

# Ukraine

Evgenia Lopata interviewed **Oleh Panchuk**

Interview date: 27 February 2019, Chernivtsi, Ukraine

**Lopata:** My name is Evgenia Lopata. I'm a cultural manager, translator and cultural activist. I have been involved in the International Poetry Festival Meridian Czernowitz<sup>1</sup>, various international cultural projects focusing on Ukrainian and European cooperation, particularly Ukrainian-German cooperation since 2013. I am the editor-in-chief of the Meridian Czernowitz Publishing House. I translate from German and English. I graduated from Karl-Franzens-Universität in Graz with a degree in International Business and Administration, as well as from Chernivtsi National University's Faculty of Economics and the Faculty of Foreign Languages, German Studies. In 2015 I received the title "The Young European of the Year" awarded by the Schwarzkopf Foundation. Today I work in Chernivtsi for the poetry festival and publishing house, as well as international projects of cultural diplomacy. Currently I am doing an internship in the Bundestag in Berlin, Germany.

Today I'm honored and overjoyed to talk to Professor Panchuk who was born in Chernivtsi in 1932. He studied in the Chernivtsi Gymnasium, entered the Faculty of Chemistry at Chernivtsi National University (which used to be called the State University back then), graduated with honors, and immediately defended his Ph.D. thesis and later received "the Doktor Nauk" degree<sup>2</sup>. Later on, he was the dean of the Faculty of Chemistry of the Chernivtsi University for 7 years.

You are the author of 120 scientific works and 5 certificates of authorship. Another extremely interesting fact from your biography is that you are one of the founders of the People's Movement<sup>3</sup> in Bukovina and the fighters for independence. Today, at the age of 86 you are still teaching at the university, that is, you are actively engaged in work with students.

I am very grateful to you for giving this interview today. It seems to me that your personality and your life story are extremely interesting in a wider European context. In my opinion, you belong to those Ukrainians who could serve a role model for the younger generation, for my generation. Having, for example, a family relationship with Olha Kobylanska

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<sup>1</sup> Meridian Czernowitz is the International Poetry Festival in Chernivtsi (Ukraine) whose main objective is to return Chernivtsi to the cultural map of Europe, stimulates Ukrainian and Jewish cultural cooperation and is one of the most important international cultural events in Ukraine.

<sup>2</sup> Doktor Nauk or literally "Doctor of Sciences" is a degree which may be earned after the Candidate of Sciences (the latter is informally regarded in many post-Soviet states as the equivalent to the PhD)

<sup>3</sup> People's Movement of Ukraine for Reconstruction (i.e. for Perestroika) was a civil-political national and democratic movement that united numerous Ukraine's democratic formations, was founded in 1989 in the Soviet Ukraine

[Ukrainian writer, 1863 – 1942]<sup>4</sup>, you chose another profession and became a chemist. I hope that we will discuss all 86 years that are behind you and your plans for the future as well as your vision of the future in today's interview. I'll start with a question about your childhood and your family.

**Lopata:** You were born in Chernivtsi. It was still a part of Romania<sup>5</sup> in those days. Could you tell us a little bit about your childhood?

**Panchuk:** I was born on 17 July 1932 in the house that is now a museum for Olha Kobylianska<sup>6</sup>. I was raised by my mother's family. My mother was Olha Kobylianska's foster daughter and in fact her niece. Olha adopted her. My father was Elpidofor Panchuk, who was originally from the village of Mamayivtsi, not far from Chernivtsi. He came from a large family, of eight, who owned only one hectare of land. You can imagine what kind of life that was. He told us they basically lived on mamaliga [hard-boiled corn flour porridge]<sup>7</sup>, potatoes and cow's milk. They also had a garden and a small field for bread, enough to get through the winter. They hardly ate meat, only some chicken from time to time, or they might slaughter a young pig for Christmas. They lived very badly and poorly. My father was the only child who, after having finished elementary school, went to the Chernivtsi grammar school, which is now Gymnasium Number 5. It was the only Ukrainian grammar school at that time. He successfully finished it. He was born in 1894 and in 1914 he graduated.

Suddenly the war broke out<sup>8</sup> and he was drafted into the Austrian army. He fought against Russia on the Eastern Front of the Empire. He was quick-witted, his luck took care of him, he was not wounded, and after a year and a half he became a lieutenant, earning a salary that was even enough to help his parents. After Austria withdrew from the war in 1918, he went to Kyiv along with some other Ukrainian comrades to enlist in Petliura's army [one of the leaders of Ukraine's struggle for Independence in the 20th century]<sup>9</sup>. They fought there until the very end. After the war had ended he returned to Bukovina. The Romanians interned him for a year, but then gave him back all his rights since he was in fact a native

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<sup>4</sup> Olha Kobylianska was a Ukrainian writer, who came from a Ukrainian noble family. She authored dozens of short stories, essays, novellas, critical and journalistic articles, translations in Ukrainian and German. Kobylianska lived in Chernivtsi and is considered to be one of the most important writers and intellectuals of Ukraine in the 20th century.

<sup>5</sup> After the First World War and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire according to the Romanian royal decree-law as of January 2, 1919, Bukovina was annexed to Romania and was part of it until June 1940, when the city and all Northern Bukovina were annexed from Romania by the Soviet Union.

<sup>6</sup> The Olha Kobylianska Museum is located in a small one-storied building in Chernivtsi, and was the first home owned by the writer. The exposition highlights the writer's life and creative work, her social activities, and literary connections. Oleh Panchuk's childhood took place in this house as well.

<sup>7</sup> Mamaliga is a hard-boiled corn flour porridge, a popular dish in Southeastern Europe. It is a national dish of Hutsuls, Moldovans, and Romanians.

<sup>8</sup> Significant territory of Ukraine found itself on the near-front zone. The hostilities broke out in the Austrian Kingdom of Galicia, the Duchy of Bukovina as well as Prykarpattia.

<sup>9</sup> Symon Petliura was a Ukrainian statesman, military and political figure, journalist, literary and theatre critic. He was the organizer of the Ukrainian Armed Forces and one of the leaders of Ukraine's struggle for Independence in the 20th century.

Bukovinian, unlike others who – despite being Ukrainians – migrated here from other cities. After the war, my father went to university, where he graduated from the Faculty of History. When I was born, he was working as a librarian at Chernivtsi University.

My mother was the illegitimate daughter of Olha Kobylanska's brother Oleksandr, who was single but had an extra-marital relationship. When my mother was born, her mother left her in Olexandr's care and moved permanently to Vienna. Olexandr didn't know what to do with the child, so he decided that someone else should take care of her. He had two sisters: Yevgenia and Olha, who was younger. Yevgenia was childless, so she took my mother in, in 1900. She raised her for five years until she fell ill and could no longer look after her. By that time Olha Kobylanska was about 40 years old, she had lost all hope for a happy family. She didn't want to be lonely when she got old, so she adopted my mother.

