

UKRAINE -2014: WHICH WAY WILL THE DIGITAIZATION PEDULUM SWING?

INTRODUCTION

On August 24, 1991, Ukraine, a former Soviet Union Republic, became an independent State. At that moment, Ukraine gained the possibility to create its own political system based on the European development model of democratization, liberalization, and establishing freedom of speech and the press.

In 1991 Ukraine won this freedom easily, practically with no effort, just as did the other fourteen Soviet Republics. Perhaps that is the reason this freedom was taken for granted. But today, after twenty-three years, Ukrainians now face the prospect of having to struggle for their independence and their right to choose their own way of development.

That's not to say they haven't had some successes. According to a report by human rights organization Freedom House "Nations in Transit – 2014" Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova are the only post-Soviet countries (excluding the Baltic ones) that have managed to achieve the status of transitive political regimes, whereas the other post-Soviet countries are still under various stages of authoritarian regime.¹ The "Freedom on the Net – 2013" ranking rates Ukraine a free country and awards it 16th place. Of all of the post-Soviet countries, only Georgia (which is in the 12th place) scores higher than Ukraine.²

It could be argued that one of the most important reasons for this success was the intensive involvement of internet-media and mobile technologies in organizing the population and disseminating information during the political turmoil of recent months. Nevertheless, though digital media are acknowledged to be an instrument for democratization and the establishment of a civil society, they are not a panacea that can at one stroke establish democratic regimes around the entire globe. Like any other powerful instrument, digital technologies can be put to both good and evil uses, like a pendulum that can swing in both directions, such as:

- society consolidation or digital dissidence;
- democratization or strengthening authoritarian regimes;
- awakening civil activity or "stay-at-home" or "coach" activism;
- state informational sovereignty or defenselessness to external aggression, and others.

Such ambivalence to digital technologies appears to be particularly acute in so called transitive societies, which are in the process of transforming from authoritarian to democratic. Such hybrid political regimes are a field of increased instability, as they combine both democratic and autocratic features, and may easily transform from one regime into another. According to Freedom House's classification, Ukraine is precisely this kind country.³

In this chapter there is an analysis of existing digital technologies and their development inside Ukraine in the instances mentioned above.

¹ *Nations in Transit - 2014* 18 (Freedom House, 2014), accessed August 10, 2014, http://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/nations-transit-2014#.U-cPJNx_v2F, 8

² Freedom House "Freedom on the Net 2013" news release, 2014, accessed August 19, 2014, http://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/freedom-net-2013#.U_LpJdx_v2E, 17

³ *Nations in Transit - 2014*

SOCIETY CONSOLIDATION OR DIDGITAL DISSIDENCE?

At first sight new, cheap, high-speed, accessible communication and informational channels would appear to facilitate the integration of society, educating huge groups of like-minded people, and forming a unified technological space.

But in practice, digital media are able not only to consolidate and integrate, but also to explode unstable communities from the inside. In a society with distinctive stratification, different access to informational technologies, and strong regional heterogeneity, these media can exacerbate existing divisions. That is the current situation in Ukraine.

Digital inequality

The problem discussed most is what is called digital inequality - unequal chances to access digital technologies among various social groups that have different levels of education, earnings, location etc. However this problem in Ukraine is not acute. Despite the rather late arrival of informational technologies in comparison with many other countries, Ukraine is developing this sphere extremely quickly.

In 2014 Ukraine was in 32nd place in the Internet Live Stats rating among 198 countries in terms of the quantity of internet users, which as of July 1, 2014 was reckoned to be 16.8 million people or 37.49% of the Ukrainian population. This is close to the average world index of about 40%.⁴

The annual growth of the number of users is 9%, putting Ukraine in 83rd place among the 198 countries surveyed. During 2013, as gemiusAudience indicates, the number of Ukrainian internet users increased by 1.5 million people.⁵

Step by step the digital discrepancy between cities and villages is being evened out. As of the beginning of 2014 one of four Internet users lived in the countryside;⁶ gender discrepancy: 51% of Internet users are women; age discrepancy: more than a half of million children “have friended” their parents within social networks.⁷

