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# Helping the Homeland in Troubled Times: Advocacy by Canada's Ukrainian Diaspora in the Context of Regime Change and War in Ukraine

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*This paper analyses diaspora advocacy on behalf of Ukraine as practiced by a particular diaspora group, Ukrainian Canadians, in a period of high volatility in Ukraine: from the EuroMaidan protests to the Russian invasion of Eastern Ukraine. This article seeks to add to the debate on how conflict in the homeland affects a diaspora's mobilisation and advocacy patterns. I argue that the Maidan and the war played an important role not only in mobilising and uniting disparate diaspora communities in Canada but also in producing new advocacy strategies and increasing the diaspora's political visibility. The paper begins by mapping out the diaspora players engaged in pro-Ukraine advocacy in Canada. It is followed by an analysis of the diaspora's patterns of mobilisation and a discussion of actual advocacy outcomes. The second part of the paper investigates successes in the diaspora's post-Maidan communication strategies. Evidence indicates that the diaspora's advocacy from Canada not only brought much-needed assistance to Ukraine but also contributed to strengthening its own image as an influential player. Finally, the paper suggests that political events in the homeland can serve as a mobilising factor but produce effective advocacy only when a diaspora has already achieved a high level of organisational capacity and created well-established channels via which to lobby for homeland interests.*

*Keywords: Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, EuroMaidan, Russian invasion, lobbying, homeland conflict, Revolution of Dignity*

## Introduction

At the end of 2013, a high degree of political and social tension in Ukraine led to protests known as the Euro-Maidan. The protests were triggered by the refusal of ex-president Viktor Yanukovich to sign Association Agreements with the European Union (EU). By January 2014, the peaceful anti-government protests turned

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into violence and culminated in the Revolution of Dignity. One month later, in February 2014, the protests caused Ukraine's President Yanukovich to flee to Russia, an event followed by Russia's swift annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine. Needless to say, these events have overshadowed all others for the global Ukrainian diaspora. The Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, the second largest diaspora in the world with over 1.4 million people claiming Ukrainian origin,<sup>1</sup> appeared at the frontlines of advocacy for Ukraine.

This paper aims to answer the following question: To what extent do significant political developments in the 'homeland' (e.g. Ukraine) affect patterns of diaspora mobilisation in general and lead to effective advocacy practices in particular? By using as a case study the Ukrainian Canadian diaspora's advocacy for Ukraine during the post-Maidan period (2013–2017) this study analyses the relationship between homeland events and their effect on the diaspora's ability to advocate and mobilise for the cause.

The findings rely on qualitative data collected by means of archival research, in-depth interviews, document and mass-media analysis and participant observation. Among my sources were Canadian mainstream and Ukrainian ethnic press, official publications of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress, other diaspora organisations, government publications. Participant observation took place in Canada between 2014 and 2019 when I was attending different public events, rallies organised by the Ukrainian Canadians. Over 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with members of the Ukrainian Canadian community living in Canada, civil servants and some political staffer working for Canadian Members of Parliament during 2016–2019. Purposive sampling was selected as a strategy for choosing the participants for this study. This means that individuals were selected for interview based on who they are or were, what they do or did and what they know about Ukrainian diaspora activism in Canada and the process of advocacy on behalf of Ukrainian Canadians.

### **Theoretical accounts of diaspora mobilisation and advocacy**

First of all, it is important to stress that this article adopts neither a purely constructivist nor essentialist definition of diaspora. Instead, it follows Grossmann's approach, which views diaspora as a transnational community whose members share a number of attributes such as dispersal or immigration, location outside a homeland, community orientation to a homeland, transnationalism and group identity (Grossmann 2019: 1267). This approach sees diasporas as both actual social formations (entities) and social constructs (Grossmann 2019: 1265).

The diaspora literature almost unanimously argues that the power of an event, in particular political tension in the homeland, affects diaspora communities in a variety of ways (Baser 2014; DeWind and Segura 2014). Significant political tension in the homeland can be important for triggering a wave of ethnic political mobilisation in the diaspora that makes the latter politically more active (Hockenos 2003; Shain 2007; Smith 2005). Homeland conflicts and wars in most cases have the strongest impact on diaspora mobilisation, in both positive and negative ways. Negative influences have been traced in the cases of Croatian and Tamil mobilisation in Canada (Godwin 2012; Winland 2007), because their activity became connected to the transfer of funds and illegal arms to conflict zones, thus further fueling conflicts. Mearsheimer and Walt (2007) have noted that the most violent periods of the Arab–Israel conflict were connected with the most active phases of Jewish lobbying in the USA. Moreover, a larger part of the literature studying the causes of mobilisation focuses on how a trigger event impacts diaspora–homeland relations, changing already established advocacy patterns of diaspora groups in the countries of their residence. This last development is the primary focus of this article.

Many scholars of diaspora studies identify certain diasporas as being conflict-generated. For instance, Columbian, Croatian, Albanian and Sri Lanka diasporas are often viewed as such (Godwin 2012; Winland 2007).

The Ukrainian diaspora has never been classified as such because its consciousness had been generated through other means and the conflict in Ukraine came to the diaspora as an unexpected and frustrating development.

Since the 1970s, an increasing number of scholarly works have paid attention to the political influence of ethnic groups, especially in regard to foreign policy. Most authors have viewed the political activities of ethnic groups as a legitimate phenomenon of liberal democratic states that can be compared to the political activism of other interest groups (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007; Smith 2005). The vast body of literature on diaspora political lobbying has focused on answering the question: Under what conditions are ethnic actors able to influence the policy process? There are a number of assumptions that scholars offer to explain cases of diaspora advocacy influence. The abundance of research available on this topic says that diaspora groups' success depends on a variety of factors, which can roughly be divided into structure-based and agency-based ones (Rytz 2013), the most-cited of which are the lobby's organisational capacity (Watanabe 1984), its political salience (Rubenzer 2008), the nature of the cause which the diaspora advances, the absence of a competing lobby group with an opposing cause and the alignment of the diaspora's interests with those of the state. The latter idea received particular attention from interest-group scholars – Rubenzer calls it 'strategic convergence', while DeWind and Segura (2014) utilised the term 'convergence/divergence theory'. The concept of strategic convergence suggests that, in order to move its file forward, it is important for an interest group to find common ground with a government's agenda (Haney and Vanderbush 1999; Smith 2014). In this paper I aim to show the extent to which these theories still hold and which one has the highest relevance when advocacy's ultimate goal is to assist a homeland in mitigating the consequences of ongoing conflict.