In 1918 my mother graduated from the teacher training seminary. After the Romanians came [In November 1918, the Romanian army occupied Chernivtsi, and later it was declared the union of Northern Bukovina and Chernivtsi with Romania]<sup>10</sup>, she could no longer work in the areas she had been trained for, even though she knew the Ukrainian and the German language, because she didn't speak Romanian. She worked as an assistant in a laboratory for several years until she got married to my father. They met in the Ukrainian People's House, where Olha Kobylanska was a regular guest as well. She took her daughter to the parties there. My father used to go there with some other students. My parents got married in 1925. That's how it happened.

As for my childhood: I was born in 1932. At the age of six I started at the school situated on the corner of Shevchenko and Holovna Streets. It was the Romanian School Number 3 named after George Tofan<sup>11</sup>. Classes were of course taught in Romanian. It was only later in the 1930s after the shift of power in Bucharest that the attitude toward minorities such as Ukrainians, Germans and Poles started to change. During my childhood, conditions for Ukrainians were harsh: languages other than Romanian were forbidden in public institutions, including schools. I remember an interesting incident. Once, during a school break, I was sitting at a desk with my neighbour who was also Ukrainian. We were whispering to each other in Ukrainian. Someone heard us and told the teacher. I was punished, rather symbolically though — I was hit five times on my palm with a ruler. It didn't hurt, but it was humiliating. This was when I realised how important it is to let people speak their native language.

In 1940, I finished the second year. It was in June 1940 when the Soviet government was established. They lionised Olha Kobylanska. However, Olha was very sick at that time.

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<sup>10</sup> The order to attack Ukrainian Bukovina was given by the Romanian government on November 5, 1918. On November 11, 1918, the Romanian army occupied Chernivtsi, and on November 28, 1918 the Romanian General Congress of Bukovina declared the union of Northern Bukovina and Chernivtsi with Romania.

<sup>11</sup> George Tofan is Austro-Hungarian Romanian journalist and teacher.

She was paralysed and had suffered two strokes. That is why she was not able to leave her house or even her room.

The Soviet authorities wanted to eliminate propaganda techniques concerning Olha Kobylanska because she was the only living representative of the renewed Ukrainian literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries at that time: Lesya Ukrayinka had passed away as well as Franko and Kotsyubinsky [prominent Ukrainian writers in history]<sup>12</sup> — there was nobody left but Olha. I remember one interesting event: two days after Soviet troops entered the city, on the 23rd [of June], a Soviet delegation, the party leadership and members of the military came to our house with flowers. Olha was carried to the sofa in the big room. She could barely speak. The officers talked about liberation and she was only nodding. This is when it all began: delegations from different cities and republics were coming to congratulate us on the liberation every day.

I remember my father telling my brother and me - I had an elder brother, he died at the age of 45 - something when we were adults. Under Soviet rule people were afraid to tell their children things like that.

My father was promoted by the Soviet authorities to be the head of the university library. They even provided a car that took him to dinner [to celebrate the occasion]— I remember what a stir it caused, the whole street came to see it.

So later [that evening] a representative of the Local Party Committee<sup>13</sup> came to him and took a roundabout approach to the subject: "How are you? Are you satisfied with how the Soviet authorities treat Olha Kobylanska?". Questions of this sort were unexpected — given how the Romanians had treated Olha. They had been indifferent, they simply ignored her. So this representative gets to the point of the conversation and says: "It's been a month and a half since the liberation and we are a little surprised as to why Olha Kobylanskaya does not respond publicly to it". Father begins to fudge and explains that she is paralysed. "Well, yes, but you could prompt her. She didn't say "thank you" to the great Stalin, although she could do it personally. That's how it is done. All our victories are victories under the leadership of Stalin". My father fudged again replying that she's really paralysed. But he was told: "You'd better think about how you could do it anyway". My father came home and asked his wife Olena for advice. They knew what had already started. They knew that the deportations of Ukrainians had begun<sup>14</sup>. They had known what this

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<sup>12</sup> Lesya Ukrayinka, Ivan Franko, Mykhaylo Kotsyubinsky are among the most prominent Ukrainian writers in history.

<sup>13</sup> The City Committee of the Communist Party is the central municipal department of the Communist Party in the USSR.

<sup>14</sup> 1940, February to April: The Red Army annexed territories in the eastern parts of Poland) About 250,000 Poles and thousands of Ukrainians and Byelorussians were deported in three major waves to Siberia and to Central and Far Eastern Asia in order to remove the most active populations from the annexed territories. Source: <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/fr/document/soviet-massive-deportations-chronology.html>

Soviet power was like for a long time. We didn't have any other choice, you see? Rejection would have led to a catastrophe. [Yet,] acquiescing meant giving up all our beliefs. Eventually, father met with that man again and said: "We have no right to refuse, but we are afraid to make a mistake, please write it by yourself, and we will give it to Kobylianska for her signature". That's what they did. To be morally clear, although not fully. This letter was given to Olha, she herself was not able to write, but there had to be a signature. Olha asked what those papers were. She was told that those were some domestic economic matters.

That's how the first greeting appeared. They demanded more and more greetings on a monthly basis. Nobody was even asking us anything now, everything went on behalf of Kobylianska: Olha Kobylianska congratulates some Uzbek writer on his anniversary and does not forget to say how thankful she is to the Soviet authorities. We've collected some 30 letters of this kind in the course of one year. If you're interested, look for the book *The Words of the Touched Heart* where Kobylianska's memories of her youth are collected. These memories were not entirely acceptable for the Soviet authorities, so they compensated for it by adding those quasi-letters and appeals that Kobylianska was allegedly writing to the leadership of the state. So, that's how it was all happening.

Later, the Soviet government decided to raise Olha's status even higher. It arranged an anniversary [festivity] on her birthday. It wasn't a milestone anniversary, so the authorities announced something like "on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of her literary activity". There is a photo from this event in the Kobylianska museum. Ukrainian writers including Ivan Le, Volodymyr Sosyura, Yuriy Yanovsky<sup>15</sup> and others visited us there in our house.

There was a reception in the evening. The first secretary of the Communist Party Ivan Hrushevsky and the whole military party company<sup>16</sup> and NKVD [central body for public administration in combating crime and maintaining public order]<sup>17</sup> were there. There was a plan to organise a solemn gathering in the theatre the next day. They wanted to see Olha. They wanted her to perform there at the theatre. Our father explained that Olha could hardly read, and that her private doctor Husar had strictly forbidden her from leaving the house, even if she had a ride [in the car]. This was after her second stroke, she hadn't left the house for three years. But the authorities wanted to hear Olha Kobylianska's voice anyway. Just imagine: they ran a telephone line all the way from the theatre to our house. She was given a microphone and she read a tribute that my father edited.

**Lopata:** That's almost 2 kilometres between the theatre and your house!

**Panchuk:** Yes, the phone line was stretched all the way up here. The party ordered it, so it had to be done. In 1941, the flow of visitors went down, only one or two guests visited Olha

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<sup>15</sup> Well-known Ukrainian intellectuals, writers, and poets of the 20th century.

<sup>16</sup> Unable to identify/confirm the person.

