There is a great temptation to begin the list of the challenges with the geopolitical problems. Indeed, today, the whole world is undergoing transition from the former bipolar system to a new one, whose outline is being determined. The post-socialist Central European and Baltic states are joining the European Union — the community of developed democracies; Ukraine, too, has made clear its European aspirations. However, in the expression "joining the community of developed democracies," the word key is "democracy," not "joining."

In the modern sense, democracy means a rule of law state, socially-oriented economy, decent standard of living of the population, protection of private property, freedom of enterprise and developed civil society. It is primarily built within the country, and the above-mentioned community of developed democracies accepts such a country as a friend or a foe, depending on its progress in building democracy. Not all democratic societies are EU members — but all enjoy the authority sufficient for provision of their national interests on the European and global scene precisely because they are globally recognised as democratic.

Ukraine, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of the post-socialist Central European and Baltic states, will not become an EU member next year. Not due to a great geopolitical pressure, but not receiving EU's willingness to see Ukraine as its member but because a country that has not attained the required level of economic development; has not guaranteed its citizens a decent, by the standards of developed democracies, standard of living and protection of human rights; that on the international scene is often associated with such words as "corruption," "thennysks" and "administrative resources" will never become a member of a community of democracy. It will remain a final slide to authoritarianism, or as a system of common values.

Therefore, the main challenge for Ukraine comes not from outside but from inside, is of a domestic nature and lies in the inconsistency of its present state with the criteria accepted in the democratic world. The current ruling political elite of Ukraine did not answer this challenge, although it had both enough time and more than enough power.

Now they should be decisive for Ukraine not because the enlarged EU is closing its borders, and the chance to join it will fade away for an indefinite period, but because that will be the year of the presidential elections, that is, a chance to change the political team. Can any of the political leaders who have already decided to run for the presidency in the 2004 elections make a radical and rapid breakthrough to European values? Hardly. The inertia of 12 years of independence is too strong, the methods and goals of the leaders, both loyal to the authorities and oppositional, are too similar.

The shock for the overwhelming majority of citizens as a result of the unjustified and largely overstated expectations of the early 1990s is too deep. Indeed, society appeared unequal, deprived for freedom and independence, in every sense of these words. Having been deprived for generations of democratic traditions, the ethos of private ownership and, finally, a sense of personal civic dignity, it could not be ready for that.

But — the political elite exists to show society the solutions for emerging problems, to consolidate society and to lead it. The ruling elite failed to do this: on the contrary, it took full advantage of the split in society, its unpreparedness to live in the conditions of functioning democracy. All this led to social apathy and the lack of belief by citizens in their ability to change anything in their own country, the doubt of half of the population in statehood itself, its necessity and effectiveness.

This apathy and disbelief are already complicating the forthcoming presidential campaign. Even if a candidate willing to establish true democracy in the country wins the elections, it will be a very difficult for him to public trust and consolidate society for the attainment of the national idea as specified in the Constitution — the building of a democratic, rule of law, socially-oriented state.

We have to be realistic. Ukraine should not expect a one-time breakthrough after the 2004 elections. The main thing is to keep the situation in the country under control and prevent a final slide to authoritarianism.

Because of this it is vitally important to ensure that the elections actually take place, for their maximally open, transparent character and prevent the focus of the discussion in the course of the election campaign solely on foreign policy issues — a trend and preconditions that are already visible. It is also important to realise what we and our political elite are, what to do and how to do it, for society and the political elite to be able to finally reach a consensus with each other and within themselves.

Is it worth judging our elite harshly? On one hand, it is what we are, the entire society in miniature. A cross-section. A reduction. We ourselves empowered the political elite to rule the state, or at least we did not strongly oppose its election or appointment to executive positions. On the other hand — nobody authorised people representing the present ruling minority to take a burden beyond their strength and carry it on when it turned out that it really was beyond their strength.

Were there many instances of voluntary resignation from high posts because of the inconsistency between high moral standards and the possibilities of a weak human being? Or to protest against the gap between the declarations and actions of the ruling elite?

The political elite: its authority and power

Elite — a group of people regarded as the best in a particular society or organisation.

(Explanatory dictionary)

Elite — a group of people regarded as the best in a particular society or organisation.

The role, social functions and responsibility of the political elite are always at the centre of discussion, but this discussion becomes especially acute at the transitional stages of society's development. At such moments, the role of the political elite becomes critical, if not decisive — to answer the challenges of the time of changes.

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The political elite: its authority and power

Elite — a group of people regarded as the best

Two traits of democracy are worthy of notice in the context of the discussion about the political elite. First: under democracy, the duty and right to rule are assumed voluntarily. According to the American historian and political scientist Samuel H. Beer, "voluntary authority is a pre-condition for true democracy." Winston Churchill: "Democracy is the worst form of government that man has ever devised, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time."