There is another important factor: the price for Internet access in Ukraine remains one of the cheapest in the world: the average monthly fee for home Internet use is less than \$10.⁸ Another positive trend is the increasing extension of the mobile devices sector, which by the end of 2013, according to Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) research, covered 88% of the Ukrainian population. According to a mobile operators' poll conducted by the “Capital” magazine in July 2014, the percentage of Internet-capable smartphones is 20% out of the total number cell phones,⁹ and the percentage of mobile traffic, according to “Yandex. Metrics” exceeded 20%.¹⁰

⁴ *Internet Live Stats*, “Internet Users” (accessed August 11, 2014, <http://www.internetlivestats.com/internet-users/>)

⁵ Aleksandr Gundlakh, “The way Ukrainian internet auditory grew (infographics)” (russian) *15 minutes*, March 4, 2014, accessed August 11, 2014, <http://www.techbee.ru/article/kak-rosla-auditorija-ukrainskogo-interneta-infografika-2014-03-04-20-17-00>

⁶ Ol'ha Minchenko, “Every fourth Ukrainian internet user lives in the village” (ukrainian) *Watcher*, July 19, 2013, accessed August 17, 2014, <http://watcher.com.ua/2013/07/19/kozhen-chetvertyy-ukrayinsky-korystuvach-internetu-zhyve-v-seli/>

⁷ *Plus One*, “Ukrainian digital revolution – 2” (2014), accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKHmf6sFbsM&feature=youtu.be>

⁸ Vitaliy Moroz, “Internet, social and new media” in *Ukrainian media-landscape - 2012* (ukrainian), ed. Valeriy Ivanov, Oksana Voloshenyuk and Andriy Kulakov 21 (Kyiv: Conrad Adenauer's Fund in Ukraine, 2013), 38–43, 39.

⁹ Viktoriya Vlasenko, “The number of smartphones inside of Ukrainian mobile operators has increased 20%” (russian) *Capital*, 113 (290) (2014-07-21), accessed August 19, 2014, <http://www.capital.ua/ru/publication/25275-shag-vpered-chislo-smartfonov-v-setyakh-ukrainskikh-operatorov-prevysilo-20>

¹⁰ *Yandex. Metrics*, “Yandex. Metrics Summer 2013: Ukrainian users of mobile devices” (russian), 2013, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://www.slideshare.net/WatcherUA/yandex-metrika-mobileukraine0913>

Regional heterogeneity

Significantly more difficult is the problem of the regional digital divide, which shows itself as radically different worldview inherent to inhabitants of different regions. Such polarization of opinions between regions exists for decades, but in the spring of 2014, it had reached its maximum level.

On the one hand, this situation - the result of artificial creating of regional structure of Ukraine, which was set up during the Soviet period. But today it is also a result of intentional informational policy (both internal and external), that is directed at undermining and weakening the country from the inside.

Despite the tendency to divide Ukraine into West and East, with their citizens being considered to be radically different, it's more relevant to mention the ideological discrepancy between relatively unified central part of Ukraine, the Donbass, and Crimea.

The Donbass in this sense is the most complicated region. According to a survey by the Razumkov Center, the majority of the population does not trust the traditional media: 56% do not trust Russian media, and 68 % do not trust Ukrainian sources. The majority simply don't trust anyone: neither the present government, nor the Party of Regions, which brought voters deep disappointment, but especially the politicians who lead the Maidan.¹¹ At the same time, the Donbass (and Crimea also) is characterized by the lowest levels of penetration of the Internet in Ukraine¹² and the maximum prevalence of traditional media supporters; which greatly reduces the influence of new digital media in these regions.

The situation in Crimea is not much easier. The broadcasting of many Ukrainian State TV channels has been stopped here in summer 2014. And since August 1, 2014 the RosKomNadzor communications authority of the Russian Federation had begun placing Ukrainian Internet resources on its list of forbidden sites.¹³ The first in this list was the site RIA "New Region",¹⁴ and after that more sites joined the list, such as the Kharkiv Internet publication "Glavnoe",¹⁵ the all-Ukrainian "Censor.net"¹⁶ site, and others. The reaction of "Glavnoe" was: "We consider this decision of "RosKomNadzor" as the highest praise for our work for the benefit of Ukraine!"¹⁷

This gap can be bridged only with the help of informational methods. Given such a difficult situation, Ukraine has to form a non-contradictory national information field, something that it has failed to do in almost a quarter century of independence. It's important to understand that it should be a united, single image of reality that would still include the specificities of each region – in various forms, in several languages, for different target audiences, and using both traditional and new media.

