Ukraine: party politics, the left and president Zelensky

Ucrânia: política partidária, a esquerda e o presidente Zelensky

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An interview with professor Olexiy Haran[2]

Uma entrevista com o professor Olexiy Haran

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Abstract

The following interview with professor Olexiy Haran highlights significant aspects of recent political developments in Ukraine. Departing from the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the professor reconstructs the role of leftist forces – whether socialist or communist –, alongside the unstable party system and its cleavages, as well as a series of political upheavals, not to mention the Russian invasion in 2014 and its full-scale war from 2022 on. The discussion portrays both social and institutional features of politics, encompassing social movements and political parties; it goes from fight against corruption to lustration laws; from civil criticism to war decisions. Throughout the interview, the scholar also cites relevant material for further readings and concludes by summarizing some paradoxes inherent to the current situation of the country.

Keywords: Ukraine; War; Resistance; Social movements; Ukrainian political system.

Resumo

A entrevista a seguir com o professor Olexiy Haran destaca aspectos significativos dos desenvolvimentos políticos recentes na Ucrânia. Partindo da dissolução da União Soviética, o professor reconstrói o papel das forças de esquerda – sejam socialistas ou comunistas –, ao lado do instável sistema partidário e suas clivagens, bem como uma série de convulsões políticas, sem mencionar a invasão russa em 2014 e sua guerra em grande escala a partir de 2022. A discussão retrata características sociais e institucionais da política, abrangendo movimentos sociais e partidos políticos; vai da luta contra a corrupção às leis de lustração; da crítica civil às decisões de guerra. Ao longo da entrevista, o acadêmico também cita material relevante para leituras posteriores e conclui resumindo alguns paradoxos inerentes à situação atual do país.

Palavras-chave: Ucrânia; Guerra; Resistência; Movimentos sociais; Sistema político ucraniano.

Introduction

Rumor has it that Brazilian politics is not for beginners. This implies that what occurs in the country is neither easily understandable nor explainable. For native Brazilians trying to engage with an international audience, this is self-evident. Ukrainian politics, on the other hand, presents an entirely different political grammar and social history. The legacy of the Soviet regime, an astonishing number of wars on the territory of Ukraine (over sixty wars across its history) and a complex and unstable history regarding its independence and sovereignty all contribute to this distinction.

If we overcome this initial threshold of differences, however, we can see that Ukrainian politics is also not for beginners – and for reasons that may parallel those making Brazilian politics difficult to understand and explain. In Ukraine, one can identify an unstable party system, blurred ideologies across different parties, and past and ongoing struggles against corruption. Furthermore, the country has witnessed intense popular movements against authoritarian trends since 2004. Populist leaders have emerged on the political scene since then, with the current president, Volodymyr Zelensky, serving as a prominent representative of populism.

This interview with professor Olexiy Haran aims to explain certain features of contemporary Ukrainian politics that may assist an international audience in understanding what's going on in the country. In particular, it sheds light on some aspects that have been overlooked in recent public debates about the country, partly due to the full-scale invasion and its monopolization of media attention. By highlighting the contradictions and complexities inherent in the development of the left, the weakness of the Ukrainian party system, and how Zelensky fits into the political spectrum of the country, this interview seeks to contribute

to the challenging task of translating a particular political world into a universal political conversation. Through this process, we can transcend the label of "beginners" and become, at the very least, informed beginners.

Interviewer, October 2024

INTERVIEWER: *First of all, I would like to ask you about the role the left – leftist parties and forces – still play in Ukrainian politics.*

INTERVIEWEE: When we talk about the split of the Soviet Union, it's important to understand that in the totalitarian USSR there was only one party, the Communists. Therefore, in the late 1980's different ideological forces struggling for more democracy and for distancing from Moscow united in one front against the totalitarian regime.

To bring analogies, it's like the example of the *Solidarity* Movement in Poland. Or *Saudis* in Lithuania and People's Fronts in Latvia and Estonia. And in Ukraine we had the People's Movement of Ukraine (or simply *Rukh* which means 'Movement').