Different diaspora groups representing the same ethos but living in different parts of the world allegedly have varying degrees of influence on foreign policy (Laguerre 2013; Satzewich 2002). So how can we measure the influence of ethnic lobbying? The question of influence is a highly debated topic in political science, especially in the ethnic lobbying literature. Influence can be either 'perceived' or real. In this paper I adopt the definition of influence used by Helen Helboe Pedersen (2013), who views it as control over observable political outputs, such as bills or parliamentary debates: 'This means that an actor is viewed as influential, if behavior results in or prevents changes in political decisions or in the political agenda that are preferable/undesirable to the actor' (Helboe Pedersen 2013: 30).

### **Political advocates of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada**

Bearing in mind the above theoretical postulates that stress the importance of agency, any analysis of the diaspora's advocacy toward Ukraine would be incomplete without a detailed understanding of the actors engaged in it.

In Canada, the politics of multiculturalism and general spirit of interest-group pluralism promote cultural diversity and do not restrain the political activism of ethnic interest groups (Breton and Reitz 2005; Goldberg 1990). The Ukrainian diaspora is a mature community engaged in different types of advocacy activity, which can be divided into political advocacy aimed at decisions-makers and social advocacy that seeks to impact on public opinion. However, often these two types of diaspora advocacy are very similar and it becomes difficult to distinguish which targeted audience the advocacy groups seek to impact on or to establish boundaries between social and political diaspora advocacy practices.

Evidence indicates that the Ukrainian diaspora's advocacy for Ukraine derives from three qualitatively different types of advocate: large institutionalised diaspora players, individual diaspora entrepreneurs and diaspora politicians.

The Ukrainian Canadian Congress<sup>2</sup> (UCC) is a core organisation of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada. It was formed as an umbrella organisation that sets as its mandate the representation of the Ukrainian Canadian

population. In my research, the UCC is classified as an institutionalised diaspora player. Overall, the UCC, based on its size, experience and organisational and fundraising capacity, has the greatest ability to work as an official lobbyist for Ukraine, which means methodologically being engaged both in political and social advocacy for the country. Other smaller organisations of Ukrainian Canadians are usually members of this umbrella organisation and deliver their interests through the UCC.

The diaspora's involvement in political advocacy for Ukraine began long before the dramatic events there. Since 1991, or the Independence of Ukraine, the UCC's political function has increased and its role has come to encompass political advocacy with regard to Ukraine. In 1996, the UCC launched the Canada–Ukraine Stakeholder Advisory Council (CUSAC – formerly the Canada–Ukraine Advisory Council), a forum for consultations between the UCC (just one of many organisations in the Ukrainian Canadian community) and the Government of Canada that is used as a platform for political advocacy for Ukraine. Its key function is to represent the Ukrainian Canadian Community before the Government of Canada by holding regular meetings between the UCC, Global Affairs Canada and other representatives of state authorities so as to keep the Canadian government informed. CUSAC has become a tool with which to inform government authorities of the agenda and interests of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, thus keeping Ukraine on the list of Canada's top foreign policy priorities.

By the beginning of the tumultuous events of the EuroMaidan at the end of 2013, the UCC had already grown into a well-established professional advocacy organisation according to Mearsheimer and Walt's (2007) criteria: in 2010, the UCC moved its national office to Ottawa, a short distance from Parliament Hill, hired full-time professional staff (such as Taras Zalucky, its executive director from 2010 to 2016 and a former chief of Staff and Senior Advisor to Federal cabinet Ministers) were able to communicate with elected officials on a regular basis. In 2010 the UCC's Triennial Congress elected Paul Grod as its president. Grod's tenure (from 2010 to 2018) is firmly associated with higher professionalisation in the UCC and its rising political clout on the Hill. During Grod's time in office, the UCC achieved a very high level of involvement with the government and public affairs: official records show that UCC's executives often hold formal meetings with the prime minister and other high-ranking governmental officials, as well as opposition leaders, during which they discuss issues that are important for the community. Notably, over the last ten years, almost every large Canadian delegation to Ukraine was accompanied by UCC representatives.

Considering the fact that diaspora leaders tend to exaggerate their power in order to increase their political clout (Smith 2005: 76), this study does not solely rely on a self-assessment of their influence as valid data. What must be stressed is that the UCC's public image as an influential organisation is supported by data received by interviewing political staffers. As many of them have indicated, in terms of political clout, only the Jewish Congress in Ottawa is better organised than the UCC; its staff are very professional and the organisation is well known on the Hill among politicians and bureaucrats. Thus far, the Ukrainian diaspora does not have an equally well-organised political competitor that would represent rival (e.g. pro-Russian) interests in Canada.

Canada's ethnic politics provides an arena for many players who may consider themselves obliged or motivated to speak on behalf of Canadian Ukrainians or Ukraine. Despite the fact that the existence of well-institutionalised ethnic organisations is a key to political influence (Mearsheimer and Walt 2007), in political advocacy individuals acting outside of established channels and identifying themselves as relatives of the diaspora, can often be influential. In the academic literature and mass-media publications, the catch-all terms 'ethnic lobby' or 'diaspora lobby' are used frequently and contribute to a false impression of diasporic unity. Analytically speaking, when it comes to political advocacy in the diaspora, the most problematic issue is how to recognize whose voice actually constitutes the interests of the Ukrainian diaspora and Ukraine and how to separate this voice from the interests of private individuals and groups speaking on behalf of Ukrainian Canadians.