¹¹ Mykhaylo Mischenko, "Donbass citizens don't trust anymore either Ukraine or Russia: interview to the newspaper «Mirror of the week»: Інтерв'ю газеті «Дзеркало тижня»" (ukrainian) *Center of Razumkov*, May 19, 2014, accessed August 12, 2014, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/article.php?news_id=1122

¹² Elina Shnurko-Tabakova, "As Ukrainian events prove, it is practically impossible to manipulate people who are using unlimited on-line informational sources" (russian) *Dialog.ua*, May 19, 2014, accessed August 7, 2014, <http://www.dialogs.org.ua/ru/dialog/page162-2523.html>

¹³ Anatoliy Vasiliyev, "«New Region» became the 1st independent resource blocked in Crimea" (russian) *RIA "New Region"*, August 9, 2014, accessed August 19, 2014, http://nr2.com.ua/News/politics_and_society/Novyy-Region-stal-pervym-nezavisimym-resursom-zablokirovannym-v-Krymu-77743.html?fb_action_ids=541588542634330&fb_action_types=og.likes

¹⁴ RIA "New Region" - <http://nr2.com.ua>

¹⁵ Internet Source "Glavnoe" - <http://glavnoe.ua>

¹⁶ Internet Media "Censor.net" - <http://censor.net>

¹⁷ *Glavnoe*, "«Glavnoe» is forbidden in Russia" (russian), August 19, 2014, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://glavnoe.ua/news/n185938>

DEMOCTARIZATION, OR NEW INSTRUMENTS OF AN AUTOCRATIC REGIME?

Speaking about the influence of digital technologies on the democratic transformation of a society, we usually refer to just one of the possible directions of such a transformation. The optimists say informational technologies facilitate an inevitable and rapid flourishing of democracy because it is practically impossible to manipulate people who are using unlimited on-line informational sources. The opposite view is that the World Wide Web provides almost unlimited possibilities for control, propaganda and the manipulation of people's minds, which can actually strengthen autocratic regimes.

In modern Ukraine such fears are quite justified. The Ukrainian media, both traditional and Internet ones, started to gain their independence after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and after the "Orange Revolution" of 2004. But in the first decades of the twenty-first century the new media have become an object of influence for political and government structures and for oligarchs again. During the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich, the political development of the country was directed towards strengthening the government regime and tightening state controls.¹⁸ In other words, the Soviet Union totalitarian regime was substituted with the Yanukovich totalitarian regime. In particular, the country's leadership demonstrated absolute intolerance of opposition media.¹⁹

It wasn't long before Ukraine started to slip in the international ratings. In 2004, according to the evaluation of Freedom House "Ukraine overcame a huge barrier and managed to step on the democratic way of development, which is a significant story of successful democracy in Eastern Europe".²⁰ But in their report of 2011, the same experts noted "a worsening political situation connected with the reduction of the democracy level and the ensuring of human rights." The Ukrainian political regime was placed in the autocratic category.²¹ Similarly, in the world index of press freedom Ukraine dropped from 90th in 2009²² to 126th in 2013.²³

Revolution of dignity

The situation started to change from November 21, 2013 – it is no exaggeration that the events that happened really were a turning point in Ukrainian history and generated a wave of irreversible social change. On that day, a few days before the EU's planned Vilnius Eastern Partnership Summit, at approximately at 15:00 the Ukrainian government announced its decision "to stop negotiations with the EU on association," despite these negotiations having been expected by the whole country since 2007. From very moment, the development of events was rapid. "Within 15-20 minutes of the announcement being published in all of the top Internet media, the information immediately appeared on the social nets. Within an hour, the Internet news media traffic reached its peak - for instance, the hosts of news website *Ukrainska Pravda* saw a doubling in traffic (according to Liveinternet data). Close to 16:30 the

¹⁸ *Innabtys.com*, "Evolution and revolution of media in Ukraine" (russian), March 30, 2014, accessed August 2, 2014, <http://www.innabtys.com/blog/evolyutsiya-i-revoljutsiya-media-v-ukraine>