First, there were movements in support of *Perestroika*, and it means that they united very different forces: from communists who wanted to reform the USSR, to dissidents, rights defenders, and to anti-communists.

When I was a student, I wanted to become a member of the Communist party. I believed in Che Guevara and all these bright ideas. But in the USSR the Communist party was the party of bureaucrats and corruption, so I was rejected because my family did not belong to workers or peasantry and I did not have informal connections. Only in 1990 I was asked to join. But by that time Gorbachev's liberalization opened the truth about the horrors conducted under the communist regime, so my faith in Communism collapsed. On the other

hand, I was one of the members of People's Movement of Ukraine (*Rukh*). In 1989, the first year of *Rukh*, the movement wasn't about independence of Ukraine, it was more about Ukrainian autonomy. But the situation was developing very quickly and in the next year in fall 1990, *Rukh* started to talk about independence and against Communism.

I am talking about this because you see from the very aims of this movement that it was broad. If you are talking about democratization, about Ukrainian national revival, cultural revival, political revival, it is not necessary for you to be left or right. You may be left, you may be right, you may be liberal. As I'm teaching to my students, national liberation movements are very broad movements. That was also the case in Ukraine, this was the beginning of the political life in post-Soviet Ukraine[3].

When Ukraine reached independence, on the one hand, it seemed that the task of the *Rukh* was fulfilled. So, it started to split; the same process happened to *Solidarity* in Poland or broad movements in the Baltics. But the problem is that Ukrainian independence was under constant threat from Russia. If we analyze the whole development of the independent Ukraine, all these aims [defense of democracy and independence] remained to be present in Ukrainian politics. The ideological differences were blurred in this scenario. If the government is not doing well to democracy, should we support it? The answer seemed to be "no". But Russia is close, so we had to think about how we can criticize the government and at the same time not to hit our boat.

One of the problems for independent Ukraine was the role of Ukrainian communists. In Central-Eastern Europe communist parties were transformed into kinds of socialist and social democratic parties: they took the left side but paradoxically they led privatization and movements towards the market economy. They had to do reforms to join the EU and NATO and so they agreed with center-

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[3] See Haran (2009).

right parties for these geopolitical ambitions. But in Ukraine this wasn't the case as the Communist Party remained a very orthodox force and did not want to move to social democracy.

When Ukrainian independence was proclaimed on August 24th, 1991, the communists had a majority in the parliament. A few days later, nevertheless, they banned the Communist Party themselves to show they were not supporting the communist coup against Gorbachev. As a result, communist MPs suddenly became 'non-party'. Nevertheless, they were called by Ukrainians a "party of power" as they continued to have their own informal ties. Former communist and now 'non-party" Leonid Kravchuk became the first president of independent Ukraine and started a move towards Europe.

However, the most orthodox aisle of the ex-Communist party ended up restoring the Communist Party of Ukraine in 1993. And they did it in a very orthodox fashion: they were oriented towards Russia. I'm not talking about ethnicity: many of them were ethnically Ukrainians and spoke the Ukrainian language, but they were in favor of the restoration of the Soviet Union in some form, or, at least, the revival of a "friendship" with Russia.

However, the more flexible part of the Communist Party declared itself to be socialist and formed a Socialist Party. Its leader, Oleksandr Moroz, was a clever guy and understood that it was necessary to gradually reform this Socialist Party and move from communism to a Ukrainian type of social democracy. He then became the speaker of the parliament. His party was not very large, but it was in favor of Ukrainian independence; its members embraced very gradually the idea of social democracy[4]. This evolution lasted for more than ten years, and finally this party participated in the 2004 Orange Revolution[5]. After that, unfortunately – and

we know that sometimes leaders are making wrong choices in history – Moroz wanted to become a speaker of the parliament again and he didn't receive this position after the Orange Revolution.