In the Ukrainian diaspora of Canada, the UCC, despite being the loudest, is not the only voice. Numerous pro-Ukraine diaspora entrepreneurs, like their well-institutionalised peers (the UCC), also claim to represent the interests of the Ukrainian diaspora and can be engaged both in political and social advocacy. Empirical evidence suggests that, in Canada, there are many different Ukrainian diaspora groups who, by writing op-eds and newspaper articles and engaging in all sorts of advocacy actions, voice pro-Ukrainian views that are qualitatively different from the umbrella organisation's agendas and concerns.

Individual ethnic politicians are those who recognise (and often emphasise) their own ethnic background, using it strategically. They should be considered a part of the so-called Ukrainian diaspora lobby in Canada. Contemporary literature on ethnic lobbying finds that their role in political advocacy is important (Jiménez 2014) and, in the case of its effect on advocating a pro-Ukrainian cause, should not be underestimated. Historically, the representation of Canadian politicians of Ukrainian descent at the federal level has always varied. Starting as early as the 1920s, Ukrainian Canadians began electing MPs (the first of Ukrainian descent being Michael Luchkovich, in office between 1926 and 1935) who represented the community at the federal level. The first Ukrainian MP who achieved a cabinet minister position was Michal Starr in 1959 (Momryk 2018). However, analysis of the recent performance of Canadian politicians with regard to political advocacy for Ukraine highlights the importance of the quality and not the number of representatives or their origin in the diaspora communities. Numerous cases can be easily identified of MPs of Ukrainian background voting against pro-Ukraine initiatives. Ethnic MPs are restrained in their capacity to support ethnic causes because the Canadian political system leaves little room for individual MPs to act against their own party's line, even when their own constituents support alternative political solutions.

Overall the composition of the last three Canadian parliaments (a Conservative majority under Steven Harper, in the 41<sup>st</sup> Federal election in 2011 and a Liberal majority for Justin Trudeau in the 42<sup>nd</sup> in 2015) provided opportunities for advocating Ukraine's interests at both the federal and provincial levels: each political party had several representatives with loyalties toward Ukraine. Canada's 42<sup>nd</sup> federal elections of 2015 saw the election not only of a number of politicians who claimed Ukrainian ancestry,<sup>3</sup> but also of two cabinet ministers: the journalist and writer Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade) and MaryAnn Mihychuk (Minister of Labour). However, the latter's tenure as minister did not last long, whereas Freeland was promoted to the rank of Minister of Foreign Affairs. In order to explain what having high-ranking officials for organised diaspora groups means, one might cite an interview with an anonymous high-profile diaspora activist in December 2018: 'We [organised diaspora] don't have to teach Chrystia what to do, as she knows without our briefings what Ukraine needs'. This quote should be understood as meaning that Ukrainian community organisations do not necessarily maintain a direct interaction with Chrystia Freeland or other politicians. In other words, the fact of having top-ranked foreign-policy decision-makers does not immediately resolve the diaspora's problem of free access to them.

Indeed, the Canadian political system, compared to that of the US, makes cabinet ministers perhaps the most important decision-makers after the prime minister. Their influence is considerably higher than that of ordinary MPs who are considered to be ineffective targets for lobbying (Singh 2010: 26), which has raised the profile of the Ukrainian community's possible influence even higher and moves pro-Ukrainian cabinet ministers into the category of elite diaspora players.

By and large, the role of diaspora advocacy groups or individual players can be summarised as follows:

- informing the Canadian government on matters dealing with Ukraine through official channels, thus creating a favourable environment for the Embassy's work;
- using typical grass root instruments (protests, rallies, petitions) to inform the general public on issues that matter to the Ukrainian cause; and

- utilising one's own channels of communication with the government, like CUSAC, to lobby for selected causes independently.

This means that diaspora players, especially institutionalised ones like the UCC, being independent from the Ukrainian state, may play a role greater than being simply a facilitator of Ukraine–Canada interests. In this formulation, diaspora organisations in practice become independent from Ukraine as political players, providing no information to the Ukrainian Embassy regarding their initiatives and the funds contributed in support of their pro-Ukraine projects. While diaspora group advocacy can be extremely effective on certain issues, neither diaspora lobbyists like the UCC nor other individual non-institutionalised diaspora players can act on behalf of the Ukrainian state, as certain types of work can only be done by a direct representative of the country, like the Embassy of Ukraine in Canada. As Shain and Barth would argue, they are not accountable to Ukraine's representatives abroad but do have a capacity to become massive advocates of Ukrainian interests as long as the political structure of Canada permits this (Shain and Barth 2003).

It should be noted that, today, the diaspora's core members (including the leadership, largest donors and lay activists), along with both individual advocates and representatives of major institutionalised players, are by and large represented by an older fraction of the Ukrainian community in Canada, with a very high percentage of them being the children or grandchildren of the third wave of immigrants – those who arrived in Canada between 1948 and 1953 as post-World War II Ukrainian refugees.

### **From EuroMaidan to the Revolution of Dignity: mobilisation**

If one asks whether the Maidan protests and the subsequent conflict with Russia were triggers that boosted political advocacy towards Ukraine in the Ukrainian diaspora of Canada, my answer would be yes. Those events, first and foremost, caused unprecedented political activism in diaspora circles. The sequence of events observed in Canadian Ukrainian circles very much corresponded to the main theoretical postulates of the diaspora literature, which argue that, in most cases, war or a conflict in the homeland created a critical juncture that often led to a splash of diaspora activism, including a high degree of political advocacy focused on the homeland (Winland 2007).