¹⁹ Arif Aliyev et al., *Media freedom in countries of eastern partnership - 2013* (Kyiv: EaP Media Freedom Watch, 2014), accessed August 13, 2014, http://mediafreedomwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/EaP-Media-Freedom-Landscape-2013_RU1.pdf, 63

²⁰ Freedom House "Nations in Transit - Ukraine 2004" news release, 2004, accessed August 18, 2014, http://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2005/ukraine#.U_GIt9x_v2E

²¹ Freedom House "Nations in Transit - Ukraine 2011" news release, 2011, accessed August 18, 2014, http://freedomhouse.org/report/nations-transit/2011/ukraine#.U_GOhtx_v2E

²² Reporters Without Borders "Press Freedom Index 2009" news release, 2009, accessed August 18, 2014, http://en.rsf.org/spip.php?page=classement&id_rubrique=1001

²³ Reporters Without Borders "Press Freedom Index 2013" news release, 2013, accessed August 16, 2014, <http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2013,1054.html>

government's announcement started to be discussed in social nets".²⁴ The seeds of the protest movement were sown in cyberspace. Evidently, the first person to summon people to the Maidan was journalist Mustafa Nayem. Approximately at 21:00 he published on his Facebook page a short message that became a historical message of the Euromaidan: "Meeting at 22:30 near the Independence Monument. Bring warm clothes, umbrellas, hot tea, coffee, a good mood and you friends. Reposts are kindly welcome." As people came to the Maidan, activity appeared in Twitter, where the hashtag #euromaidan became one of the most popular in Ukraine within the period of November 21-28; with the intensity of tweets reaching 1,500-3,000 messages per hour.²⁵

According to founder of the online publication "Watcher" Maxim Savanevs'kyy, "on the basis of the Euromaidan one can say with confidence that it is in this situation that digital communications began to play an important role in the political life of the country",²⁶ while the authors of the report "Freedom of the Media in the Countries of the Eastern Partnership - 2013", prepared within the framework of the project "ENP East Media Freedom Watch" wrote that "it is thanks to online media that Ukrainian society managed to resist the information dictatorship"(Aliev et al. 2014, p. 65) efforts in late 2013 stemming from the rise to power of the government of Viktor Yanukovich.

In turn, further democratic reforms in Ukraine, as Director of Military Programs of the Razumkov Center Nicholas Sungurovsky said, "were made possible precisely because, as a result of the Maidan in Ukraine, civil society has finally emerged. Precisely that became the basis for Ukraine's survival".²⁷ The Euromaidan and "the Revolution of Dignity" at the end of 2013, following months of joint fighting by Ukrainians for their country - in both physical and virtual space - launched a process of changing the consciousness of Ukrainians, evolving from it "post-Soviet" and prompting self-consciousness as the subject of a historical process.

From streams to public television

The revolutionary events on Independence Square have ended, but the trends that they generated continue to spread around Ukrainian society. One major change was the emergence of new independent mass media, including Ukraine's first public television projects.

It all started with the independence movement streamers, dozens of whom from the earliest days protested on the Euromaidan armed with cameras and mobile phones, providing almost continuous online broadcasts from the scene of the events. Spontaneous video broadcasts quickly escalated into fully-fledged online broadcasting projects. One of the first was Hromadske.tv, created immediately after Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Vilnius agreements. Live video was broadcast only on the Internet, via the facilities of Youtube, and often collected up to 100,000 simultaneous viewers.²⁸

In a matter of days there appeared other such broadcast channels, such as Spilno.tv, Espresso.tv and many others, while similar projects like Uklife.tv that had existed before also gain popularity. The Streamers of Ukraine Association was also created.

²⁴ Maksym Savanevs'kyy, "#євромайдан: Ukrainian digital revolution and last chance to analog politicians to become digital" (ukrainian) *Ukrainska Pravda: Blogs*, November 29, 2013, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/savanevsky/5298980715e65/>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mykola Sunhurovs'kyy, "Ukrainian society is against of Putin's aggression" (ukrainian) *Radio Svoboda*, July 15, 2014, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/content/article/25457938.html>

²⁸ *Innabtys.com*,

Such rapid growth was made possible by broadcasting through web services such as Ustream.tv and Youtube, which allowed the activists to broadcast online, and give them access to an audience totally for free, and without their having to purchase expensive equipment.