As a result, he switched sides and the Socialist Party became part of the coalition of anti-Orange forces led by Viktor Yanukovych. Moroz was then punished by the voters during next elections, when his party did not overcome the threshold (3%). After that, the Socialist Party ended up basically destroyed, which is really a pity. And what happened next? First, the socialists disappeared from the political scene, and then communists joined Yanukovych's government (2010-2014)[6].

INTERVIEWER: *So, it was the end of Ukrainian socialist and communist forces?*

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. They didn't follow the left policy, because the left should fight against dictators and imperialism. Instead, they joined Yanukovych's attempts to create an authoritarian regime. Many of the communists de facto supported the Russian invasion in 2014.

As a result, in the parliamentary elections in the fall of 2014, communists didn't surpass the electoral threshold (since 2010, it is 5% of the votes) and were unable to join the parliament.

This was a total blow to them, because in 1998 the communists had the best result on the party slates. They had up to 20% of the votes. And it all collapsed afterwards. The party was erased from the parliament, and even banned – because of the support for Yanukovych, for the 2010 anti-constitutional coup (the cancelling of the 2004 constitutional reform), and because of the support for the Russian aggression. They fought in courts, but at the end of the day, that party was banned. Now we have different groups, a kind of *new left*: people

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[4] See Haran (2001).

[5] The Orange Revolution (*Maidan*) was a series of protests in Ukraine after a run-off election between president candidates Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovych, falsified to make Yanukovych win. It resulted in an annulment of the results and a new election, that ended up in favor of Yushchenko.

[6] For more information about left and center-left parties, check out Haran; Belmega (2010).

who embrace leftist ideas, who organized different structures, but not very powerful. There's even a new journal, founded in 2009, which is called *Commons: Journal of Social Criticism*[7].

INTERVIEWER: *I've heard of it. It's supported by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation. What characterizes this 'new left'? Is there cohesion?*

INTERVIEWEE: There are different people there. Some people around *Commons* criticized Ukrainian "nationalists" from the very start of Russian aggression in 2014. In terms of the left, they held the stance that this is an imperialist war between Russia and the West, that Ukrainian government is a pocket of the West, and that Ukrainian "nationalists" are "suppressing" Russian speakers in Ukraine, thus repeating Russian propaganda.

But some of these *new left* people are pro-Ukrainian like famous journalist Nataliya Gumenyuk and sociologist Anastasiya Ryabchuk. And that's what we need, because one of the problems, if we are talking about Ukrainian political spectrum, is that we do not have a social democratic party. And that's why many oligarchic projects weaponized the slogan of social democracy. They would say "We are social-democrats", but actually be a whole different thing. The *Party of Regions* – Viktor Yanukovych's party – for instance, signed an agreement with the Party of European Socialists in European Parliament. And Viktor Medvedchuk, the boss of "Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United)", in fact, was a pro-Russia oligarch weaponizing this label. (Putin is the godfather of Medvedchuk's daughter).

So, the term "social democracy" was used by pro-Russian oligarchs, and this is also one of the explanations why we don't have real social-democratic parties in Ukraine. All these parties discredited themselves, especially after the full-scale invasion started in February 2022. Medvedchuk and some other oligarchs were standing behind the Russian aggression against Ukraine. In sum, this is part of the explanation why we don't have a real left force.

INTERVIEWER: *Institutionalized left forces, right? It's only in civil society, in small groups, maybe, but not in the parliament.*

INTERVIEWEE: Yes. The problem with Ukrainian party system is that most parties are structured around one leader. They're not based on programs; they are based on different informal ties. That's why it is difficult to divide Ukrainian parties by left and right. There was a hope that after the Orange Revolution, we would be able to build a normal party structure; because as I mentioned, Oleksandr Moroz was a kind of leftist leader; Viktor Yushchenko's party (*Our Ukraine*) was kind of a center-right one. Petro Poroshenko's party, *European Solidarity*, is center-right. The interesting thing about Yulia Tymoshenko's party, which is called *Batkivshchina* (*Fatherland*), is that it was a center-left populist party. But Tymoshenko knew how to play politics and saw that center-right was having a momentum in the EU, so she decided to join European People's Party, which is center-right, as an associate member.