While the political elite is in power, it is responsible for those who rule, and on the other hand, those who deserve to rule to have such an opportunity. If one does not rule, it is because he is not worthy of this responsibility; if one rules, it is because he is worthy of it.

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The “new” old elite

The contemporary tragedy of the former Soviet country is that it has not yet made the leap to a state as an egoistic ruling class indifferent to the common good, which never preceded the state as a moral personality that threatened its privileges —
the laws of the market economy, or simply the establishment of the all-sufficient values of an individual person. (J.Leddon)

The present political elite of Ukraine is merely, if not solely, identified by the formal indicator. It does not enjoy public recognition, authority or noticeable support in society.

The lack of competitiveness for the actions of the authorities (both institutions of power and private individuals) does not exceed 8-11%, only 6% of citizens reported a positive attitude to the present ruling elite of Ukraine, the majority (53%) sticks to the opposite opinion, and almost a third (30%) is absolutely indifferent to the ruling elite.

None of the top statesmen, none of the political leaders, neither loyal to the authorities nor oppositional, has a chance to be elected President in the first round, “if the elections book is read properly”, therefore, does not exist, and the confidence in national and support of the majority of citizens, in contrast to Poland, the Czech Republic or the Baltic states, has not become the state of a “critical mass” of the political elite. We calculated that among the people appointed to the key positions in the system of governance in 1991-2003 (Prime Minister, Vice Prime Minister, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, Head of the Presidential Administration), products of the Communist, Soviet, economic and Komsomol nomenklatura of the Soviet period made up 73%; among those who occupied (or occupy) the positions of heads of regional state administrations since 1995 — almost 80%. As far as its bureaucratic component is concerned, according to the [Ukrainian] National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS), 52% and 46% of executives of local and central bodies of power in Ukraine, respectively, have been in state service since Soviet times.

Another component of Ukraine’s political elite is made up of the representatives of the “new bourgeoisie”. The main task of its representatives was to find a “common language” with the authorities for the conversion of power into property, and of property — into still greater power. The fundamental similarity of motives and tasks created the preconditions for the symbiosis of the nomenklatura and the “new bourgeoisie”.

Self-interested behaviour of the ruling elite proved extremely effective at attaining of its goal — formulation and protection of personal interests. This was clearly demonstrated, for instance, by the mechanism of privatisation implemented in Ukraine. According to expert estimates, 47% of big and medium enterprises were sold for privatisation certificates; 18 million citizens became their formal owners. The price of a certificate ranged between $2 and $10. In reality, today, the enterprises belong to a small group of oligarchs. This means that almost half of the Ukrainian population participated in the transfer of the social wealth of the country to the private sector. Some oligarchs, using the advantages of their position, bought (or sold) enterprises in one state, and sold (or bought) their “own” enterprises in another state.

The “new” old elite[b] has become a sign of respectability for the new political elite. Decoration with church awards, sponsorship of church construction in the homeland and mass circulation of “own” works, demonstrative consumption, purchase of “noble” titles. These marginal traits are characteristic both in society and in the political elite. However, since the elite is public, despite all its secrecy arrangements, its tribalism and complexes are, first of all, well seen by society, and, second, due to the limitation of the circle of the ruling elite, these traits are especially vivid.

Outward religiosity has become a sign of respectability for the present political elite. Decoration with church awards, sponsorship of church construction in the homeland and mass circulation of “own” works have become usual phenomena among political figures. It is clear, however, that the seeming ascent of religiosity does not mean the ascent of morality. The worst thing is that such outward religiosity is actually promoted by the Church.

The pragmatism of the “new old” elite borders on cynicism, its ambition — on vanity, its effectiveness — on aggressiveness. It is doomed to reproduce the models and patterns of behaviour accessible to k, formed under Communist party rule, overburdened with the marginal complexes and superimposed “criminal laws” of the new bourgeoisie.

Such an elite could only organize a political system meeting its standards — and it did.

A political regime meeting the elite’s standards

Every succeeding political regime knows how to be better than its predecessor. It knows the weak points of the previous system. The would-be elite may be noble — “we are not like them.” Or it may not.

The Ukrainian post-Soviet elite chose the latter way. The period of “democratic euphoria” in Ukraine did not last long. Beginning in the late 1990s, the authoritarian trends in the activity of the part of the political elite grouped around President L.Kuchma began to gain strength. The parliamentary elections in 1998 and 2002 and the presidential elections in 1999 were increasingly undemocratic, as a result of the application of the administrative resource and “dirty” political technologies by the authorities. Those acts were aimed at the replenishment or partial “renewal” of the ruling elite with loyal individuals and the prevention of the enhancement of the political weight of the counterelite — the opposition. As a result, the following became the specific traits and “national features” of the present political system.

