

Notes for a discussion about Ukraine with Tymofiy Mylovanov on 22 June 2022

by Roger Myerson

<https://home.uchicago.edu/~rmyerson/ukraine2022june.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h0QsBLj-b7w>

I have had the privilege of talking with Tymofiy Mylovanov about the situation in Ukraine since 2014. I have come to such discussions with two main areas of concern: (1) the value of decentralization reforms to strengthen democratic local government in Ukraine, and (2) the need for America and Europe to support Ukraine's national security without this support being seen as a threat to Russia's security.

On decentralization, since 2014 Ukraine has implemented important reforms to create effective local government at the municipal level, in cities and towns and about 1500 rural communities (hromada). As Timofii Brik and Jennifer Murtazashvili have noted in a recent paper, these decentralization reforms have significantly contributed to people's confidence that government in Ukraine is responsive to their needs and is worth defending against external threat. In every part of Ukraine, trusted local leaders who won responsible positions in local government have helped to mobilize their neighbors for national defense. Policy-makers in the Kremlin utterly failed to recognize that this development of democratic local government would make Ukraine much tougher and more resilient in 2022 than it was in 2014.

But decentralization reforms are still needed at the district (rayon) level in the countryside. Please let me suggest that international assistance for postwar reconstruction will be able to do more for long-term future development of Ukraine if some portion of the assistance is budgeted for allocation by district-level committees composed of locally elected mayors and councilors.

On national security, we should understand that an autocrat in Russia would prefer to suppress democracy in Ukraine, but that people in Russia would not support an invasion for that purpose. So the master of the Kremlin needed some way to convince his people that an independent Ukraine was a threat to Russian national security. The 1994 Budapest Memorandum gave America a perfect rationale for supporting Ukraine's security without threatening Russia, but ignoring this agreement and instead promoting NATO candidacy since 2008 has helped Vladimir Putin to manufacture the domestic justification that he needed.

Now, however, Putin needs to understand that the unconquered people of Ukraine will never make any concession to Russia without some assurance that the Russian people are prepared to accept Ukraine as an independent democratic neighbor. If Putin wants to leaders of Ukraine to negotiate with him, the first thing that he should do is let people in Russia understand that, in this war, the people of Ukraine have been truly united in their determination to defend their nation's independence. A general Russian recognition of this basic truth is the only credible assurance that Putin can offer against valid fears that any concession today would just be used to advance Russian arms for a subsequent invasion. International discourse about the war should emphasize this fundamental point: that Russian forces will not be able to induce any concessions by Ukraine unless the Kremlin relaxes its internal censorship of information about the war.