So, basically, there are very few ideological parties. One of these parties is *Svoboda*: they started as far-right, no doubt about it, but they moved to center-right.

INTERVIEWER: *And are there are also old far-right parties, or are there only new ones as well?*

INTERVIEWEE: *Svoboda* is old, it appeared in 1991. But as I said, now it is not far right.

INTERVIEWER: *I have the sense that most of the Ukrainian parties are new. Zelensky's party, for instance, was formally founded in 2017, but in reality, the first party structures appeared during the 2019 elections.*

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[7] Check it out here: https://commons.com.ua/en/.

INTERVIEWEE: The Ukrainian party system is not stable. Parties are built around one leader, who has the best chances to win presidential or parliamentary elections. But Tymoshenko's party is old, *Svoboda* as well – we may call it an ideological party; the communist one was also ideological.

So, what happened after the victory of the Revolution of Dignity (*Euromaidan*) in 2014[8]: new players appeared, like Poroshenko's party (*European Solidarity*); old players remained, like Tymoshenko's party (*Fatherland*). There were several attempts to build really liberal projects in Ukraine, the projects that would represent the middle class. Now, in the Parliament, there is the *Holos* party, which is translated as *The Voice*, because it united around a very famous Ukrainian rock musician, Svyatoslav Vakarchuk. The party gathered qualified people and experts, real liberal, real democrats. But, as we always have with democrats – I am not sure about Brazil –, everyone wants to have the final word about all issues. There are many talented people fighting for leadership and, as a result, starting to split. So, this is a problem, and, unfortunately, these Ukrainian liberals appeared not able to overcome it. Well, we don't know for sure, but it seems they will not surpass the threshold in the next elections.

INTERVIEWER: *And how does Zelensky figure in this spectrum?*

INTERVIEWEE: The paradox is that Ukrainians enjoy democracy and so they criticize everything, even democracy itself – after 2014. Before 2014, there was real censorship, but now it's free and you can criticize authorities. So, every political TV channel we had – and we had many political TV channels – had their own talk show. Zelensky had a show. First, it was a show that was broadcasted every evening, and he was criticizing all politicians;

then he made a movie, *The Servant of the People*, in which he was elected as president, and as a president, he had a dream that he had a gun and he killed all the Parliament members, because all of them were bad. That was the plot of the movie. The main point of this movie was: "every politician is bad and only I am good". Basically, when Zelensky joined politics, all Ukrainian politicians were discredited, and Zelensky suddenly came as a person who was never in politics, never in civil society activity.

INTERVIEWER: *And even so he won by a large majority.*

INTERVIEWEE: Huge, incredible. He got 73% of the votes and Petro Poroshenko got only 25%. And what was interesting about the polls before the 2019 election: even when *Servant of the People* existed only on paper, it would score number one in vote intentions.

INTERVIEWER: *How did it happen?*

INTERVIEWEE: Because the movie was very popular, and people naively believed it. There are conspiracy theories saying that this was a plan; that someone developed a strategy for how Zelensky could come to power. Anyway, this was a kind of political technology campaign: to thrust him into politics and to create this party after the movie. So, when the election came, the party didn't even know who would join their party list because they didn't have a party organization at all. If you look at the composition of this party, there are so many strange figures: comedy artists, body builders, photographers, etc.

INTERVIEWER: *And nobody had a political career before, right? They were all new.*

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[8] The victory happened in February 2014, after massive protests ousted president Viktor Yanukovych, which refused to sign an association and free trade zone with the EU, bending over to Russia. He was perceived as a very corrupt president and later convicted of high treason by the Ukrainian justice system.