<sup>17</sup> NKVD is a Russian abbreviation for People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs of the RSFSR, the central body for public administration in combating crime and maintaining public order.

each week. Still, we continued receiving visitors, we weren't in a position to say no. Workers came from Kyiv, they wanted to see Olha Kobylianska — well, how could one refuse? The proletariat was getting involved in culture. There were two visitors who stood out though. They were journalists. One of them was Dmytro Kosaryk, a journalist from Kyiv, who was also a writer in his own right. It was his idea to write a book about Olha Kobylianska. Books on her had already been published, so he wanted to do something new and to have a conversation with her about the prototypes of her literary characters. As my mother told me later, when I was 20 years old, Kobylianska was never left alone with anyone. There were times when Kobylianska was about to say something, when my mother would apologise: "Olha is already tired". My mother was a kind of censor. But then Kosaryk arrived. We are talking about the winter and spring of 1941. He had been coming to us for a few days and mother was sitting with them. But the conversations lasted for hours. So mother consulted with father and they decided that Kosaryk had made a good impression. He was originally from Shevchenko's [Ukrainian poet, and national hero] native region<sup>18</sup>. They were joking that he wrote the genealogy of an oak, on which, according to legends, a sparrow used to sit and witness an encounter between Olha Kobylianska and Lesya Ukrainka (laughs).

We decided to leave him alone with Olha, understanding that nothing could happen. It lasted for a couple of months. At the end of March 1941 there were no children at home, my father was at work, my mother was at home alone and the maid who we had for a while, she was looking after Olha, was at the market. Kosaryk, pale as a ghost, bursts into the kitchen where mother was and says: "Oleno Oleksandrivno, is there anyone at home?" She says: "Nobody. Did anything happen to Olha?" He replies: "She is all right. But I do not even know how to say it. Give me your word, swear that you will never ever tell anyone what I'm going to tell you right now. Otherwise, I'm dead, you're dead, perhaps we are all dead". He went on: "We were talking, she [Olha] was replying somewhat indistinctly, so I was thinking about leaving. Suddenly Olha said: 'You know, Mr. Kosaryk, whatever happens, happens, but the Bolsheviks would be the worst outcome of all'." He didn't come back after that. My brother and I were told this story later.

**Lopata:** I understand the importance of us talking about Olha Kobylianska. She is considered one of the most important authors in Ukrainian literature. An interesting fact is that first she wrote in German. There are texts by her in German.

The Soviet authorities exploited her name and used her. Your story reveals that she never supported the Soviet regime as such. Did you have an opportunity to correct the record about Olha when the Soviet system collapsed? For instance, the fact that she never wrote those letters?

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<sup>18</sup> Taras Shevchenko was a Ukrainian poet, writer, artist, public and political figure. He is a national hero and a symbol of Ukraine.

**Panchuk:** Yes, during the time of Gorbachev, when the Soviet authorities lessened censorship and decommunisation<sup>19</sup> took place. A Ukrainian Language Society<sup>20</sup> was created at that time. I joined it immediately along with many other public figures. I became its deputy chairman. We were standing up for the Ukrainian language. Later, the People's Movement appeared. We joined it as well, and the Ukrainian Language Society took a back seat. On 25 August 1989 the constitutive congress of the Movement took place in Kyiv, and a delegation of 22 members from Chernivtsi Oblast were there. Among them was Professor Sanduliak, the head of the Movement in Chernivtsi Oblast, who was also a Deputy of the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR<sup>21</sup>. The Komsomol was afraid to touch him, so in a sense he protected all of us. Back home, our delegation separated and headed to its districts, villages and towns in order to inform people about what was being discussed at the congress. That is what we did as well: we planned a rally in Chernivtsi, which was supposed to take place at the stadium. We expected a lot of people, but eventually the authorities ruined everything: they disseminated an announcement about an alleged cancellation of the rally. Those who didn't believe it came. There were around 500-1000 people. Once we began to talk, the authorities turned on their megaphones, which were louder. That's why we had to leave. Accompanied by a police officer, about 300 people who decided to stay went along Chapaev Street with us. They found a place in one of the yards and we held the rally there. We were threatened again because "this is an unauthorized rally" and held administratively liable. I was fined 500 roubles. That was the size of my monthly salary at that time. I easily dealt with it. My colleague Volodymyr Staryk and two other students were arrested for 10 days.

The university's annual Komsomol conference was scheduled to take place three days after the arrest. The Komsomol members [i.e. a member of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth Union]<sup>22</sup> invited me. They didn't inform me about their intentions, they only said: "You should come, it will be interesting". The meeting took place in the House of Officers, and there were 500-700 people there, including delegates, the presidium, party and Komsomol authorities. Suddenly the secretary of the party's district committee stands up, says that they are opening something and turns the floor over to the Chairman of the Party Committee of Lenin's Communist Society of the Youth of Ukraine. He takes the microphone and says: "Yesterday, the Komsomol University Committee came to the

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<sup>19</sup> Decommunisation is the process of getting rid of the consequences of communist ideology.

<sup>20</sup> Shevchenko Ukrainian Language Society (abbreviated as TUM) is a civic organization established at the foundation conference on February 11-12, 1989 in Kyiv as an All-Ukrainian Public Union that united numerous organizations and groups in the wake of the national uprising in order to revive and strengthen the Ukrainian language in Ukraine and among the Ukrainians who lived abroad.

<sup>21</sup> The Supreme Council of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic was the supreme body of state authority and the only legislative body of the former Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

<sup>22</sup> "Komsomolets" or "the Komsomol member" was a member of the All-Union Leninist Communist Youth Union. Komsomolets is a young communist, a future leader of party cells. It was impossible to reach the top of power without the Komsomol, under the political monopoly of the CPSU.

conclusion that we would not hold a Komsomol conference until our comrades are released from arrest [because those two students were taken into custody]. So you are free". It was really nice that they showed solidarity with the students. Everybody opposed the arrest. The next day, the students were released.

A day or two after this incident the correspondent of the Komsomolskaya Pravda [Russian daily newspaper]<sup>23</sup>, which was basically anti-communist, arrived in Chernivtsi and came directly to me to the Dean's office to ask about this event. I explained the circumstances. I told him that our rally was without any public [to observe], we were alone, and people here get punished for such things. His article about Chernivtsi appeared in the newspaper the very next day with the words: "I heard all this from Olha Kobylinska's grandson, who speaks seven languages and who is indignant about how the local authorities treated him". A call to Chernivtsi followed, and my fine was reimbursed. Nobody apologized, though. That is how we pressured the authorities step by step, although sometimes it was necessary to back off.

In 1990, I became the head of the regional People's Movement and I was nominated as a candidate to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine<sup>24</sup>. I lost in the second round to a doctor, a professor at a Medical Institute. My friend told me that there were some cars moving around the city [with people] shouting "Long live Panchuk! Long live Bandera<sup>25</sup>!" Bandera's adherents<sup>26</sup> were considered terrible enemies of the state back then.

In May 1990 a gathering of the People's Movement supporters was supposed to take place in Kolomyia<sup>27</sup>. We had established some connections with other peoples' movements at that time. I knew that I would get the chance to give a speech. I told them everything about the rallies that we held, [the incident with Olha Kobylinska] and so on. Video recording was not so widespread at that time, but the KGB had cameras and was filming everything. I

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<sup>23</sup> "Komsomolskaya Pravda" (Eng. "The Komsomol Truth") is the Russian daily (former Soviet newspaper), which was founded on March 13, 1925.