From the outset, the diaspora's post-2013 advocacy was associated with unanimous support for the EuroMaidan in Ukraine. In 2013, the UCC campaigned to make Yanukovich sign the Ukraine–EU Association agreement. When he refused to do so, the diaspora was among the first to ask the Canadian government to intervene, stressing that, at that time, Ukraine was sliding towards authoritarianism. In November 2013, as the waves of protest embraced the Ukrainian capital, Ukrainian Canadians organised their own local rallies in every major city where Ukrainian Canadians resided. The UCC formed a special committee called EuroMaidan Canada (initiated by Markian Swec, head of EuroMaidan Canada Committee in Toronto), whose task was to organise mass protests and inform Canadian society about developing events in Ukraine.

Under the Harper government, the Ukrainian diaspora leadership received an unprecedented high level of access to the prime minister, which started before the Maidan protests erupted but intensified by the end of 2013. The UCC President Paul Grod – recognised, due to the diaspora's effective engagement with the Canadian government over the situation in Ukraine, as one of the top 100 most influential individuals of the year in Canadian politics – held numerous meetings with Steven Harper and accompanied Canada's officials on their formal visits to Ukraine. In particular, Grod was present during Minister of Foreign Affairs Baird's two trips to Kyiv (during and after the EuroMaidan), and followed him to the by Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) ministerial meeting in December 2013 and during other official visits. According to my interview with Paul Grod, in some cases it was not the UCC that sought out the government's attention but *vice versa*.

Despite the key role played by large institutionalised diaspora structures like the UCC in orchestrating the pro-Ukraine advocacy, credit must be given to important initiatives from diaspora politicians. However, this case study asserts that many of these latter, despite representing rival political parties, overall worked in congruence with other diaspora players in lobbying for common issues. For example, one of the most significant pieces of Canadian legislation that focused on helping Ukraine was the Sergey Magnitsky Law (Bill S-226). Implemented on 2 October 2017, Canada's international sanctions law against human rights violators and corrupt foreign officials all over the world is named in honour of Sergey Magnitsky, the Russian political prisoner who died in a Russian prison in 2009. It began as an independent initiative of British financier Bill Browder, Sergey Magnitsky's ex-employer, who has done extensive lobbying both in the USA and, later, in Canada and whose initiative was supported by three well-known Canadian politicians of Ukrainian descent with active ties to the Ukrainian community: Senator Raynell Andreychuk, Conservative Party MP James Bezan and Liberal MP Borys Wrzesnewskij. All worked toward getting the legislation passed in the House.<sup>4</sup> As human rights law, it was initially created to sanction officials of any foreign country involved in violations of human rights. Although the Magnitsky Law is not considered an openly pro-Ukraine initiative, it was supported largely by pro-Ukrainian politicians, lobbied for by the UCC and understood as a pro-Ukrainian political instrument by the Canadian mass media and an anti-Russian one by Russian officials.

The protests, rallies and humanitarian activism that took place in Canada have become a coherent supplement to the burst of civic activism in Ukraine. Interviews with organisers of EuroMaidan Canada commonly showed that the initiative united Ukrainian Canadians of different waves and generations, engaging those layers of Ukrainian Canadians who had previously hardly shown any interests in organised diaspora life. This turned the diaspora into a powerful civil force.

As the War in Ukraine became a reality, EuroMaidan Canada's main focus was to organise a massive fundraising campaign that helped to send humanitarian aid to the frontline and civilians. Numerous local Ukrainian diaspora groups across Canada were focused on organising the fundraising campaign to support the army and people of Ukraine and on mounting political rallies to draw attention to the country. The Canada Ukraine Foundation (CUF) became one of the leading groups that coordinated medical and humanitarian aid to war-torn Ukraine. Later, as the tragic sequence of events that took place in Ukraine faded into the past, many EuroMaidan Canada groups slowly ceased to exist. Interview-based evidence suggests that many diaspora activists have become weary and disappointed, primarily with the slow progress of reforms in Ukraine, the difficulty of contacting the Ukrainian authorities and the process of getting through the Ukrainian bureaucratic machine. As the war in Eastern Ukraine transformed into a long-lasting conflict fueled by Russian arms and military support, events in Ukraine and public rallies organised in the diaspora stopped receiving the media attention they had garnered at the outset.

Citing numerous interviews, the war and EuroMaidan also provided a huge opportunity for many diaspora organisations and, first and foremost, for the UCC, to increase their visibility to a level they would not have been able to attain without the political calamities occurring in the homeland. The Maidan and the war promoted not only the UCC but also other diaspora organisations within it – specifically the CUF which not only became the UCC's number one partner in providing humanitarian aid to Ukraine but also turned into a more influential player among Ukrainian diaspora organisations, one example of which was the invitation in 2015 by PM Harper to be a guest at fund-raising events.

Another point that needs to be made is that the tumultuous events in Ukraine, despite having affected the general mobilisation for the cause, were unable to change the *status quo* in the diaspora leadership structure. Despite the fact that the recent, fourth wave of immigrants showed an interest in participating in EuroMaidan protests, humanitarian aid drives and other war-related activities, very few of them joined the ranks of the UCC's leadership, which was considered the key player in advocacy. To date, the vast majority of diaspora

leaders and core members are represented by individuals who are descendants of older waves of immigrants.<sup>5</sup> New immigrants' low level of participation in the diaspora leadership constitutes an entire topic for new research.

The post-Maidan events were followed by the occupation of Crimea and by Russian aggression in the Donbas, which naturally redefined the main objectives of the diaspora's advocacy. If, previously, the diaspora's main emphasis had been on keeping Ukraine on Canada's list of top foreign policy priorities – ensuring continuous support for democratic and economic development and providing Ukraine with humanitarian aid – after the Maidan the focus shifted toward sustaining Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and political and diplomatic advocacy in order to oppose Putin's aggression and toward providing military aid and rehabilitation.