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, with very few exceptions. Zelensky said: "This is my principle. I do not include anybody who was an MP before. So, I'm mobilizing new people". And actually, some people appeared to be good because they came from expert communities. But when we talk about the whole faction, and it was based on a one party majority in the parliament, we can find different people: there are corrupt people, there are people who are very pro-Ukrainian or pro-Russian (the latter had to leave the faction after the full-scale invasion); there are totally unprofessional people, and there are some good professionals.

Zelensky's ideology was very populist. He promised to change everything and all very quickly. In sum, his party was not very united, it was built around Zelensky; very schematically, we can put his party in the center, but some of the slogans of the party are quite libertarian. It had also a very popular slogan: "we will have the State in a smartphone".

INTERVIEWER: *And they say Ukraine will be an IT state, right? Everything is so digitalized.*

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, and they did some good things as well as a lot of mistakes. There was a fierce opposition to Zelensky's party, saying he was doing very badly – from Poroshenko's and Tymoshenko's side, and also from the successor of the *Party of Regions*, which was called *Opposition Platform*. This *Opposition Platform* was made by oligarchs and they speculated on these ideas of social solidarity, but, in fact, they were just big capitalists connected to Russia.

That means that the this left/ right divide was very schematic because there were right-wing politicians or center-right, like Poroshenko, but we didn't have real left politicians. And when this invasion happened, we faced an existential threat, and it meant that all parties had to unite. So, we wouldn't care about ideology; that's why when

you ask me where is Zelensky? Is he left, or right? I would rather say he's a commander-in-chief in the country which fights with imperialist aggressor. Most of his party is also patriotic. The people united around one idea: to defend the state.

Now, among Ukrainians, there's no geopolitical divisions; before the invasion, we could say center-right forces were in favor of EU and NATO, and other forces were against it. Before 2014 Ukrainian public opinion was in favor of non-block status. Why? According to the 1994 Budapest memorandum Ukraine gave the third nuclear arsenal in the world in exchange for territorial guarantees from the US, the UK and… Russia. But Moscow attacked in 2014. And after the full-scale invasion in 2022 every Ukrainian is saying: I am in favor of EU and NATO. So, there's no ideological divide here, there are agreements that we need to go to the EU, there is a unity that we need to conduct reforms, including fighting corruption.

Previously, Yanukovych was speculating that there was an interference into Ukrainian affairs, that EU would like to raise our prices and to seize Ukrainian lands – that's why we wouldn't need EU integration. Nevertheless, such views do not gather much resonance anymore; basically, Ukrainians agree that civil society and also the EU are demanding the fight against corruption and that is good. The EU is pressing us and puts some conditions, but I would say that most people would agree, and our polls show that[9].

We accept the conditions, because we are interested. My bottom line is we need to have social democrats, we need to have liberals, we need to have conservatives, but it's currently all blurred. Conservatives are more or less visible, but the other segments are very blurred.

INTERVIEWER: *In Brazil, we also had this fight against corruption slogan. And it very actively mobilized in 2013 and 2014, when a huge operation started – the Carwash Operation – in the judiciary*

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[9] Check out, for instance: https://dif.org.ua/en/article/results-2022-under-the-blue-yellow-flag-of-freedom.

branch. What came out ten years after is that this operation to fight corruption was actually a project against the rule of law and against leftist politicians; current president Lula was jailed allegedly because of this fight against corruption. But in 2022 the Supreme Court recognized the illegality of the procedures against him and annulled the trial. My fear and my question would be: don't you think this fight against corruption may be weaponized by some political rightist forces that are trying to insulate leftist politicians?

INTERVIEWEE: First, it can be weaponized, definitely. Second point, I do not consider myself to be an expert on corruption. Nevertheless, I can see a lot of progress in this matter now in universities; previously it was a huge thing to enter the most prestigious universities and corruption came from the Soviet time. If you wanted to become an engineer, you needed to know math and physics. But if you wanted to become a lawyer, a historian, a doctor or something like that, you needed to find the ways, to bribe someone; corruption was huge. Better said: nepotism. So, this was a huge problem in the Soviet Union. And this was a huge problem in Ukraine as well, as a successor to the Soviet Union. However, we gradually overcame this problem by introducing the system of external evaluation. Now, to enter the university, you don't need any ties, you just have to perform adequately. This example, from the universities, show that it's possible to erase corruption.