Inadequate representation of social interests. The newly-established political institutions appeared democratic only in their form — their content does not meet the criteria of modern democracy. Consequently, today, no governing, public or political institution in Ukraine adequately represents the interests of citizens.

For instance, the representation of social interests in Parliament is becoming increasingly distorted. First of all, the fractional structure of the Verkhovna Rada, and especially the balance of the ruling and opposition elite representatives, does not correspond to the political choice of citizens, due to illegitimate factors. Second, having come to Parliament, many deputies lose connection with their voters and consider themselves free from the slogans and promises proclaimed during the election campaign.

The pragmatism of the “new old” elite is confirmed by the oligarchs controlling the most profitable enterprises and the majority of citizens. According to the official data, the ratio of the prosperity of the richest 10% to the most destitute 10% of citizens is 7:1, while a gap two-and-half times smaller is acceptable to be assumed, from the viewpoint of public opinion.

Nonetheless, such an elite could only organize a political system meeting its standards — and it did.

As a result of the transformation, the oligarchs organized the political system in such a way that the power is concentrated in the hands of the elite, and the electorate is deprived of any real possibility of influence on the results of elections. The oligarchs repeatedly monopolize the decision-making process, which is further complicated by the lack of any legal norm regulating the actions of the ruling elite.

The oligarchs adopt a policy that is in line with their interests, and this policy is often at odds with the interests of the wider population. The oligarchs are interested in maintaining their dominant position and increasing their power and influence. They use their resources and influence to manipulate the political system, and they often engage in corruption and abuse of power to maintain their position.

The oligarchs use their influence to shape the political agenda and to control the media, which further limits the ability of the electorate to hold the oligarchs accountable. The oligarchs also use their influence to shape the legal system, and they often use legal means to protect their interests and undermine the interests of the wider population.

The oligarchs’ actions have had a significant impact on the political system in Ukraine. They have created a situation where the power is concentrated in the hands of a small elite, and the electorate is deprived of any real possibility of influence on the results of elections. The oligarchs’ actions have also contributed to the corruption and abuse of power, and they have limited the ability of the electorate to hold the oligarchs accountable.
the national-patriotic tendency had no experience of state governance, much less any experience of state building, and finally concentrated on the introduction of the formal signs of statehood. The idea was demonstration, as the application of methods of administrative and forcible pressure against opposition political leaders and restriction of their access to the media. For instance, after the 2002 parliamentary elections, live airtime with known politicians where the opposition could present its opinion actually disappeared from the national TV channels. Administrative and forcible pressure is also applied to the businessmen who support the political opposition or whom the opposition represents.

The value system of the new elite

Voting for independence, many of us, if not the majority, voted for a democratic, law-ruled, socially oriented state. Which in the end was fixed in Ukraine's Constitution. It definitely and clearly: democracy, the supremacy of law, socially oriented market economy and real independence from the USSR.

democratisation, civil rights, freedom of small and medium business... And nearby, in Poland and Czechoslovakia — "velvet" revolutions, "return to Europe" and so forth, or, more accurately, about the meaning of independence as seen by its participants. One should just recall the slogans of the five years that preceded the referendum: socialism with a human face, democracy with dignity, and finally, in the 1990s, the desire for a "better life".

According to the polls, presently, 11% of the youth state that they do not submit to moral norms; 21% ignore the law; and 25% believe that the level and quality of education are not done so even now?

Foreign policy proclaims the strategic course of Euro-Atlantic integration and accession to the EU. In practice, however, the documents on joining the SES are being signed, which a system of administrative democracy has been established in the country, whereby democratic norms exist only on paper, and in reality, the authorities exert ever more control over the authorities.

If the opposition today mirrors the actions of the authorities, can it become a truly new elite? Won't it act in the same way, having come to power? Hardly.

And, that, which follows...

(Ernest Gellner)

Answer: that, which follows.

...what is worse than socialism?

The oppositional political elite: familiar traits in a looking glass

The oppositional political elite claims the role of a truly new elite. To be sure, the very existence of the institutionalised political opposition represented in Parliament is a positive phenomenon. The existence of the political opposition makes the socio-political process in the country more dynamic; shows the presence of alternative views among the political elite; and creates opportunities for control over the actions of the authorities through parliamentary activity, opposition media and public forums. This makes the authorities more transparent and to some extent prevents abuses on their part.

At the same time, the Ukrainian opposition generally has the same roots as the ruling elite, and therefore bears many traits of the latter. Parliamentary factions of the opposition political elite are representatives of big and medium business, for whom the main essence of their parliamentary activity lies in the protection of their business by political means, the desire to avoid re-division of property or diminish the resultant losses.