<sup>24</sup> The Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine is the only legislative body of state power of Ukraine, which has a collegiate structure and consists of 450 people's deputies of Ukraine elected for a term of 5 years on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot.

<sup>25</sup> Stepan Bandera was a Ukrainian political figure, one of the chief ideologues and theorists of the Ukrainian nationalist movement of the 20th century. After the split of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists he was the head of the OUN Ward.

<sup>26</sup> Bandera adherents (Ukr. "Banderivtsi") is a polysemantic term, that comes from Stepan Bandera's name. Primarily it was used to name the members of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists revolutionary, which was headed by Stepan Bandera. The contemporary meaning is about those Ukrainian nationalists who consider themselves followers of the OUN-r. After the 1940s, the concept of "banderivtsi" began to be used to define all Ukrainian nationalism in Soviet and Russian propaganda. This name was especially used by Soviet propaganda in a negative sense, as a synonym for banditry and a threat to Russian imperialism, in general denoting the entire Ukrainian nationalist underground, as well as Ukrainian nationalists abroad and those who in the Ukrainian SSR stood in opposition to Soviet national politics.

<sup>27</sup> Kolomyia is a town in the West of Ukraine with a population of 61,000, located 80 km away from Chernivtsi. It is a gateway to the Ukrainian Carpathians.

said [in my speech]: "I support Gorbachev. What do you have against Gorbachev?" and they immediately went quiet. They were scared of him.

On August 1st of the same year, the newspaper Chas, which was previously banned by the Bolsheviks who had supposedly come to liberate Ukraine, resumed its work. A text with my words was published in it. After the Soviet Union had collapsed, another congress took place. A woman came to me after the performance — it was the wife of Dmytro Kosaryk. She said she knew the whole story about Kobylianska but wanted to add one more thing: "After you gave a speech in Kolomyia, two KGB men came to us within a week or two. They wanted to talk to my husband, but I didn't let them in". It means that they wanted to get a denial from Kosaryk of my words about the fact that the incident with Kobylianska had taken place. But they couldn't do anything. He didn't tell them anything. That's the story.

**Lopata:** What is your most vivid childhood impression? What do you remember best of all from your childhood?

**Panchuk:** You know, I am a child of late development. The first thing I remember is of my mother holding me in her arms. I was 4 or 5 years old: I was throwing a tantrum because I didn't want something. Then someone came to [speak to] my mum. [But] I didn't want her to speak to the guest out of jealousy.

At the age of five I went to the "German House" in order to learn the language. I am grateful to my parents. Thanks to them I started to develop an interest in foreign languages. It began with German. There was a German teacher in our house who didn't know either Romanian or Ukrainian. A month later I understood everything, and a year later I knew the language perfectly. Later I became a polyglot – that was the start. When the Soviets returned to power in 1944 I went to school and chose German as a foreign language. It was very beneficial for me: I didn't have to learn anything and had only excellent marks. Once my parents found out they said that this would not do. I began to learn French, because I had a good command of Romanian. Then I studied English at university. But since I already knew German, I didn't have any problems with this language [either]. Now I am also able to write scientific English. Once you have learned one language, it's easier to learn others.

When Khrushchev took over<sup>28</sup>, he decided to improve democratic relations with other countries and allowed travel abroad. Polish magazines now started to be published here as well. I became interested in this language: I didn't understand it, but I wanted to learn. My mother said that she had a friend who could teach me Polish and that "the main thing was to learn how to read correctly!" He showed me and within one month I understood everything. I read those newspapers, subscribed to them. They dared to write impossible things! We couldn't imagine something like that being published. For example, the Polish

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<sup>28</sup> The period of Khrushchev's rule in the Soviet Union is often referred to as the "thaw": many political prisoners were released compared to the period of Stalin's reign, the activity of repressions declined significantly. The influence of ideological censorship diminished.

press wrote about the best and worst outfits of the state leaders' wives. They considered Khrushchev's wife to be the worst dressed! Then the Prague Spring began and the Czech press appeared here as well. I decided to learn Czech. I had to know what they were writing there, not [just] what they were writing here.

**Lopata:** According to what we have discussed, you are fluent in Ukrainian, Russian, German, Romanian, English, French, Czech and Polish. When was the first time you went abroad?

**Panchuk:** I don't speak Czech. I can only read it.

There were two borders: The border of democracy and the capitalist one. The first time I received permission to go to Romania, where my distant relatives lived, was in 1985. And the first time I crossed the capitalist border was in 1989 when I went to France. Later, I visited Italy, Germany, Belgium, Poland and the Czech Republic, mainly to attend scientific conferences.

**Lopata:** If it happened in the 1980s, it means that you were in your fifties when you managed to go abroad for the first time. Were there any instances when you wanted to go abroad but the authorities didn't let you?

**Panchuk:** It's more about my brother and mother than me. My mother wanted to go to Austria to visit her cousin Yurko. The descendants of Kobylanska settled mostly in Austria. He somehow managed to find our address and sent us letters and parcels. Once he invited my mother to Austria. We discussed this at home. "Everybody knows us, they won't let us". We decided to try though. However, we agreed not to apply immediately, but to make a request to the former First Secretary of the Chernivtsi Regional Committee of Hrushevsky Party, who was a friend of ours. At that time, he was the first person in Ukraine — a Chairman of the Supreme Council. They were silent for three months. Then they called my brother, who worked at the university at that time, and said: "You are invited to OVIR<sup>29</sup>". We were met there by some person who started shouting at us in Russian: "How do you imagine this? Do you think you can go wherever you want only because you know Hrushevsky? WE decide who is allowed to go, not you! You do not belong to the party. And do you consider yourself Kobylanska's grandchildren? She loved the Soviet authorities so much, I read her letters to Stalin!" (laughs). My brother left and that's how it ended. That was one attempt.

Talking about me, I didn't leave the Ukraine until 1989. My brother and I went abroad only because we were philatelists — we collected postage stamps. We could do it precisely because we knew foreign languages. It was an extremely profitable business because Soviet stamps sold very well abroad. The Soviet authorities could send stamps just to their

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<sup>29</sup> OVIR (abbreviation for Organization of Visas, Immigration and Registration) is a subdivision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the USSR and the Union republics, which issued both registration for foreigners who arrived in the USSR and travel documents for the Soviet citizens who wanted to go abroad.

branches abroad. They sold stamps there at the cover price and a high exchange rate: 1 dollar = 4 roubles. The rouble was overvalued: in fact, the purchasing power was 10 times lower. We could easily sell stamps at a discount of 50%. That's how our own collection of stamps appeared. After we had sold them, we were able to buy our first car.

**Lopata:** This is very interesting. You must have had partners you kept in touch with in different cities and countries where you were selling your stamps. Couldn't the Soviet government have punished you for sending Soviet stamps all over the world?

**Panchuk:** I was about to tell you about it. We began our philatelic work in 1949. According to the postal rules of that time, it was prohibited to send unused Soviet stamps. We did send them, but nobody said anything. I assume that the laws are written but not enforced. They asked Stalin, and he said: "Let them make propaganda for us. If nobody buys our stamps in our stores, let them be bought there". This, in my opinion, is the only logical explanation. But once Stalin's regime was over, Khrushchev began to introduce some order and in 1955 someone informed on us and he said that it has to be the way it is written in the law. Then our letters started to return. We sent a lot of them... some of them weighed even 200 grams. Hundreds of stamps of the same kind! Eventually, we stopped in 1956. The letters were being returned, some of them were confiscated, our partners owed us money.