Now, your question on whether it could be weaponized by a rightist. Yanukovych tried to weaponize the fight against corruption against Tymoshenko. After the Euromaidan protests [also called the Revolution of Dignity], we did fight against corruption in various cases, but I don't think that they were politically weaponized. Mostly, we had cases about those who were connected with Yanukovych's regime, who were involved in high-level corruption. After 2014, in sum, there were many investigations, but unfortunately, not very much success.

Zelensky's government is trying to fight corruption in some cases. But they're also trying to use it against opposition. And the main opposition to Zelensky is basically from center-right, from Poroshenko's party.

INTERVIEWER: *And there were also these lustration laws, right? To remove from office servants appointed by Yanukovych's regime. I heard some experts criticizing their lack of transparency and abidance by rule-of-law standards.*

INTERVIEWEE: Basically, it says it's not possible for you to be a civil servant for some period of years if you were a member of Yanukovych government at a certain level. It doesn't mean that if you were a member of Yanukovych party you cannot join the government, or you will be fired. It means that if you were the head of the department at a ministry of Yanukovych's government, then you cannot hold this position anymore, which, in some cases, may be just, but maybe we also lose some good professionals – in every government, even dictatorships, there are some professionals who are doing their jobs. There was a huge debate over this law.

We didn't have anti-communist lustration law, as happened in some eastern European states. In Poland and other countries, there were different laws – if you were engaged in collaboration with communists or with secret services, for example, you would be dismissed from certain positions. In Ukraine it didn't happen, because communists were so smart to ban themselves and to quickly distance from that issue. It's a pity, actually, that some communist officials were not punished or banned from participation in political life. Because, unfortunately, some people reemerged from the Soviet past.

Some military generals received education in Soviet Union, in Russia, and we had ongoing debate about they still holding their offices. But at the end of the day, this is the reality, and actually many people who participated in the building of Ukrainian

army were trained in Soviet institutions, some diplomats graduated from Moscow institutions.

In our case, lustration laws were made after Yanukovych was deposed. There were some pros and cons regarding this lustration law. Basically, the idea was right, but the implementation had problems.

This is always a tricky issue, like happened with the ban of the communist party. I'm always trying to explain that we are not banning communist ideology, we banned concrete actions. For example, there was a bill against the use of the symbols of the totalitarian states, and it was approved in 2015[10]. With this law, Nazi symbols and Soviet symbols were prohibited as symbols of the totalitarian state. We cannot ban communist ideology, however: if there are people who believe in that, what can we do about it? Unless they commit crimes, or unless they call for anti-constitutional interventions, we can do nothing about it.

INTERVIEWER: *But would you say communism is more pervasive in Ukraine as an ideology than far-right ideology? Because what we see as the most pressing issue in democracies around the world is the far-right.*

INTERVIEWEE: First of all, as mentioned above, the Communists collapsed. And the far-right never surpasses the threshold in Ukrainian parliamentary elections. *Svoboda* once overcame it, in 2010. And they overcame it because they were seen by Ukrainians as a symbol of resistance to Yanukovych. But by that time Svoboda started moving to the center right. Basically, we never had a real far-right in Ukrainian parliament.

Nevertheless, that does not mean we don't experience some far-right statements. *Svoboda*, for instance, had Iryna Farion as a member. She promoted Ukrainian language and said once that those Ukrainian soldiers who are using Russian language at the frontlines would be bowing to the aggressors and betraying Ukraine. The campaign against this statement was so harsh, that the university excluded her on the reason that she was inciting ethnic tensions, and this is prohibited by the law. There are also campaigns in support of LGBT rights, against those making sexist statements about women and they're punished. I'm not saying that all Ukrainians are in favor of LGBT campaigns, but the progress towards the LGBT community is very high. Maybe this is the only issue in which you can say that Ukrainian society was conservative. Meanwhile, in the Soviet Union this issue was never discussed, and LGBTs were criminalized. But now in Ukraine the attitude changed.