For viewers it was a unique opportunity to observe the revolution live, without having to be at the scene, and without waiting for the airing of the next news program from state broadcasters. It is not surprising that a large number of Ukrainians at this time discovered the benefits of this alternative television, and that they are unlikely to want to abandon these new sources in future.

The result is obvious: today's young independent Internet TV channels have started to rival the popularity of the traditional channels. For example, viewers of Divan.tv "Espresso TV and Hromadske.tv watch these channels more than any of the traditional ones, apart from 1+1. Thus, the share of "Espresso TV accounted 24.95% of the view time of all the channels on the portal, and the share Hromadske.tv was 20.55%, while the share of 1+1 was 23.53%. The conventional channels now lag behind by a considerable margin: Channel 5 has 11.59%, Inter - 5.91%, and so on.²⁹

From entertainment to political activism

There have also been changes in the map of interests of Ukrainian Internet users. From a place for relaxation, entertainment and communication with friends, social networks have become a source of reliable civic and political information. In particular, with the advent of the public Internet TV channels, up to 90% of the notable online media (including non-core ones) started to include a Euromaidan mast-head search box (Innabtys.com March 30, 2014). According to "Gemius Ukraine," since the beginning of 2014 the top 10 websites of television channels are those that provide news content - Channel 24, ICTV, EU-PRES TV, STB, Hromadske TV, ZIK, 112, Channel 5, and 1+1. First Channel of Russia is also among the most popular sites.³⁰

According to the SocialBakers analytical platform, in August 2014 the top ten popular Ukrainian pages on Facebook now also include the pages of news resources and Ukrainian politicians: after football page Chezz Misic from the makers of Chernigivske beer, and the official website of Ukrainian rock band Okean Elzy, the rating of pages with more than 200,000 subscribers featured TV channels TSN news portal, Ukrainska Pravda, Euromaidan, Channel 5, 1+1 and Hromadske.tv, along with the public pages of Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk and President Petro Poroshenko.³¹

Similarly, according to Google Trends, the top ten search queries in Google coming from Ukrainians in August 2014 were all associated with the current political situation: "Right Sector", "humanitarian convoy", "Mig-29", "Yasinovataya", "Slavansk", "Strelkov", and others.³²

The events of the autumn of 2013 early 2014 gave rise to a number of other trends and phenomena related to information technology. But most importantly they have clearly demonstrated that Ukraine, teetering at the end of 2013 on the verge of becoming an authoritarian state with full control by the state over the Internet area, managed not to cross this line and, moreover, continues to move further and further in the direction of a free Internet and a free society.

²⁹ *Divan.tv*, "«Espresso TV» became more popular than «1+1», and «Hromadske TV» is more often watched than «Inter»" (russian), January 24, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://divan.tv/posts/view/espresso-tv-stal-populjarnee-11-a-gromadske-tv-smotrjat-chasche-intera-2206>

³⁰ *WebAwards*, "Gemius has defined a leader among Ukrainian TV channels' sites" (russian), 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.webawards.com.ua/gemius-opredelila-liderov-sredi-sajtov-ukrainskix-telekanalov>

³¹ Socialbakers "Facebook Pages Statistics & Number of Fans" news release, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.socialbakers.com/facebook-pages/country/ukraine/>

³² "Google Trends" accessed August 17, 2014, <http://www.google.ru/trends/>

AWAKENING OF CIVIL ACTIVITY, OR ONLINE SURROGATES?

There is another controversial issue related to the proliferation of digital media: Will online activists graduate to similar offline processes? Will digital media contribute to the establishment of real democracy, or always remain at the level of a simulated, virtual or fictitious democracy?

Among the Internet audience there have long been jokes about Couch Warriors, the Office Company (referring to the companies formed to protect the Euromaidan protests), and Fighters on the Internet Front", hinting at only virtual activity from many patriots. U.S. journalist Evgeny Morozov in his book "The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom" termed this kind of activity "slacktivism" (from slack, or lazy, and activism - activism, i.e. "lazy activism").³³ In his view, "social networks have given us a false sense of belonging: allowing us to disseminate "socially useful "information, sign an online petition – which is very simple and is done by thousands of Internet users – allowing them to feel that they have done something important. However, there are often no tangible results in practice, no matter how many retweets a post gets. The main problem is the fact that such civil activities in social networks for many have replaced actions in real life".³⁴

Indeed, social networks can be used as a tool for the rapid mass mobilization of activists,³⁵ but the presence of this feature does not mean that users, discussing this or that problem on the net, will then close their laptops and go to the town square to take real action. It is equally likely that the outcome may be the opposite: the people's energy is diverted from active offline protests to a safer and more comfortable "Sofa Activism." Exactly this kind of online democracy can serve as a cover for authoritarian regimes, a kind of diversion from popular discontent.