In 1963, I decided to buy a car for that money. But how could one buy a car? One couldn't just go and buy it in a shop — it was impossible. It was the Soviet Union: there were huge queues for cars at that time. We got on the wait list, though we could expect the purchase only after 10 years. However, the time of the 100th anniversary of Olha Kobylanska's birth was approaching. Demochko, an editor-in-chief of "Radianska Bukovina" [Bukovina newspaper in the Soviet period] and my father's friend heard that we wanted to sell the collection and buy a car, and recommended that our mother appeal to the corresponding authority with a request for assistance. She had already got rejected when a few years ago she made a request to allocate her a personal pension for Olha Kobylanska. So now we had to approach them again with a request to let us buy a car with our own money and without any public expenditure. I remember it was yellow GAZ-21 [Soviet car for the middle classes]. The Soviet authorities were very generous.

**Lopata:** Have you ever regretted that you sold those stamps?

**Panchuk:** Do you know how much our collection would be worth now? A minimum of \$50,000. Prices are constantly rising, that's why it is hard to say precisely how much it would cost today. We were building our collection step-by-step: once we had finished with the stamps from one country we began to collect the stamps from another country [...]

**Lopata:** Did you restart your collection after selling everything?

**Panchuk:** Yes. My brother also bought stamps for his son. When I was already a professor, I had a friend in Kosiv who had many nice stamps. But most importantly, he had

bought one stamp from some philatelist who was born in 1880. He was the head of the post office in Stanislaviv<sup>30</sup> at the time of West Ukrainian People's Republic<sup>31</sup>. They took Austrian stamps and put the "ZUNR"<sup>32</sup> seal with a face value on top of it — that's how they made stamps back then. Sometimes one and the same face value could be printed on different Austrian stamps of different print runs. And those stamps that belonged to the smaller print runs (100-200) cost a lot: even up to 500-1000 dollars per piece. They cost the same today. I could not afford to buy them, but my friend had them and sold them as well. At that time I could buy a stamp for only 100 rubles which almost equaled an average salary. This is the only thing that I have. Then one collector from Odessa helped me by complementing my collection. But here in Greater Ukraine<sup>33</sup> they made reprints of Russian stamps: Odesa, Kyiv, Lviv, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and dozens of other cities. I could not collect everything, but he gave me something from Odesa. I will pass it all on to my grandchildren.

**Lopata:** So you were able to preserve your passion for stamps throughout your whole life?

**Panchuk:** Yes, up to an old age. I am an experienced philatelist. In fact, from the age of 7, I saw my brother taking off the stamps from the letters that came to Olha Kobylanska from Poland, Austria, Romania and Soviet Union and then drying them. Sometime later I became interested in it and helped him. Then I started looking for stamps myself. The collection began in 1948. My mother's friend in Chernivtsi told her about her roommate, the major of the medical service. Once while he was unpacking his belongings I saw his albums with stamps. I asked him: "Do you collect stamps?", He said yes. I then asked if he knew other collectors because I wanted to establish contacts. That's how we got to know each other. And he gave us the addresses of foreign clubs and we became their members. Those clubs printed a list of all members by country every half year. So within six months, we became members of the club. We were getting lots of offers! When we got the first book with the list, we realized that there were two of us from the Soviet Union - us and someone else, whereas there were more than 100 philatelists in Romania. People here were afraid of doing it in Stalin's time, but we were not.

When, for instance, I wanted to order 100 stamps, how could I describe what I wanted? There are special catalogs where you choose a number belonging exclusively to a certain stamp. Our first letters [with orders] of this kind did not get any answer for a long while. "We

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<sup>30</sup> The name of the city of Ivano-Frankivsk, which is located in western Ukraine before 1962.

<sup>31</sup> The Western Ukrainian People's Republic (abbreviated as "ZUNR") is a Ukrainian state that actually existed during 1918-1919, and formally up till 1923, on the territory of Western Ukraine and had its capital in Lviv. It appeared after World War I as a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

<sup>32</sup> IBID

<sup>33</sup> Great Ukraine is an identical political concept in the Ukrainian nationalist environment, a state that should cover all Ukrainian ethnic territories. Greater Ukraine is an irredentist political concept of the territory claimed by some Ukrainian nationalist groups outside the Republic of Ukraine which are considered part of national homeland by Ukrainians, based on the present-day or historical presence of Ukrainian populations in those areas.

didn't receive anything from you" our partners said. After a month or two, he said that the letter had arrived. They (the authorities) probably thought that our letters included some codes, that it was some cryptography. But then, apparently, they consulted some specialist and realized that there was nothing behind it. There were thousands of similar stories [like this] ...

**Lopata:** You were born in Chernivtsi in 1932. It was Romanian territory back then. It turns out that after having lived in Romania, Chernivtsi became Soviet, then it was occupied by the Germans, and then again by the Soviet Union, now it is Ukraine. You lived in different states.

**Panchuk:** And the Soviet Union was also different: Stalin's, Khrushchev's, then Gorbachev's versions, and only then Ukraine. Lots of different orders and ways of life.

**Lopata:** Which state order do you consider the best?

**Panchuk:** Ukraine is head and shoulders above the rest, it is our own state. Gorbachev's time, of course, comes next, because they gave people the opportunity to speak. Gorbachev wanted to do better, but he didn't understand the system completely. He didn't realise how much the Russian people were absorbed by imperial delusions, which they had been fed by the tsars, and then the General Secretaries. And it continues to this day. They say: "We want to be friends with other peoples, we are ready!", but in reality, they attack lots of other states. What hypocrisy. Neither Brezhnev, nor even the Stalinist government did that: the Stalinist regime spoke directly of what it did. And now they want the "friendship of the peoples". I won't comment further.

**Lopata:** What does it mean for you to be a citizen? What is your position in civil society?

**Panchuk:** There is no doubt that any person who resides in the territory of Ukraine cannot be considered a citizen if he or she is not interested, doesn't understand, and doesn't analyse the events that are going on in our country. For instance, the events that are happening right now. The Kremlin's main claim against us is that we've become poor. Who is to blame? Of course, Poroshenko [Ukraine president from 2014-2019].<sup>34</sup> and Yatseniuk [Prime Minister of Ukraine between 2014-2016]<sup>35</sup>. They left the country in that condition... 90% of the sober-minded people who I asked about the cause of our poverty answered that the reason lies in the fact that the Ukrainian hryvnia [Ukrainian currency] plummeted. However, they don't know why it fell so sharply. And I respond: "Don't you remember how it happened?" The riots in Eastern Ukraine started and everybody was arming themselves. Russia was moving new divisions closer to the border, but they didn't cross it.