What observable outcomes have there been of the official diaspora's accomplishments in the period from the eruption of protests in Ukraine in 2013 to the end of the Harper government in 2015? Before answering this question, it needs to be made clear that the EuroMaidan protests and the subsequent active phase of the Russian annexation of the Crimea and the war in Donbas overlapped with the Harper majority government in Canada. First and foremost, this period was known for Canada's pro-Ukrainian rhetoric. Prime Minister Harper became the first Western politician to voice concern openly to President Putin regarding the occupation of the Crimea, in what was reported as his 'get out of Ukraine' comment (CBC 2014). Harper's official statement assured the diaspora that Ukraine remained Canada's top foreign policy priority. His rhetoric was further validated by sanctions imposed by the Canadian government against the Kremlin and Putin's inner circle, partly as a result of advocacy efforts.<sup>6</sup>

Canada's reaction to the situation in Ukraine also resulted in substantial material support through sizeable financial, humanitarian and military aid. Observable financial support included funds allocated for the following needs: a \$200 million stabilisation loan to Ukraine, disparate payments toward a political and security-monitoring mission to Ukraine (such as the \$775,000 by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe or OSCE), funds for sending election-observer missions for the presidential elections in Ukraine deployed through an NGO known as Canadian Election Observation Missions (CANEOM) and the OSCE (*Ukrainian Weekly* 2016). In 2015, Canada announced additional support to Ukraine totalling more than \$50 million (*Ukrainian Weekly* 2016), including funds to promote the growth of dairy and grain producers in the home country and to support democracy and institution-building there.

Canada's military support, announced in August 2014, included non-lethal military assistance such as different types of gear, the establishment of operation UNIFIER (the Canadian Armed Forces mission established in 2015 to support the Security Forces of Ukraine) and the transfer of images from the Canadian RADARSAT-2 satellite to Ukrainian military forces to help them track down the movements of pro-Russian military groups. What the diaspora could not achieve during Harper's tenure was Canada's agreement to sending defensive weapons for Ukraine.

The majority of diaspora interviewees highlighted Harper's exceptional interest in helping Ukraine and his alignment with the diaspora's cause. It comes as no surprise that Harper's vigorous stand on behalf of Ukraine and unprecedented attention to the Ukrainian issue have been interpreted by certain scholars (Carment and Landry 2016) as his unique strategy of courting the Ukrainian vote in Canada. Specifically, they argued that this shift in policies towards diaspora groups occurred in 2011, when the Conservatives won a majority government: the Maidan and Russian aggression gave Harper a political opportunity for closer relations with the diaspora. These closer ties promised more votes from Ukrainian Canadians. Others, like Kordan (2018), saw the major reason behind Harper's fervent support of Ukraine in his ideological views, which significantly overlapped with the diaspora's appeals.



Without rejecting the two arguments above, my position is that, without the organised diaspora's agency, including its self-promotion as a politically valuable group, consistent soliciting of the government's attention and, even more importantly, strategic crafting of the message being sent, Ukraine would not have received the attention and achieved the support it eventually did. Evidence indicates that the theoretically prevalent idea that a congruence of diaspora–state interests leads straight to a diaspora's influence can only be effective when the latter's agency is activated. In other words, diasporic agency needs particular attention and constitutes a key element in explaining its influence. In order to strengthen this argument, the following section analyses the diaspora's communication and advocacy strategy in greater details.

### **The diaspora's political communication strategies**

According to Alex Marland, communication practices are becoming an increasingly important issue for influential political players (Marland 2016). Scholars researching interest groups consider diasporas to be identity-based political actors whose ultimate goal is to gain political clout and leverage, which should comply with the commonly accepted rules of the game applied to other interest groups.

Despite the historical and overall good standing of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada, it must continue to perform as an industrious lobbyist if it is to capture the attention of its political elites and the general public. Evidence indicates that the Maidan and the war have not only affected the scope and urgency of the advocacy practices applied by different local Ukrainian diaspora actors but, according to data collected through in-depth interviews, have also added more vigour and creativity to their approaches when dealing with different stakeholders.

The Maidan and the war made many diaspora players resort to strategising their messages in their advocacy for Ukraine, messages which it is important to analyse in order to prove the above. What were the key elements in the diaspora's messages during the war period? Analysing the numerous official statements made by the key organisation in the lobby, the UCC, we can see that these have consisted of a number of patterns, traceable in the messages they have communicated both to the general public and to the state. Both general and specific post-Maidan-related elements of the diaspora's messages need to be considered. The general message is often composed of the following elements:

- Ukraine is an important partner for Canada and has been so since 1991;
- the UCC is an organisation that represents the interests of 1.4 million Ukrainian Canadians who are, first and foremost, Canadian citizens;
- the Ukrainian community is strong and numerous;
- the Ukrainian diaspora is a respectful part of Canadian society, a well-established one that has contributed much to Canada's well-being; and
- Ukrainians Canadians have contributed to multiculturalism.<sup>7</sup>

The consistency with which this message is disseminated is worth emphasising: it appeared in almost every official communiqué. The message promotes the idea of a single and united community whose background justifies its demands. However, the idea of a single united community should not be understood literally but, rather, as a tactical tool to increase the sense of political weight of ethnic communities (Breton and Reitz 2005). In fact, most of my interviewees who were diaspora activists themselves acknowledged that they did not believe in the idea of a single united community but saw it as a purely rhetorical means to boost the image of the community in the eyes of the general public.