However, this is not a view that is shared by all. According to the director of the Center citizen media MIT, modern society (at least in the West) "has reached such a stage of social development, when there is no point in holding on to the distinction between online and offline areas. Therefore, we see what can be called a hybrid of political activity that combines both online and offline components ".³⁶ Moreover, many online activities do have a real impact in the physical world.

Examples are crowdfunding projects undertaken voluntarily by the public to raise funds to tackle the financial problems of the Ukrainian army, protest actions and other socio-political needs. For example, at the beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the Ministry of Defense of Ukraine in the few days after the launch of a national campaign to raise funds for the army managed to attract tens of millions of hryvnias. The purses of the people supported the Euromaidan".³⁷ In particular, the collection of funds for the Maidan was joined at the beginning of December 2013 by the famous crowdfunding platform Great Idea³⁸. Within a week of the start of the campaign, the amount of funds raised amounted to almost 300,000 hryvnia. Start-up capital for the national television project Hromadske.tv was also

³³ Evgeny Morozov, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (PublicAffairs, 2012), <http://books.google.com.ua/books?id=ctwEIggfIDEC>

³⁴ Vitaliy Vasilchenko, "New word: Slaktivism — the way social nets distract our attention from reality" (russian) *AIN.UA*, July 28, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, https://owl.english.purdue.edu/media/pdf/1300991022_717.pdf

³⁵ Elina Shnurko-Tabakova, "Social net is a soft utility, it can't make a revolution" (russian) *Dialog.ua*, April 11, 2013, accessed August 6, 2014, <http://www.dialogs.org.ua/ru/dialog/page150-2303.html>

³⁶ Etan Zuckerman, "It's easier to organize a protest than to reach the results of it" (russian) *Terra America*, November 18, 2013, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://terra-america.ru/%C2%ABseychas-legche-organisovat-protestnoe-dvijenie-no-nam-nogo-slojnee-zastavit-eto-dvijenie-dostigat-zrimyx-resyltatov%C2%BB.aspx>

³⁷ Pavlo Mandryk, "Political crowdfunding: how much you can earn of public financing and how to do it?" (russian) *Forbes Ukraine*, April 1, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://forbes.ua/business/1368324-politicheskij-kraudfanding-kak-i-skolko-mozhno-zarabotat-na-narodnom-finansirovanii/1368464>

³⁸ Crowdsourcing platform "Great Idea" - <http://www.biggggidea.com>

raised on this platform in April 2014 and collected 1.24 million hryvnia, or 124% of the amount requested.

Similarly, reporting of the financial and material needs of servicemen, along with fundraising, is actively carried out in social networks in the groups Army SOS³⁹ (to raise funds for the needs of individual units of the Ukrainian Army), Donetsk SOS⁴⁰, which coordinates national headquarters to assist the residents in the Donbass in the current difficult situation (victim assistance, assistance in temporary relocation to other regions, military assistance, co-operation and security of the citizens of Donetsk, etc.), Crimea SOS⁴¹, and others. On average, each of these groups has from 2,000 to 5,000 participants or more, and some of the projects also have offshoot sites. Specialized platforms political crowdfunding have also been created, such as the national project set up by the Mykolayiv Charitable Foundation - the Regional Fund of Piety⁴².

Information Sovereignty, or Defenselessness Against External Aggression?

Modern Ukraine can be considered - given the foreign policy context in which it has existed for at least the last six months - a state in physical and information confrontation with Russia. In this situation, the information space of all parties to the conflict becomes the object of aggressive action against the enemy (or enemies). And these information wars of today are often more damaging than physical armed attacks. The main goal here is to ensure there is a kind of immunity, or protection for the information space, from possible external aggression and internal fluctuations.

