



# Stichting Nederlandse Onafhankelijkheid

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## **Dutch Independence speech (Nederlandse Onafhankelijkheidsrede)**

**By Andrey Kurkov**

**Pronounced during the Dutch Independence celebration on July 26<sup>th</sup> 2022**

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### **APPLYING THE PAST TO THE FUTURE**

On April 5, 1710, the newly elected hetman of Ukraine, Pylyp Orlyk, signed a document known as the "Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk."

In the text of the document, the territory of the state is called Ukraine, the Cossack Army Lands, Little Russia. The same document describes in detail the would-be structure of power in Ukraine:

“Legislative power is granted to the General Council, which acts as a parliament and includes general foremen, civilian colonels from cities, general advisers (delegates from regiments from prudent and meritorious people), regimental foremen, centurions and representatives of the Zaporozhzhia Sich (Article 6). The General Council is to work in sessions, three times a year - in January (for Christmas), April (for Easter) and October (for the Intercession). At its meeting, the General Council would consider the issue of the security of the state, the common good, and other public affairs, would hear the reports of the hetman, the issue of no confidence in him, and, on the recommendation of the hetman, would elect a general foreman.”

In the same document Pylyp Orlyk promised to save the Ukrainian people from corruption and money-grubbing and from the arbitrary behaviour of officials and the military.

This document could be evidence of the Ukraine's European development in the early 18th century, if not for one thing. It was written on the territory of present-day Moldova after the troops of the previous Ukrainian hetman, Ivan Mazepa, and the army of the Swedish king Karl 12 were defeated near Poltava by the Russian troops of Peter the Great. The "Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk" never became a reality for 18th century Ukraine. It can be called the "constitution of dreams." From this document, we can identify the many problems of Ukrainian society of that time, which could not be resolved by the forces of the military-political elite of Ukraine partly due to the immaturity of this elite, but also because of the need to constantly fight for the independence of the Ukrainian state.

Few people in Europe know that the history of Ukraine does not coincide with the history of the Russian Federation. Perhaps some people in Europe remember that Kyiv is 1540 years old, while Moscow is only 875 years old. Maybe some people even know that Moscow was built by Kyiv's Prince Yuri Dolgorukiy, who is buried in Kyiv.

But few people know that at the beginning of the 17th century Ukrainian lands were not part of the Moscow principality. They were part of the kingdom of Poland, but the Ukrainian Cossacks successfully fought for the independence of Ukraine. The Ukrainians did not want to submit to foreign tsars and kings, but neither did they want to have their own tsar. They elected, at Cossack



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meeting, the chief commander and leader of Ukraine, who had the title of Hetman. Together with the hetman, the Cossacks chose the senior officers of their troops. In the middle of the 17th century, the diplomatic service of Cossack Ukraine began to work and the first ambassadors went to Constantinople to the Turkish Sultan. The diplomatic correspondence of the hetmans and sultans was found in the Istanbul archives and studied in detail by the American historian of Ukrainian origin, the founder and long-term head of the department of Ukrainian studies at Harvard, the famous historian Omelyan Pritsak. Omelyan Pritsak was born in the independent Western Ukrainian People's Republic in 1919 and liked to say that he would not die until Ukraine regained its independence. He lived a long life, waited for the new independence of Ukraine and even managed to teach the history of Ukraine for several years at the Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv – what a delight for the students and faculty in newly independent Ukraine!

Independent Ukraine of the 17th-18th centuries lasted a little over a hundred years and was finally destroyed by Catherine II.

In the document called “Pylyp Orlyk’s Constitution”, the third article is of particular interest to me. I will read a few lines from it for you:

“Since we always need neighborly friendship with the Crimean state, with whose help to the Zaporizhzhia Army has more than once succeeded in defending its territory, then, for how long it will be possible, the Most Serene Hetman, through his ambassadors, to the clearest mercy of the Khan of Crimean, should vouchsafe the restoration of the ancient from the Crimean a state of brotherhood and military unity and the confirmation of eternal friendship, looking at which neighboring states would not dare to seek to enslave Ukraine or ever inflict violence on it. After the end of the war, when God will help, with the peace we desire and expect, the newly elected hetman, who has settled in his residence, must strictly watch, obliging his government to this, so that friendship and brotherhood with the Crimean state are not violated in any way because of our self-willed and frivolous people who are accustomed not only to neighborly harmony and friendship, but also to destroy peaceful alliances.»

In the 16-18 centuries, the Crimean Tatars often acted as allies of Ukraine in its struggle for independence during the wars with Poland and the Muscovite kingdom. The independent Crimean Khanate was taken over by Russia under Catherine II in the late 18th century, at the same time that Ukraine became part of the Moscow kingdom.