INTERVIEWER: *Changing the subject now: I think you, Ukrainians, live two totally different temporalities at the same time. You have like the temporality of the war, but also the course of a normal politics. And these two things are happening at the same time. How can you cope with both of them?*

INTERVIEWEE: That's what I was saying at the beginning: we have this level of democracy and also the criticism, and it's very difficult to couple the two of them during the war. On the one hand, this is our advantage because we are saying "we are not Russia, still have debate, and we can criticize freely". And the government is to react, so this is good. But yes, you are right. Frankly speaking, I don't think this is good for society to be involved in the discussion about war decisions and updates. But then comes the question: should we close the discussion? Should we not inform the public what's going on? This is a tough question. You know, sometimes it's easier when you have martial law and you have restrictions on democracy and restrictions on criticism. But we, Ukrainians, want to continue with democracy, and sometimes this open debate between the government and the

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[10] Check out Law n. 2558 "On Condemning the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Totalitarian Regimes and Prohibiting the Propagation of their Symbols": https://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb2/webproc4_1?pf3511=54670.

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society is not effective; but nevertheless, we have it on our TVs and especially in social media.

INTERVIEWER: *The elections issue, for instance. They had to be cancelled because of the war, but it leaves you a really hard time to come, right? Because if there's no elections, you need to put with the same old figures in politics, and in the Parliament.*

INTERVIEWEE: According to the Constitution and the martial law, we can survive without elections until the war ends. The government, the president, the parliament will be legitimate until the election of the new ones. From a legal point of view, it's more or less okay. But the question is how we should provide national unity. And the opposition is talking about a national unity government, or a technocratic government. They basically state that we are extending the term of president Zelensky and of the parliament, but we should at least have a government, in which different forces are represented.

INTERVIEWER: *How would this unity government be? How would they be selected?*

INTERVIEWEE: Very difficult political negotiations, so I am not sure it will happen.

INTERVIEWER: *Would that be acceptable for democracy?*

INTERVIEWEE: Yes, in times of war. There are many cases in other countries when such governments were created in times of war, economic crisis and political crisis – especially economic ones. I think this is one of the variants to move forward. Obviously, elections are important, and in Ukraine elections are always important and unpredictable: we don't know who will be elected and that's a huge difference compared to Russia or many other post-Soviet states. But the ruling party, the opposition and the civil society agreed to postpone elections until the war ends.

What we need right now are weapons, weapons and shells, because how can we talk about democracy, if Russia continues to occupy Ukrainian territories and to move forward?

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INTERVIEWEE: To finish, I would like to say we are not afraid of tough questions and we know there are some contradictory points in Ukrainian history. Maybe the only neighbor nation with whom we didn't quarrel and never had a war with was Belarus, but with all other nations around us were whole other stories since medieval times. In 1918 the independence of Ukraine was proclaimed but it was immediately attacked by Russia. The independent state reemerged only in 1991.

And the international community should know more about Ukrainian history to overcome stereotypes. Do you know that the United States didn't want collapse of the Soviet Union?

INTERVIEWER: *No, actually not.*

INTERVIEWEE: This is a famous story. When George Bush came to Kyiv in August 1991, three weeks before the collapse of the Soviet Union, he made a speech in the Ukrainian Parliament and he tried to persuade Ukrainians to stay in the Soviet Union, and to avoid "suicidal nationalism". First reason was that the West had very good relations with Mikhail Gorbachev, and they didn't know what would happen if 15 new different states emerged. The second reason was about the spread of nuclear weapons: they were afraid. So, basically, United States didn't want to see the collapse of the Soviet Union.

INTERVIEWER: *This is very interesting. History is full of contradictions and we have to explore them in order to raise awareness and a better understanding of our world. Thank you for your time and interest in talking to me.*

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