Finally the Russian Duma allows Putin to send troops into Ukraine. What were Ukrainian citizens supposed to think? People who had a lot of money rushed to exchange it. There

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<sup>34</sup> Petro Poroshenko is a Ukrainian politician, entrepreneur, and the fifth president of Ukraine 2014 - 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Arseniy Yatsenyuk is a Ukrainian politician and state figure, a people's deputy. He is a former Minister of Economy, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine; in 2014-2016 he was the Prime Minister of Ukraine.

are not enough dollars for everyone. One dollar was 8 hryvni, in two days it became 10, in the next two days it was already 12, and lo and behold: the Duma allows Putin to send troops. The whole world was protesting. How on earth can a parliament allow the President of its country to send troops into another country? They have achieved their goal, for they have overthrown our economy and only now we are coming to the point when the minimum wage is \$200 like it used to be in the time of Yanukovych<sup>36</sup>, and the average salary is also rising. We are a country that is being provoked in all kinds of ways. We are a country from which the Crimea was taken away, the Donbass<sup>37</sup> with its huge industries was taken away, and now people demand conditions that they used to have during peacetime, when Yanukovych was the President. The time when he constantly took out loans for his reforms. The country bathed in money and welfare grew. But what are the prospects for such a life? Sooner or later it was bound to end.

**Lopata:** What are the prospects for today's Ukraine?

**Panchuk:** You know, there is no normal plan of action that would quickly and with certainty strengthen our state independence, and everything that follows. But, in fact, the first and most important steps in the direction of separation from Russia have already been made, including a professional army, that didn't exist before, although it cost us a lot. Then [secondarily], the termination of the Treaty on Friendship<sup>38</sup>, which was enshrined in the constitution, [which] is a very smart decision because the next parliament, which is very likely to be anti-Ukrainian due to the populists and pro-Russian forces, may want to reverse everything, but they will not succeed in changing the constitution.

And there is also a second [possible] direction that people who do not think cannot imagine [but] I feel it with my heart. I cannot imagine [a strong] Ukraine without those steps that have been taken.

This second way is to reimpose order in the state [in the governing of Ukraine]. Let's take the new police, for instance, here in Chernivtsi. The bosses handed out plum jobs for

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<sup>36</sup> Viktor Yanukovych is a former Ukrainian statesman, politician, and the fourth President of Ukraine. After he had removed himself from his constitutional duties, he was subsequently deprived of the title of the President of Ukraine by a special law. On January 12, 2015 he was declared wanted by Interpol. On January 24, 2019, he was convicted of high treason, complicity in conducting aggressive warfare, and is now sentenced to 13 years in prison. He is currently in exile in Russia.

<sup>37</sup> The War in Donbass is an armed conflict in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine, part of the Ukrainian crisis that started in 2014. From the beginning of March 2014, protests by anti-government, pro-Russian groups took place in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts of Ukraine, collectively called the "Donbass", in the aftermath of the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the Euromaidan movement.

<sup>38</sup> The Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation is an agreement between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, which fixed the principle of strategic partnership, the recognition of the inviolability of existing borders, and respect for territorial integrity and mutual commitment not to use its territory to harm the security of each other. On September 6, 2018, the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine decided to support the proposal to terminate the Treaty with Russia. On September 17, the President of Ukraine signed the Decree "On the decision of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine ...". On December 6, 2018, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine terminated the agreement (from April 1, 2019).

bribes where they were dealing with public money. They worked on 'kickbacks'<sup>39</sup>. It was terrible.

New judicial reform has been launched [as well]<sup>40</sup>. But now they're saying: "Disband the constitutional court!" People do not understand what's even possible. It might perhaps be possible somewhere in Belarus or Russia. The court is scheduled to be in session for 5 years, only 2 years have passed so far: the Supreme Court<sup>41</sup> and Corruption Court<sup>42</sup> have just been re-elected<sup>43</sup>. But the resistance is terrible and it will continue at least for one more president's term in office. The reforms in Poland took 20 years, despite the fact that there was no war, nor was there such a high concentration of oligarchs [as in the Ukraine]. And besides, everything begins with us. Corruption begins with us! Have you ever given money to get a certificate?

**Lopata:** Never.

**Panchuk:** I confess, once I handed over 50 hryvni [~ 1.6 Euros], because I really needed one. That's where it all starts.

Then a medical reform was launched. It was followed by an educational reform. Dozens of reforms were made! Did any other president achieve so much? No! On the other hand, Poroshenko<sup>44</sup> is indeed a businessman. Let us not overlook that he was involved in bribery schemes. But he restored the state. There was a message from the former president of France relaying how negotiations were held and how Putin and Poroshenko attacked each other during the Minsk talks<sup>45</sup>. But Poroshenko still managed to arrange a break in the fighting, volunteers were killed by the hundreds while we didn't have weapons. I believe that a monument to Poroshenko will be erected after my death, and perhaps after his death. I'm 100% positive! You will see it.

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<sup>39</sup> "Kickbacks" are one of the most widespread corrupt ways of using one's official position for personal purposes in business.

<sup>40</sup> Ukraine inherited an ineffective justice system from the Soviet Union during the first decades of independence. On October 16 2019, the Ukrainian parliament approved a bill for judicial reform which changes the country's judicial governance bodies. Overall, this has been supported by international stakeholders, e.g. the council of Europe

<sup>41</sup> The Supreme Court of Ukraine is the highest judicial body in the system of courts of general jurisdiction in Ukraine. It was only established in 2017.

<sup>42</sup> The Constitutional Court of Ukraine is the sole body of constitutional jurisdiction in Ukraine. The Constitutional Court of Ukraine interprets the Constitution of Ukraine in terms of laws and other legal acts. The Court initiated its activity on October 18, 1996.

<sup>43</sup> The whole suite of reforms is expected to be implemented over a period of 5 years.

<sup>44</sup> Petro Poroshenko, in full Petro Oleksiyovych Poroshenko, (born September 26, 1965, Bolhrad, Ukraine, U.S.S.R. [now in Ukraine]), Ukrainian businessman and politician who served as president of Ukraine (2014–19), and was replaced by television personality Volodymyr Zelensky. Zelensky, an actor who had played the president of Ukraine in one of the country's most popular situation comedies, in April 2019.

<sup>45</sup> Minks talks, i.e. the 2014 Peace talks between Ukraine's government and pro-Russian rebels in Minks, which resulted in the Minks protocol, an agreement to halt the war in the Donbass region of Ukraine <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-conflict-can-the-minsk-2-peace-deal-with-russia-be-salvaged/a-52346015>

Coming back to the topic, unfortunately, we are a humiliated nation, we have been under Moscow's hoof for 300 years. And their main goal was to denationalise us. And to a large extent they succeeded. Their second goal was to keep us down. Those who were smart were taken to Moscow for work. And how do people criticise Poroshenko today? Do you read the comments on Ukrayinska Pravda [popular Ukrainian online newspaper]?

**Lopata:** I do.

**Panchuk:** Everyone is silent when alone, but together they begin to attack Poroshenko like a swarm of mosquitoes. And the comments: "Oh, so much criticism befell on Poroshenko, and I wanted to vote for him. Now I won't." That's what it's all about. And they just rub their hands with joy in the Kremlin, send bots who write all those comments against Poroshenko and say: these Ukrainians are such losers — we destroyed their economy, and they accuse Poroshenko of it all. But we are who we are. Denationalised. Disoriented. But you — young people, people of your generation, less than 30 years old — are our future.