Another point that has to be made is that the UCC's official message was carefully drafted in order to avoid any negative connection with the diaspora's ethnic nationalism and blunt the impression that it was focusing on a foreign cause. This was done by emphasising the 'normality' and political proactiveness of the Ukrainian

Canadians as a group. One recent UCC initiative, a community priorities survey, is an excellent case in point. In 2019, the UCC conducted the survey to determine the key public policy themes leading up to the Canadian federal elections. In the survey, the members of the Ukrainian community were asked what issues were important for them. While asking very specific Ukraine or diaspora-related questions, the surveys also included questions of general political interest such as – *inter alia* – how to fight online hate and propaganda, social problems and Canada’s immigration policies. Its results were widely publicised and discussed during meetings with representatives of all political parties. This survey is an example of a strategic tool that serves a twofold purpose: to inform politicians about the Ukrainian community’s needs and priorities and, simultaneously, to indicate the UCC’s capacity to reach out to its people. A party leaders survey is another older instrument that has been used by the UCC during the last two federal elections. The point of this survey was to ask federal party leaders to respond to questions and declare their positions on Ukraine and community-related matters. It thus reached out to all political parties in a consistent way. To be sure, very few ethnic communities in Canada use such a tool to reach out to political parties, which indicates the Ukrainian diaspora’s high level of political activity.

### **Aligning the political message with the government**

From the outset, the dramatic EuroMaidan protests received extensive media coverage and remained on the front pages of numerous Canadian and international media outlets for months. The high salience of the motive behind the diaspora advocacy campaigns was beyond question and played a not unimportant role in the diaspora’s advocacy success. Essentially, the EuroMaidan Ukraine’s democratic revolution and the Russia–Ukraine war that followed symbolised all that Canada had been advocating: respect for territorial integrity, democracy and human rights, all of which were at stake in Ukraine.

With the outbreak of the Revolution of Dignity and the conflict in Ukraine, the diaspora’s rhetoric started paying precise attention to how it depicted events there. In particular, when the Russian aggression against Ukraine unfolded, the UCC as well as other pro-Ukrainian lobbyists stressed that the Ukrainian people were bravely defending their right to freedom so ‘the cause of the Ukrainian people is the cause of free peoples’ (UCC electronic newsletter). The diaspora’s message also emphasised that the commitment of the Ukrainian people to democracy was clear and that, during the Revolution of Dignity, they had paid a high price for this freedom. The diaspora showed that freedom and democracy were at stake in Ukraine. The occupation of Crimea and the ongoing military aggression in Eastern Ukraine were linked to human rights abuses and therefore should draw Canada’s attention; supporting Ukraine would boost Canada’s influence as a country that stands for democracy, freedom and peace. The Ukrainian World Congress actively identified itself as an organisation committed to supporting democracy in Ukraine. All in all, the message clearly appealed to the idea that Canada’s assistance to Ukraine should be considered a natural outcome and noble cause in itself because it was congruent with Canadian values and declared national interests.

The diaspora’s way of communicating its cause was focused on making sure that Ukraine’s interests were aligned with Canadian national interests and agenda. Canada’s long record of being a country that stands for democracy, human rights and sovereignty was invoked. The diaspora’s message emphasised that helping Ukraine was in tune with Canada’s long-established commitment to this country – the first Western country to recognise Ukraine’s independence and its long record of helping Ukraine to achieve democratisation (Koinova 2009; Kordan 2018). Over a decade ago, when the Orange Revolution was unfolding, the UCC had been instrumental in persuading the Canadian government to send bilateral electoral observer missions (EOM) as a vehicle for the democratisation of Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> Since the beginning of the 1990s, the UCC saw its role as helping persuade the Canadian government to prioritise Ukraine as a recipient of Canadian International Development

Assistance (CIDA). Since the mid-1990s, Canada has been among Ukraine's top 10 international donors and a large number of its programmes in Ukraine have focused on democratisation, good governance and economic reform projects.<sup>9</sup>

The diaspora's strategic communication techniques were not the only strategies used. The urgency of events in the homeland mobilised the diaspora leadership to develop a number of new but politically well-considered initiatives. For instance, the celebration of Vyshyvanka Day<sup>10</sup> is one instance of many organised diaspora initiatives that began after the EuroMaidan protests. Initiated from below by Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program interns as a day of solidarity with Ukraine, Vyshyvanka Day was primarily supported by Canadian-Ukrainian ethnic politicians, then later by diaspora organisations and the Ukrainian Embassy. This event is an excellent example of the symbolic annual post-Maidan flash mob that captured the attention of both the mass media and Canadian politicians. In 2016, to cite another example, the diaspora turned the criticism of the Ukrainian Canadian community by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Lavrov (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-SMzytIxknBc>) into a global media campaign that has grown into a global eponymous hashtag #RabidUkrainianDiaspora as a countermeasure for the Russian propaganda machine.

During the first years after the Maidan, the UCC launched an information project called Ukraine Crisis Daily Brief, a daily e-newsletter that included exhaustive information in regard to new developments in Ukraine. Other projects that were born in the midst of the Ukrainian crisis were less visible to the public eye but no less important, as they were designed to boost the community's internal synchronisation, capacity-building and readiness for action. Among them was Project Link, launched to increase the political clout of the Ukrainian community by creating a better connection between the community, MPs and their ridings. Maidan and the war needed the UCC to diversify its information campaigns by including different means of informing its own community members as well as those politicians and community experts who are targeted as its recipients.

That being said and as many interviews indicated, despite the above efforts, the path of events unfolding especially during 2013–2014 in Ukraine made it difficult for the UCC, as well as for other actors, to plan advocacy ahead of time. There was only enough time to react to events and take decisions in an *ad hoc* manner. Had the diaspora's institutionalised players not already elaborated a high degree of professionalism in advocacy prior to the events in Ukraine, it would have been more difficult for them to sustain cohesive advocacy during the most dramatic years.

### **Advocacy in the post-Harper era: the Liberals and the Ukrainian cause**

In the post-2015 period, most of the Ukrainian diaspora's agenda followed a path-dependency trajectory: it continued being related to challenges to Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, to deterring Russia's aggression, offering humanitarian support and encouraging Canada's diplomatic advocacy for Ukraine in the international arena.