Since then, first Tsarist Russia, then the Soviet Union, populated Crimea with Russian-speaking people from different regions in order to keep the indigenous Crimean Tatar population under total control and in a demographic minority. To deprive them of the very memory of their independence and statehood.

In the Russian-Ukrainian war, which began with the annexation of Crimea, the Crimean Tatars again took the side of Ukraine. They protested the annexation, knowing that they were entering into an unequal battle. In 1991, they accepted the independence of Crimea from the USSR as part of the independence of Ukraine and linked their plans and lives with the Ukrainian state, which did not always reciprocate their Ukrainian patriotism.

That third paragraph of the Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk on the need for friendship with the Crimean Tatars remains and will forever remain relevant for the Ukrainian state.

Among the numerous Crimean Tatar activists who did not accept the Russian annexation of Crimea and were convicted on falsified charges, there are a dozen of journalists. Among them is the



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journalist and politician Nariman Dzhelal, who has been in a Russian prison since September 5 last year, accused of preparing and committing a terrorist act. Since last year, with the help of his wife Leviza and his lawyer, I have been corresponding with Nariman. Court hearings continue, right now, at which the prosecutor demands 20 years in prison for Nariman Djelyal. And it was during the breaks between court sessions that Nariman wrote me a letter, which I want to quote here in full. A letter with his reflections on independent Ukraine.

“I am a Crimean Tatar. Citizen of Ukraine. I am 42 years old. I grew up, and became a professional journalist and public figure in independent Ukraine. I have witnessed its failures and achievements, mistakes and attempts to correct them.

Unfortunately, many of these mistakes have resulted in Ukraine fighting for its very existence, sacrificing the lives of thousands of civilians and soldiers.

The Kremlin never hid its imperial ambitions. Its actions aimed at limiting the sovereignty of Ukraine - its freely chosen vector of development have been clearly visible for a long time, with the naked eye.

One of Kyiv’s mistakes was to neglect the desire of the Crimean Tatars - the indigenous people of Ukraine - to realize the right to self-determination in the form of national autonomy within Ukraine.

In the end, this allowed Russia to put on a show with the “referendum” of the inhabitants of Crimea in 2014.

However, I see that Ukraine is striving to improve. It is obvious not only for me, but also for thousands of my compatriots, the vast majority of whom believe in the end of the occupation. We believe that Ukraine will learn well the lesson that has cost her so dearly.

And this is a lesson not only for Ukraine, but for the entire free world. The Kremlin does not hide its aggressive intentions towards the Baltic countries and Moldova. The Kremlin threatens Finland and Sweden. And we now have confirmation that these threats must be taken very seriously.

The restoration and preservation of the integrity and independence of Ukraine, the success of the Ukrainian army and the development of European Ukraine are key to the success of the entire free world. This will be a victory for democracy and international law.

The policy of appeasement with Hitler led to a world war just under a century ago. The then European leaders were self-confident and preferred the interests of their own countries to the common interests. They miscalculated. Hasn't Europe learned that lesson, merciless as this lesson is in its cruelty?

After all, today Ukrainian soldiers with weapons in their hands are defending the ideals and principles laid down in the foundation of United Europe, in the foundation of the UN.

Any help to Ukraine today contributes to freedom of democratic countries, to their own future, to their own security.”

Our thoughts are with Nariman Dzhelal and all Crimean Tartars who are persecuted by Russia for their political beliefs.

In recent months, during each of my trips to Europe, in any city, I look around in search of the Ukrainian flag. Sometimes, when I don't see it on the buildings of the mayor's office or in the



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windows of houses, my heart sinks and becomes restless. From my recent impressions I remember two huge Ukrainian flags on either side of the entrance to the giant building of the city hall of Brest in French Brittany, a huge flag of Ukraine on the city hall of Morlaix,

the absence of a Ukrainian flag on the city hall of Montpellier, but four Ukrainian flags waving on the Opera House in the same city of Provence.

This is how Europe and the world support Ukraine, support Ukrainian independence and statehood.

Up to eight million Ukrainian refugees in Europe and on other continents look up at those Ukrainian flags and gazing upon them, remember their homes, they remember relatives and friends who have remained in Ukraine, perhaps, even in occupied areas – regions of their native land seized by Russian aggressors.