**Lopata:** Does Ukraine have a future in Europe?

**Panchuk:** You know, it is a debatable question. I refuse to give predictions. Europeans would obviously want to have Ukraine. Something like France but in the East. At least, something like Poland. However, it is too hard to change our people, especially middle-aged and older generations. The majority will remain of the same mindset. People will remain passive because the Soviet power made them accustomed to it. Romania and Poland quickly got over it, but our parents still taught us to "keep quiet, otherwise I'll have problems". Today it has changed. There has never been such freedom of speech in Ukraine like under Poroshenko. With all his flaws, I am amazed at what he endures.

**Lopata:** Do you consider yourself European?

**Panchuk:** With a background like mine, I do.

**Lopata:** Are there any European Institutions you trust or vice versa?

**Panchuk:** I have never been a part of European politics, but I trust everyone there by default, because there is supremacy of the law there. Have you seen what happens in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe? Let's give credit to our delegation that managed to maintain a general mood against Moscow. I cannot understand it: it would be alright even if Ukraine paid those 20 million dollars to compensate everything that comes from Russia. It is not such a big amount of money for us. I do not understand how our representatives are working there. But we'll see. All institutions work based on the rule of law, so no mistakes are made in resolving issues. A man was recently discovered to have spent 40 years in jail for nothing in the USA, so he received \$21 million and was released.

**Lopata:** Do you think our life would change for the better if Ukraine joined the European Union?

**Panchuk:** I won't predict anything. You see, there are some centrifugal trends now. This is the hand of Moscow to a large extent. Moscow is getting stronger. I have recently found books on the internet where modern eminent thinkers and philosophers write about the immense danger from Moscow regarding propaganda. Its goal is to disjoint and divide Europe. They helped with Brexit, unrest in Italy and France, their traces are there, let's take yellow vests, for instance. But Macron tries to keep it quiet. Russia basically bribes politicians and public figures to say what they need in public with its oil and gas money. Recent news: "They say Ukraine has no future." Says who?

**Lopata:** After you have seen so many regimes and political forces come and go, what kind of guidance would you give to the younger generation and what mistakes would you advise us to avoid in the development of the state?

**Panchuk:** I think everything is going well. You and thousands of people like you are out there and act on your own initiative. You have not been coerced or bribed by anyone. And this gives impetus and motivation to the rest. My grandson has a friend who graduated from the Faculty of Philology and now works as a freelancer. She creates computer graphics, advertising, and so on. She does not count on a populist ideology: "The state has to give us something, the state has to provide us with something" — that's what we are like. We have to feel happy that things happened the way they did. Because it could have turned out differently. Everything was hanging by a thread for a while. Even in those days of 2014, when Moscow advised Yanukovich to simply send tanks to the Maidan<sup>46</sup>. Putin would do it. Yanukovich was afraid of the consequences, perhaps there was still some humanity left in him<sup>47</sup>. I do not know the reason why it didn't happen. That could have been the end. The best of the nation's youth could have died on the Maidan. We were hanging by a thread and we survived.

**Lopata:** By the way, speaking about culture, it has begun to thrive since 2014-2015.

**Panchuk:** But there was no freedom like we have nowadays. We have complete freedom of speech today: the government and the president are heavily criticised and nothing happens. Do you remember the case of Saakashvili, when the crowd took him away from the police<sup>48</sup>, who received an order not to touch anyone and not to beat him. It had never happened before... And then they will look back and think with regret: "Oh, how great it was in Poroshenko's time".

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<sup>46</sup> Maidan (or EuroMaidan) was a wave of national and patriotic protests in Ukraine, which, first of all, aimed against corruption, the arbitrariness of law enforcement bodies, in support of the European vector of the foreign policy of Ukraine.

<sup>47</sup> The protests began on November 21, 2013 as a reaction to the Yanukovich government's refusal to sign the EU Association Agreement. A series of violent dispersals of the protesters took place on Maidan. It resulted in the deaths of dozens of Ukrainian activists (including the so-called Heavenly Hundred). Maidan as a concept is associated with the Revolution of Dignity.

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-42236122>

**Lopata:** It is important not only to regret what hasn't been done but to look ahead. Thank you for this conversation. It was extremely interesting. You told me a lot about the things I wouldn't have dared to ask you about. The only thing I forgot to ask you is why you dedicated your life to chemistry, given that you have always been a politically active person and Olha Kobylanska was your grandmother. You could have been a writer, if not a politician, but you chose chemistry.

**Panchuk:** The story is straight-forward. My brother was in the war. After he returned he had to enrol in university in 1945. At home we discussed which department he should choose. Front-line soldiers were accepted into university without exams. When our father was released from the Romanian camps, he tried to earn some money: he had a small dairy shop on Kobylanska Street. But it didn't work out because of strong competition and excessively high taxes. Then he wanted to rent a field for one year, sow some beetroot seeds, then deliver it for sugar and sell it. Life was difficult at that time, we didn't even have bread. My father didn't succeed in business, but his friend had a chemical workshop. My father advised my brother to study chemistry, my brother obeyed and I followed my brother. My brother prepared me well and that is why I passed the entrance exams easily. That's how it happened.

Then I pursued a career in teaching, but in the 70-80's there was a turning point when I became interested in public affairs. Although I was always interested in it, I remember how in 1950, when we were still small, my brother and I listened to something about the Korean War on American radio. We were worried. So I have it in my blood. But my brother's life story had a great influence on me. When he became a postgraduate student, some party members nominated him for a position on the City Council. He could not refuse, because he was chosen. And then the Chairman of the Party Committee gathered all of the deputies together and said: "If you have been chosen by the people, then you have to work for them. You will have reception days and you have to help the people." With a pure and sincere soul, my brother took this job, receiving people [asking for help]. After 6 months he came to me and said that some people whose window had been broken by hooligans had come to him for help. It was impossible to buy the materials to repair it. My brother called some building organisation and told them what he needed. He was told that they couldn't give it to him. Even though they had glass, they had their own plans for it. The same with boards and cement. My brother said that he helped practically no one. Years passed and at one of the sessions he described his situation. All of the deputies admitted that they had the same problem. All they said was that it was because the country was rising and being built, it's communism... And it was all the same afterwards. My brother went to the Chairman of the City Council, and said: "If you don't help me then you don't need me. What for? To come once a year and listen to your instructions?" Next time, when the regular session took place, I remember, a postcard came from the City Council: "We request your presence since you are not fulfilling your obligations". But my brother didn't come any more and eventually he was discharged. One needs some courage to do it.

There were other cases. When his son went to a Ukrainian school in which Physical Education was taught in Russian, my brother went to the principal and said that this was a Ukrainian school and therefore the language of instruction should be Ukrainian. He asked to find a teacher who spoke Ukrainian. Physical education was probably not taught in Ukrainian in Russian schools. The principal asked him to come back in two weeks. And when my brother did so, he said that he hadn't found the teacher: "Physical education is conducted in Russian all over Ukraine. I cannot do anything". Then my brother said that he would take his son out of school and he would go to school in Mamayivtsi village. My brother would give him a ride every day to and from school. A new teacher of Physical Education appeared in the next 10 days. These were very courageous deeds at that time. My brother, that's who I learned from. My brother was my teacher in life as well as for my sense of civic duty.