Despite the gradually decreasing interest in Ukraine in the mass media, Canada's official support for the country did not decline when, in 2015, Harper lost the federal elections and the Liberal Party headed by Justin Trudeau came to power. Some media experts viewed the UCC's successful advocacy campaigns during the Maidan as associated with Harper's patronage of the Ukrainian community and predicted that support might end when the Liberal Party took over. However, that did not happen: as the war in Ukraine continued, the UCC worked with a new government strategically, extending the approach taken when the conflict started by keeping Ukraine at the forefront of Canadian foreign policy. This very fact circumvents two popular arguments that Ukraine, during the Harper government's term, was supported solely due to either Harper's unique ideological imperative or his strategic pragmatic penchant for buying the votes of Ukrainian Canadians.

Support for Ukraine by Trudeau's Liberals not only continued but greatly solidified. The diaspora's major victories in that period could be boiled down to the following policy outcomes: Ukraine continued to receive the financial, military and diplomatic assistance that the diaspora advocated. With the election of Trudeau's Liberal government, Canada's new Minister for International Development, Marie-Claud Bibeau, initiated a process of changing Canada's priorities for international assistance, shifting attention towards poverty alleviation and gender-related issues. This would have moved Ukraine from a country of focus for CIDA to the verge of being cut from developmental assistance as a country that no longer matched Canada's priorities. In an interview in December 2019, ex-UCC President Paul Grod clearly stressed the role which the diaspora played in assuring that Ukraine kept receiving assistance: 'We spent quite a bit of time working on this matter with the minister and MPs, explaining to them that they still need to help Ukraine to ensure its democratic institutions are really solidified'. Largely as a result of the diaspora's actions, Ukraine continued receiving development assistance. However, the outcome could have been different had the diaspora stopped its advocacy.

In 2016, Ukraine revived additional assistance to support the humanitarian needs of the conflict-affected population in Eastern Ukraine in the form of \$13 million (US\$ 9.7 million) promised by Trudeau in a visit to Ukraine (*Ukrainian Weekly* 2017). As for military support, the diaspora lobbied for and achieved the following milestones: renewal of operation UNIFIER twice, in 2017 and 2019; the continuation of strong military training to the Ukrainian Armed Forces through UNIFIER since 2015; adding Ukraine to the Automatic Firearms Country Control List (AFCCL) in 2017 and lifting an arms embargo on Ukraine; finally, new funding to support the National Police of Ukraine through training and equipment, thanks to the award by Canada of \$8.1 million. The ratification of the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement was another important achievement that the diaspora had lobbied for.

All the above policy outcomes, actively advocated by the diaspora lobby for years, were eventually achieved. This, according to Helboe Pedersen's (2013) definition of the lobby's influence, provides valid grounds for considering the diaspora an influential political lobby.

Many interviewees claim that the level of political access which the diaspora achieved during Harper's tenure was unprecedented and has not been equalled under Trudeau. However, the above facts indicate that, during the Trudeau government, Ukraine has not been neglected. UCC representatives have still accompanied Canadian official delegations to Ukraine, have been continuously consulted and their opinions solicited.

As a result of the above policy achievements, many diaspora-related actors have claimed victories. The variety of 'diaspora-associated' actors makes it difficult to analyse just whose contribution is the most substantial in the policy victories achieved. Specifically, the post-Harper period in Canadian politics was directly associated with the emergence of two key Ukrainian Canadians: Chrystia Freeland – who was appointed to the rank of Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Roman Waschuk.

The negotiations for the Canada-Ukraine Free Trade Agreement (CUFTA) started years earlier under PM Steven Harper but it was during Freeland's tenure that Ukraine and Canada finalised the Free Trade Agreement and saw a prolongation of Canada-Ukraine military cooperation. In 2017 Canada lifted the embargo on Ukraine on the purchase of lethal weapon by adding it to the Automatic Firearms Country Control List (AFCCL). Freeland deserves special credit for the organisation of the Ukraine Reform Conference in Toronto in 2019. Her appointment in 2017 was preceded by the no-less-valuable appointment of Roman Waschuk in 2014 to the position of Canada's Ambassador to Ukraine. He played an instrumental role in developing diaspora-Government of Canada relations. Specifically, evidence suggests that it was Roman Waschuk's initiative to hold frequent briefings of European diplomats on the situation in Ukraine at the height of its conflict with Russia. The chair of EuroMaidan Canada, Markian Swec, stressed that, for the EuroMaidan activists, former Ambassador Waschuk played an extremely important role as mediator: during the most difficult years during

and after the Maidan, he helped activists to stay informed about the most recent developments in Ukraine by distinguishing fake information from true facts.<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, the Canadian diplomatic support for which the Ukrainian diaspora lobbied was truly multi-faceted. However, without the personal agency of the above individuals, certain initiatives would perhaps never have materialised. It is significant that what unites both Waschuk and Freeland and the majority of key diaspora entrepreneurs is that they are all descendants of the third wave of post-World War II Ukrainian refugees, a mature and a well-established faction of the diaspora community.<sup>12</sup> They are highly active in advocacy and have strong ties to the Ukrainian community. The presence of such individuals of Ukrainian origin in Canadian politics obviously blurs the lines between the diaspora and the Canadian government but, in this particular case, they should be conceptualised as a variation of diasporic agency.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this paper has been twofold: first, to enhance theoretical knowledge of how homeland conflicts can affect a diaspora's mobilisation and advocacy patterns; second, to contribute to our empirical knowledge and deepen our understanding of the Ukrainian diaspora in Canada as a political actor.

The nature of trigger events in the homeland – the Revolution of Dignity in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea, followed by Russia's invasion of the Donbas – all had a unique effect on the group's mobilisation and the advocacy's effectiveness. They provided an exceptional opportunity to accelerate the engagement of Ukrainian Canadians representing all waves of migration in advocacy work toward the homeland. As a result, the synchronisation of the diaspora's involvement with Ukraine's civil society dynamics has appeared. Without doubt, the events in Ukraine added an urgency and creativity to existing patterns of political work and lifted the political visibility of many diaspora organisations, something that eventually strengthened the diaspora's role as an official party with a say in negotiating Canada–Ukraine relations. However, even though the Revolution of Dignity and later invasions by Russia came as a shock to many and the way in which events unfolded did not leave much time for the diaspora to react, by the time they happened, the organised diaspora had already developed the organisational capacity to lead advocacy work with a high degree of confidence and professionalism.

