. We have to realize our own power. Revolutions allow better realize one's own power.

MP: Has the Revolution of Dignity changed anything from the time perspective? Has it provided an opportunity for Ukrainians to obtain the European values for which they fought, and one can say, continue fighting for? Because of the current situation in Ukraine, many people are forced to conclude that maybe they did not want their future to be this way.

YM: Not this way, but still [pause] I do not feel such extreme frustration within the Ukrainian society that people came to the Euromaidan. I do not feel the frustration of the Orange Maidan. Some frustration can be seen because people, those were on the wave of the revolution, not all of them grew up to the needs of the society, in other words, our society has grown, but politicians have not.

MP: Did the revolution reinforce the consciousness of being Ukrainian, patriotism, did it influence that?

YM: One of the remarkable aspects is that the revolution, among other things, created a possibility to be a Russian-speaking Ukrainian patriot. In the revolutionary events the language issue fell by the wayside. I think this is a big plus, this is a positive aspect. Ukraine is really growing in these matters, and I believe this is good, and in my view this will have a positive impact.

MP: Yesterday was Vyshyvanka Day. Now more people demonstrate their belonging to the Ukrainian people (they wear vyshyvankas on holidays, sing the national anthem, demonstrate flags, paint benches in yellow and blue etc.) Do you think that such increase in consciousness, patriotism is just show-offing that someone is Ukrainian, but is he a conscious Ukrainian?

YM: I consider that showing patriotism publicly is fine. And it is not the worst manifestation. This is a desire to demonstrate that people feel their involvement. I live in Kyiv permanently, and I may say that every year I hear more Ukrainian language compared to previous years.

MP: Is it a positive factor, in your view?

YM: You know, in my view the proverb is about Ukrainians that they are slow to get started, but they drive fast. The level of patience is high enough, but once the lid comes off, Ukrainians actually try to go to the mat.

MP: And the last, final question. How do you think these three revolutions will influence the further development of the Ukrainian society? Will we see their influence in 10-20 years, or will it become history already?

YM: I do not think this will be history. I think that the authorities should remember these revolutions in the first place, in order not to give grounds for new revolutions, and the course of these revolutions as such is a lesson, and I think that this was indeed such time of emotional uplift, but we have to remember them, however, living in the context of evolution. In the context when we can gradually move forward. We as a country, a society have created kind of a stepping stone. Ukraine has already stated that it accepted the revolutionary changes, and now we have to implement our European choice in specific areas: in combatting corruption, ensuring fair justice, positive improvements, etc., etc., etc. These should be such things that have a significant impact on the state building process. Yet with a revolution alone, at cost of a revolution, we cannot move forward.

MP: So we can say that the revolutions were a lesson that we have to learn now.

YM: Revolution is a short summary, based on which a full study course shall be developed.

MP: In other words, we have to learn more?

YM: Yes, we need to learn how to implement what we have achieved. We loudly announced about the Ukrainian movement, the European choice to the whole Europe, and now Europe tells us – good, but show it to us in real cases, so respectively, our future will depend on our performance in those real cases.

MP: Thank you very much!