**Lopata:** Can you tell me more about your work at the university? What about your students: are you satisfied with them, or do they cause you frustration?

**Panchuk:** I defended my doctoral thesis in 1986. That is when I was nominated for the Head of the Department of Organic Chemistry and the Dean of the Faculty of Chemistry. I spent these two terms helping my students get on their feet. All [of whom I helped] became assistant professors under my leadership, four of them became Doctors of Sciences and I planned to make one of them a vice-rector. I stayed only as a professor at the university. In 1991, when independent Ukraine was formed, and the communist departments like the History of the CPSU were liquidated, Professor Taras Kiyak came to the rectorate with a plan to create a centre for Bukovina studies. It would be aimed at studying the true history of [the] Bukovina [region]<sup>49</sup>, which was spread across different states [today between Romania and Ukraine]. The rectorate agreed and provided us with some facilities. Kiyak also proposed that I become the head of this centre. I had worked with people of different nationalities and therefore had some experience. I became the head, because I was Bukovinian, while Professor Kiyak was not — it was a serious thing. By the time [president] Yanukovych came in, we received enough funding to maintain 3-4 scholars who would publish books, write articles, and participate in international conferences. I myself was an active participant as well. This lasted until 2010. Then another topic for the next 2 or 3 years was chosen and agreed upon. It was "The role of the newspaper *Bukovina*, founded by Fedkovych [Ukrainian romantic writer of the 19th century]<sup>50</sup>, in the formation of Ukrainian identity in Bukovina". We had to study it all. We were only waiting for the regional administration to be formed, because elections were still going on. The new district leader had to be elected. He was chosen. Then our funding was denied, even though we had

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<sup>49</sup> Bukovina (Bukowina) is a historical region on the northern slopes of the northeastern Carpathian Mountains and the adjoining plains. Chernivtsi is the capital of the Bukovina region.

<sup>50</sup> Yuri Fedkovych was a Ukrainian romantic writer of the 19th century, a representative of the Ukrainian national renaissance in Bukovina. He lived in Chernivtsi, and the main university of Chernivtsi is named after him.

already gotten their [the regional administration's] consent. The reason was that we focused not on the Ukrainian or Soviet parts of the history of Bukovina, but concentrated mainly on the Austrian and Romanian periods, which [however] was logical, given the length of the Austrian and Romanian periods in Bukovina. Then the inspectorate was sent to us to check if we used the funding properly. I didn't take a single penny myself, I was the head on a voluntary basis. Then they sent another inspector from the Security Service of Ukraine<sup>51</sup>. What was he looking for there? He talked to me for a long time.

I told him one thing, that the sort of people who had come to power were ruining Ukraine by not allowing engagement in culture. He made a helpless gesture and walked away. We didn't get the funding. Then they said they would release some money on the condition that the Bukovina Study Center had a new head. I resigned, but after a few months everything went cold. We didn't receive the money that we were promised. It's only now that people from the Faculty of History have restored the Center on a voluntary basis. Together with architects, historians, and scholars we did a lot of work of very high quality. Colleagues from foreign countries were surprised at how thoroughly we were studying our history. They [also] said: "With all your troubles in Chernivtsi, it is a great piece of good fortune that the Ukrainian state has had no money to rebuild the city. In Vienna, for example, many examples of historic architecture have been demolished. We regret it, and all of yours is preserved, so take care of it. Once you become richer, you'll be able to restore everything and bring it back into proper shape".

**Panchuk:** This is Europeanness, that's how it started: I was on a first-name basis with colleagues and the head of the Bukovina Institute in Augsburg [research institute]. He passed away, but his deputy still sends me the books that he wrote about Bukovina after retirement. This Bukovina Institute in Augsburg was well-funded, because there were lots of migrants from Bukovina sent to Augsburg and the neighbouring territories in the 1940s by the Germans. They accounted for 10-15 per cent of the total population, and thus could influence elections. So, in order to curry favour with this segment of voters, the authorities decided to allocate money: the Institute had a separate building and its research fellows traveled all over the world. They constantly visited us. Not a month went by they didn't come to us. They helped us with what they could: old equipment. We didn't know what the fax was, not to mention a computer, it appeared here for the first time in 1999. We didn't have a phone. We installed it with our own money later.

All this formed my identity. But I saw that my then deputy Serhiy Osachuk had outdone me when he became the honorary consul of Austria in Chernivtsi. In fact, I sowed the grain that grew higher than I myself. Together with the related organisations in Germany and Austria we have arranged that they would take 2-5 of our students every month for language courses there.

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<sup>51</sup> The Security Service of Ukraine is a state special-purpose body with law-enforcement functions that ensures the state security of Ukraine. It is subordinated to the President of Ukraine.

**Lopata:** I was one of those students.

**Panchuk:** Were you?

**Lopata:** Indeed. The grain you have sowed then is still growing.

**Panchuk:** Do you remember the interviews we held with the candidates? And do you remember the questions? They were not only about culture, but also about the history of Germany and Austria, the current political situation, and so on. And we did all of that in Chernivtsi: we took part in various literary, cultural, historical and other conferences, released publications in the press and reports at the conferences. We published a lot of books, mainly through Austrian and German funding. They were books about the history of Chernivtsi and Bukovina, which were quite rare. They also paid for the translations. This all made Bukovina the object of cultural and political life. We also ensured that the governments of Austria and Germany sent their lecturers to us at the Bukovina Study Center. They had their headquarters in the Bukovina Study Center.

**Lopata:** You see, the work that you started still resonates today. It is one more reason why Chernivtsi is considered a European city.

**Panchuk:** I personally interviewed the candidates and didn't allow any corruption. There were many calls, even through the rector, but it didn't help, everything was fair. I ensured that the dictation was read by a German lecturer who was incorruptible. He also assessed it. We created an independent commission.

Little by little, we rolled the boulder up the hill, and drew Bukovina toward the West. I do not idealise the West. There are many different kinds of politicians and indifferent people there too. I understand that people are different. 90% of people there had never heard of Ukraine before these events. Not everyone is ready to selflessly work for Ukraine. Therefore, the future of Ukraine is the same as of Europe. I do not think that the European Union will collapse. Individual states may and will leave it, but geopolitically, most people understand that there are huge benefits to the borderless zone, of course, if these migration flows are stopped. I read the number of migrants has decreased by 10 times in comparison with last year. Germany has made the right policy: it hires foreigners, including Ukrainians, but requires all the necessary documentation.

**Lopata:** Let's hope for the better, and carry on contributing to further development as long as we've got the muscle. Thank you for the conversation, it was really very interesting.

THE END

P.S.

**Lopata:** We have been talking for a good 2 hours.

**Panchuk:** What is the maximum recording time?

**Lopata:** 46 hours, it's a very long time.

**Panchuk:** Wow. I remember how we were called out by the prosecutor during the times of the Movement, when we were organizing some mass meetings or filing some applications. We understood that press will later make us look like some adherents of Bandera. So we came to the prosecutor with the tape recorder and he said "I won't talk on tape". And I said "The epoch of publicity!". That's it.