One of the factors aggravating the situation is the historically rooted bilingualism of Ukrainians (and in some areas the clear dominance of the Russian language). This can be seen in the Ukrainian segment of the Internet. The first Internet sites appeared in the Soviet Union in 1990, in the domain .su (an acronym for Soviet Union) and were, of course, also in Russian. After the collapse of the USSR the .su domain ceased to exist, and all resources posted on it were automatically moved to the .ru registered domain in 1991. Ukraine's own domain was delegated a little later, in 1992, but the vast majority of Ukrainian users continued to favor Russian-speaking Internet resources. According to the Yandex newsletter, in 2010 the share of requests in Ukrainian made by residents of Ukraine in the Yandex search engine varied from 3-10% of all searches for the residents of the eastern areas, to 19-33% for those of western regions.⁴³ According to Head of the Department of Social Communication and Information Activities of Lviv Polytechnic National University Andrew Peleschishin, "this situation conceals a serious threat: the Uanet (the abbreviation for the Ukrainian segment of the Internet) does not ensure the development of the Ukrainian nation, but on the contrary contributes to the spread of a foreign culture and language".⁴⁴

Add to this the fact that, according to a study conducted by the recruiting company Head Hunter, only 10-15% of the population has even a basic knowledge of English, and no more than 5% of Ukrainians

³⁹ Facebook Group "Army SOS" - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/armia.sos>

⁴⁰ Facebook Group "Donetsk SOS" - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/donetsksos> Project: <http://donbasssos.org>

⁴¹ Facebook Group "Crimea SOS" - <http://www.facebook.com/groups/crimeasos>

⁴² Internet-campaign "Public project" - <http://www.narodniy.org.ua>

⁴³ Yandex, "Internet search – what is in search and what are the ways of search for Ukrainian users: Informational bulletin" (russian), 2010, accessed August 18, 2014, http://company.yandex.ru/researches/reports/ya_search_ua_10.xml#toc2

⁴⁴ Andriy Peleschichin, "Web 2.0 – second chance to Uanet" (ukrainian) *Informational technologies. Analytical materials*, March 29, 2006, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://it.ridne.net/uaweb2>

speaking one or more foreign languages fluently.⁴⁵ Because of this, only a few people can access information from foreign-language resources.

Thus, the majority of the population of modern Ukraine are in effect enclosed in an information space dominated by the Russian-language, and to a large extent this is the information space of Russia. Moreover, given that unlike the Ukrainians, Russians rarely speak the Ukrainian language, the channel works only in one direction, providing the influence of Russia on Ukraine.

It is unlikely that many were aware of the enormity of the problem before the start of the Russian information attacks on Ukraine, but today the result of such negligence is that Ukraine's Internet space is completely open to any external influence from Russia.

The Rejection of Russian Social Networks

One positive trend that should be noted is the mass exodus of Ukrainian users from Russian social networks, which intensified due to the adoption by the Russian Federation on August 1, 2014 of the so-called "Law on bloggers." On the eve of the adoption of the law, an appeal to Ukrainians was made by Head of the Security Service of Ukraine Valentyn Nalyvaychenko, advising users of the Internet "to be less open on social networks".⁴⁶

As a result, according to StatCounter Global Stats, while in August last year the Vkontakte social network accounted for 34% of the pages viewed by Ukrainian users of social networks, this share has now dropped to 20.9%. Ukrainians also became less active users of the Russian social network Classmates - in the summer of last year, they accounted for 10% of the views of social networking pages, while now this is down to 2.5%.

However, there was an increase in activity in U.S. social networks: the share of Facebook page views increased this year from 34% to 46%, while the share of Twitter page views was up from 9.1% to 16.6%.⁴⁷ The increased activity on Facebook can also be associated with the mounting interest of Ukrainians in political news, since, as noted by the press secretary of the Internet marketing agency Promodo, Margaret Berger, the Facebook audience is more mature and more interested in news than that of Vkontakte.⁴⁸

The emergence of Ukrainian social networks

Domestic Ukrainian social networks could become another alternative to VKontakte and Classmates, and according to AIN.ua and more than a dozen of these have appeared since beginning of 2014. The creators of the WEUA.info Ukrainian social network very clearly stated the need for a move to Ukrainian social networks in their presentation: "The WEUA team on 19.03.2014 announces a boycott of Russian social network sites Vkontakte and Classmates. We ask all concerned to join in".⁴⁹ After WEUA, the the

