Ukraine: Why Maidan Matters

After Ukraine's president, Viktor Yanukovich, decided not to sign an association agreement with the European Union in November 2013 after years of negotiation, chaos broke loose on Kiev’s main square, officially named Maidan Nezalezhnosti. The main square, known to locals simply as Maidan and now also as Euromaidan, has been a place to gather for both fests and protests, from New Year’s celebrations to political reorganization. Among other things, Maidan has stood as a symbol of freedom since the Orange Revolution in 2004 and now, after the recent protests, ever more so. But what do the results of the current protests mean for the freedom of Ukraine's people?

Although the Euromaidan protest movement started strong and attracted more people than any other protest since the Orange Revolution, after Yanukovich’s decision to accept a $15 billion loan and oil agreement from Russia, the protest attendance slowly died down. Now, Maidan is home to a camp of political activists with their own organized system of services, almost living as a state within a state. The camp has closed off the whole square and restricts business and tourism in the area, and without an organized goal, the movement appears to have no forward momentum.

What is missing from the Euromaidan movement is a leader and an organized goal. Yanukovich’s decision to completely reject the opinion of his protesting citizens and hardly even acknowledge them shows a lack of respect for his constituents and a restricted freedom for the citizens of Ukraine. The Ukrainians want a better standard of life, and are finally ready to strengthen Maidan's symbolic meaning and stand up for themselves. Improved international acceptance as a reputable state, integration as an equal partner on the global business scene, and better overall awareness of Ukraine's wealth of resources and potential are all included in the vast list of overarching goals on the road to more freedom for the Ukrainian people. The younger generation’s participation in the protests show a form of “social enlightenment,” but without direction, the potential unfortunately diminishes.

Even though the loan agreement with Russia helps in the short term, the European Union Association Agreement, even with its imperfections, would have been a big step forward toward achieving the ideals of a freer Ukrainian population and a better life for the Ukrainian people. The reforms required by the agreement with the EU would have proved to be difficult at first but, in the long run, would have achieved a more democratic environment and forward movement at the global scale, exactly the real unwritten goal of the Euromaidan movement. As the protest turnouts have shown, there are already willing participants. Although not specifically stated by the protesters, an end goal to Euromaidan exists. Now all that is needed is a leader to organize the movement and outline the needed steps toward reform. Success is an option.

What exactly does Maidan mean for Ukraine and its people? Maidan stands as a magnificent symbol of freedom, hope, and a better future. The fact that the main square has been used as a protest location for a number of different movements and is now, after almost two months of protest, still occupied by protesters shows the significance of Maidan Nezalezhnosti. The Euromaidan movement may not have been as great of a success as hoped for, but rest assured that in the future, any other large scale protests will take place at Euromaidan.
Results will be achieved. The more the Ukrainian people make their desires known, the more the world will know what they want. With Euromaidan as the center of action, the possibilities for change are within their reach.

Additional Reading:


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