This case study shows that the influence of the Ukrainian diaspora is not an exaggeration invented by Canadian pundits. The diaspora's success in advocating for the Ukrainian cause is the result of a number of interconnected factors: the lobby's organisational capacity (the diaspora's agency), the salience of the Maidan and the Russian invasion as extraordinary international events, the absence of a competing lobby group for the opposing cause and, finally, the alignment of the diaspora's interests with those of the state. These factors are all applicable to this case study and are not mutually exclusive, so they can be considered in tandem or as mutually reinforcing factors that explain the lobby's success or failure. However, a closer look at the unique dynamics of this case study leads to the following conclusions. First, the congruence of diaspora–state interests is not achievable without the diaspora's active involvement in advocacy work. Second, the homeland event, no matter how powerful, may have no effect on foreign policy decision-makers, unless these events are 'delivered' in a meaningful way – an outcome that largely depends on diasporic agency. This latter should be understood as a number of factors taken together: active political work, the organisational capacity of diaspora institutions and the presence of influential individuals in top policy decision-making positions.

The third important observation is related to the nature of the requests that the diaspora solicits: if it has already succeeded in obtaining a positive outcome on similar previous requests (like the provision of funds for democracy in Ukraine through CIDA), or has helped Canada to enhance its international image (sanctions

against Russia, rhetorical support of Ukraine, financial assistance to mitigate humanitarian crises etc.) then the probability of receiving approval for funds for the same purpose increases disproportionately.

To sum up, the power of the homeland crisis has produced a boost of energy for Ukrainian Canadians, allowing them to move forward; however, the effective advocacy that has come as a result is, instead, a product of time and evolution and was not born overnight.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Diaspora activists often refer to the 1.4 million people who claim Ukrainian origin automatically as members of the Ukrainian diaspora. For practical matters, they use the notion of ethnicity adopted by statisticians and diaspora interchangeably. For Statistics Canada, a Ukrainian Canadian is a person who declares his or her ethnic patrilineage and identifies single or multiple ethnic identities as Ukrainian. In this paper the concept of diaspora and ethnicity are not equated. Without a doubt, not all 1.4 million Canadians of Ukrainian origin could be technically classified as members of the diaspora.

<sup>2</sup> The Ukrainian Canadian Congress (hereinafter referred as the UCC) is an umbrella organisation founded in 1941 and originally known as the Ukrainian Canadian Committee. As a coordinating body, it unites the majority of legally registered national, provincial and local Ukrainian organisations across Canada. The UCC has 6 provincial councils, 16 local branches and over 30 national member organisations. For the history of UCC see Martynowych (2016).

<sup>3</sup> For a list compiled by the UCC of Canadian MPs who officially claim Ukrainian descent see <https://www.ucc.ca/2015/10/20/ucc-congratulates-pm-designate-justin-trudeau-and-welcomes-eleven-ukrainian-canadians-elected-to-parliament/> (accessed: 22 February 2020).

<sup>4</sup> In 2016, Bill Browder, Vladimir Kara-Murza, Zhanna Nemtsova and Gary Kasparov formed a lobby group who travelled to Ottawa to meet with Canada's key MPs and Senators and appeared before Committee on the issue. Although Bill S-226 'Justice for Victims of Corrupt Foreign Officials Act' was formally introduced by Senator Raynell Andreychuk, there were other people involved in the campaign, including the Hon. John McKay MP and Marcus Kolga, a Toronto-based journalist.

<sup>5</sup> Most are descendants of the third wave of post-World War II Ukrainian refugees or, according to Satzewich's (2002) classification, a 'victim diaspora'. This latter refers to those who immigrated to Canada as refugees after World War II, in the period between 1948 and 1953 and whose political mobilisation and advocacy have, for many years, been around specific issues such as the glorification of Ukrainian participation in World War II and the drawing of attention to the Ukrainian Famine (Holodomor) as a genocide of the Ukraine people.

<sup>6</sup> The first line of sanctions (e.g. special economic measure regulations) imposed by Canada against Russian came into force in March 2014. The later amendments to the regulations occurred in 2015, 2016 and 2019. See the Government of Canada's official information: [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international\\_relations-relations\\_internationales/sanctions/russia-russie.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/sanctions/russia-russie.aspx?lang=eng) (accessed: 22 February 2020).

<sup>7</sup> They often refer to the legacy of the Ukrainian Canadian Senator Paul Yuzyk (in office during 1963–1986), known as a 'father of multiculturalism' for his advocacy for the concept of multiculturalism.

<sup>8</sup> Bilateral EOMs (since 2004) were funded by Canada through CIDA, while the UCC's own independent electoral observer missions (since 1994) were self-funded by diaspora organisations.

<sup>9</sup> According to the ProAid portal, in the period from Ukraine's declaration of independence to the present day the country received over 180 million dollars worth of international assistance from Canada, see <http://proaid.gov.ua/uk/donors/20> (accessed: 22 February 2020).

<sup>10</sup> Vyshyvanka (Embroidery) Day on the Hill is associated with a flash mob that takes place every year on 17 May in front of the parliament building in Ottawa and during which politicians and Ukrainian community leaders symbolise solidarity with Ukraine by wearing embroidered shirts.

<sup>11</sup> In his interview (December 2019) Markian Shwec stressed that, since activists never wanted to become a source of fake information, they always found it important, when giving interviews to the Canadian mass media on the situation in Ukraine, to have a source of true, verifiable information in Kyiv.

<sup>12</sup> Here I mean key members of UCC (board members), certain diaspora politicians and independent activists. Most of these individuals, in their interviews, highlighted their common values, high political activism and attendance at Ukrainian institutes and groups etc.

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