⁴⁵ *Dsnews*, "What languages do Ukrainians speak?" (russian), June 18, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://www.dsnews.ua/society/na-kakih-yazykah-govoryat-ukraintsy--18062014172000>

⁴⁶ *Interfax Ukraine*, "Ukrainian Security Service advise Ukrainians to keep the distance in social nets since the beginning of Russian aggression "law about bloggers"" (russian), July 30, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://interfax.com.ua/news/general/216129.html>

⁴⁷ "StatCounter Global Stats" (accessed August 12, 2014, <http://gs.statcounter.com/>)

⁴⁸ *Segodnya.ua*, "Russian social nets lose the popularity in Ukraine" (russian), July 30, 2014, accessed August 12, 2014, <http://www.segodnya.ua/economics/business/rossiyskie-socseti-teryayut-populyarnost-v-ukraine-540631.html>

⁴⁹ Timur Vorona, "Five Ukrainian social nets created within last two weeks" (russian) *AIN.UA*, April 4, 2014, accessed August 18, 2014, <http://ain.ua/2014/04/04/518701>

social networking market saw the appearance of Druzi⁵⁰, Antiweb.com.ua (a social network for residents of Rivne), Ukrface.net (the stated purpose of which is to unite the east and west of the country in the fight against foreign anti-Ukrainian propaganda), "This is Ukraine"⁵¹ and other projects that have had varying degrees of success. Older projects continue to work, such as "The Ukrainians",⁵² which was established in 2009, and has the mission of "unifying the nation, raising the national spirit, and popularizing the Ukrainian language, culture, and customs."

Summing up, we note the most important point: in the difficult foreign political situation of the last six months, in conditions of brutal information aggression, in the face of citizens' need to daily, if not minute-by-minute, defend their right to freedom and independence, the Ukrainian public are finally beginning to awaken to political activity, personal responsibility and consciousness of the present and the future of the country. Yes, political views are so divided that the situation today is similar to a civil war - but the main thing is that these views do exist. Almost one hundred percent of the population has assumed a well-defined position, overcoming the inherent post-Soviet passivity and indifference to politics. There are no "undecided and indifferent" left now.

These changes are immediately reflected in the media space, mainly on the Internet, which, from a medium of entertainment, relaxation and lots of fun, has mutated into a zone of elevated political activism, mobilizing people and synchronizing social actions and protests; mass charity, and the promotion of national unity; acting as a springboard to combat terrorism and lies by unethical journalists; and a platform for debate between politicians and citizens. In other words, the Ukrainian Internet has begun to take on the characteristics of an information space for civil society, which greatly increases the chances of Ukraine and with it the entire Western world, to see the victory of democracy - not only in Ukraine, but also in other post-Soviet countries.

At the same time, we must not forget that digital technology is not a guarantee of democracy, but only one of its tools. The risk is that this instrument is a double-edged sword, which with equal probability could become an effective tool for an authoritarian regime.

Society, which has been able to create a fairly *uniform* and *consolidated information space* and a unified national idea, thanks to the development of digital communications and information transfer, will rally together even more. In a society torn by internal divisions, the pendulum will swing to side of the digital division, exacerbating it, and destroying the society from within.

In societies with sufficiently *mature democracies*, this pendulum seeks the democratic pole, and digital technologies contribute to the further democratization of society. Where a political regime tends toward authoritarianism, the opposite swing of the pendulum creates conditions for establishing totalitarian controls and effective propaganda.

In societies where there is a potential for political and social activity, the online environment is an effective arena for preparing and organizing offline processes; where this potential is lacking, the pendulum will swing in the direction of online escapism and political passivity, distracting people from reality with the help of the comfortable illusion of no-risk activism.

⁵⁰ Ukrainian Social Net "Druzi" - <http://www.druzi.org.ua>

⁵¹ Ukrainian Social Net "This is Ukraine" - <http://u.ykp/>

⁵² Ukrainian Social Net "Ukrainians" - <http://www.ukrainci.org.ua/>

Finally, a society that has not only created such an information space, but also the tools to protect it from possible external aggression or internal turmoil, also has a sort of informational immune system, which in an emergency will only rally and get stronger. In contrast, for a society that has not taken the care to build up such immunity, the Internet becomes a zone of vulnerability - an open door for information aggression.