I remember the story of two Ukrainian flags in Severodonetsk in 2015. Then, on the main street of the city - on Gvardeisky Avenue - there was a small cafe, the owner of which was Tanya. She had moved to Ukraine from the Russian city of Sochi. The separatists and the Russian military failed to capture Severodonetsk then, they were stopped a few kilometers away from the city. Tanya, as a sign of support for the Ukrainian army, put up Ukrainian flags on both sides of the entrance to her cafe. Someone stole them in the night. She found new ones and put them up. The next morning they were gone again. So she began to hang her Ukrainian flags up when she opened the café in the morning and taking them off again when she closed in the evening.

So, people in Severodonetsk could see from afar whether the cafe was open or not.

What's more, people driving along Guards Avenue on their way to work at the Azot plant - now destroyed by the Russian invaders - saw the flags and understood that Ukrainian authorities still controlled Severodonetsk.

When I first went to the café to meet Tanya, I asked her for the Wi-Fi password. "glory to Ukraine!" she replied. I responded to her exclamation, as one should, saying: "Glory to the Heroes!" and again asked about the password for Wi-Fi. "Glory to Ukraine – that's the password," she told me smiling.

I don't know where Tanya is now, whether she is alive. I know that there are no Ukrainian flags hanging in Severodonetsk today. But this is temporary. The flags of the occupiers rarely linger in occupied territories. The other day, a young guy came out to the center of the occupied Melitopol and, in front of everyone, pulled out the Ukrainian flag and wrapped it around himself. Of course, he was immediately seized by the Russian military. But not before dozens of local residents had seen him and even managed to photograph this moment of courage - this manifestation of personal will and independence even in the most dangerous of circumstances.

The Ukrainian flag has become universally familiar. Flying over foreign lands, it attracts attention and suggest to citizens the political position of their governments, their leaders. And, I think, looking at the Ukrainian flags, they must wonder how it is that this small country has defended itself and how it is not afraid of the Russian army, which is many times superior in terms of the number of soldiers and weapons? Perhaps when they see that flag they also wonder what makes Ukrainians, who are traditionally dissatisfied with their politicians, their corruption, their oligarchs, sacrifice their lives for the freedom and independence of their country?



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It's easy for me to understand. Because I am Ukrainian. Because I can't imagine how one can exchange freedom of speech, freedom of thought or freedom of religion for police-state stability and slavish silence. But besides this, it is easy for me to understand my compatriots because Ukrainians have a dream – a vision of their country, not only as independent and free from corruption, but as a European Ukraine, as a member of the European Union. Russia is trying not only to crush this dream - it wants to crush the dreamers, its executors, too. In Ukraine, on a personal level, the time it takes for a dream to become reality is much shorter than in other countries. When a Ukrainian dreams, he immediately plans. The dream becomes a business plan. Ukrainians believe in their strength, in their plans and in their dreams.

This is what distinguishes them from the Russians, who today have one dream, derived from the mouth of the new "Kremlin dreamer" Vladimir Putin - the dream of reviving the great Russian Empire and dominating the world.

While seemingly alien Ukrainian flags are flying over European territories, the flags of the Russian Empire are flying on the occupied territory of Ukraine, on the territory of Ukrainian Crimea, annexed in 2014. I can assure you that Ukrainians who find themselves in the occupied territories looking at those Russian flags see them completely differently from the way Europeans see the flags of Ukraine. Russian flags over Ukrainian soil mark territory that Russia wants to steal, as it has already stolen territory from Moldova and from Georgia. The Russian flag recently fluttered on the Ukrainian Snake Island, off the coast of Odessa region. Now the Ukrainian flag is flying there again. So, it will be everywhere.

Rereading the document “The Constitution of Pylyp Orlik”, signed in early April 1710, I came across another very important point for today:

“... so that in the treaties of His Majesty with the State of Moscow it should be stated that our prisoners, who are now in the State of Moscow, should be returned to us free at the end of the war, and all the losses inflicted on Ukraine during the current war by Moscow should be paid and fairly compensated.”

It seems to be amazing how a document written more than 300 years ago can still be relevant today! But in fact, it remains relevant only because neither Ukraine's nor Russia's geopolitical priorities have changed over that time. Ukraine continues to fight for its independence. Russia, whose president has suddenly and certainly not accidentally fallen in love with Tsar Peter the Great, continues to try to take this independence from Ukraine by force.

Vladimir Putin is not Peter the Great, and today's Ukraine is not the Ukraine of the time of Hetman Mazepa in 1710. Ukraine must win the new Battle of Poltava, so that finally all the points of the "Constitution of Pylyp Orlyk", including the points on the fight against corruption and arbitrariness, can be fulfilled.

Andrey Kurkov

Wassenaar, July 26<sup>th</sup> 2022