Just like the authorities, the opposition tends to practise politics behind the scenes. The examples include the support by some opposition factions for the programme of the former President. The oppositional political elite views the opposition as a threat to its status, power and property. This was demonstrated by the application of methods of administrative and forcible pressure against opposition political leaders and restriction of their access to the media. For instance, after the 2002 parliamentary elections, live airtime with known politicians where the opposition could present its opinion actually disappeared from the national TV channels. Administrative and forcible pressure is also applied to the businessmen who support the political opposition or whom the opposition represents.

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According to the polls, presently, 11% of the youth state that they do not submit to moral norms; 21% ignore the law; and 25% believe that the level and quality of education are...
of statehood, including toponyms. Its motto was: "First build an independent Ukraine, then deal with the economy, democracy, human rights..."

A substantial part of the left-wing political elite, in contrast to their colleagues in the reformed communist parties of the Central European and Baltic states, opposed the very idea of Ukraine's independence and the building of a democratic state and market economy, cherishing hopes for the restoration of the USSR and the socialist system. This struggle of different political forces for power, the division and re-division of authority, and this struggle was in no way about the different vision of the methods of attainment of the strategic goal set by society. The struggle was dictated largely (if not solely) by economic interests and concentrated on which group of the political elite would control access to the distribution of the national economic resources and capitalisation of the national wealth. The elite not only failed to consolidate society around a common goal, but also caused it to split into the rich and destitute, which has remained until the present day.

The low voice of the "conscience of the nation"

To deprive an intellectual of his voice, he should be deprived of his audience. Few would be willing to speak in a silent vacuum. (Known expression)

In this section, the author introduces the term "conscience of the nation". It simply exists. It is easier to say who represents, articulates and formulates it — it is the elite, being such not because of its formal status but under, any circumstances, because of its public authority and public trust. On that basis, it assumes the responsibility and right to speak on behalf of those whose rights and interests are endangered — and therefore presents a kind of a political "protector" against abuses on the part of those who rule, and against a "meaningless and monstrosity" state.

This elite mainly consists of the people of the free professions, the artistic, creative and scientific intelligentsia. This is because, first of all, they more acutely feel the pains of society and, second, they deal professionally with words, images and slogans and are able to appeal to the conscience and mind. They appeal through the institutions that ensure their existence as a separate social layer: the mass media, politics, theё freedom of expression. The virtual destruction of this layer by the political elite is the most significant and direct manifestation of the domination of the elites." Why did the conscience of the nation not say its word aloud, to be heard by the confused society and the ruling elite, when the first rifts appeared between the authorities and citizens in Ukraine? The readers may wonder. We will cite only two.

First — the elite, being the "conscience of the nation", lost its audience and therefore the motivation for creation, along with the means of subsistence. The intellectual, creative elite lives at the expense of the public authorities: both in the lofty spiritual and in the earthly material sense. As everybody knows, to create for self-actualisation, one should have a "cottage of ivory". The post-Soviet intelligentsia, especially the democratic part that did not belong to nomenklatura, did not have one. When the rift "the rapid impoverishment of society" appeared, this group ended up on the same side as its insolvent audience.

Over the past 10 years, more than 6,000 intellectuals have left the country. Many thousands changed their occupational status to survive. Thousands may be raising their voices against the abuses on the part of the ruling elite, but few hear them — mainly because the ruling elite took care to control the mass media accessible to the insolvent population, first of all, via the Internet. 74 percent of Ukrainians are citizens of the existence of political censorship in the country; 62% of the journalists polled by Razumov Centre reported that they had personally come into contact with its manifestations.

On the other hand, few people out of the almost forty million of the country's adult population know what is published in uncontrolled newspapers with a circulation of several thousand copies. The virtual runs of some important publications, some of which are oriented towards the development of production, considerable numbers of which are oriented towards political processes. (By the way, the"conscience of the nation", or "the titular nation and others".)

Another reason why the "conscience of the nation" failed to become a protector against abuses on the part of the ruling political elite lies in the absence of the nation itself. More precisely, the absence of consciousness — first of all, among the "conscience", the intellectual and artistic elite — on the issue of what nation should be formed in international political, or "the titular nation and others."

No matter how challenging this issue may seem, it needs to be solved. It is caused by the peculiarities of Ukrainian history and the uncompleted process of the ethnic identification of Ukrainians, who for centuries had no state of their own and were divided among various foreign state organisms. This is neither the fault nor the misfortune of Ukraine. It is a unique society. It is a society that still have to learn about the foreign, European experience is inaccessible here. In the Baltic and Central European states, after the fall of the common enemy of all democratic forces — the totalitarian communist regime — the differences between the various tactics for attaining the strategic goal common for all democratic forces came to the forefront. None of those countries had four Churches that all equally claimed the role of the "conscience of the nation", or such division among intellectuals into irreconcilable camps. We lost the integrity of the democratic movement of the late 1980s, having split it apart. However, the foreign, European experience is inaccessible here.

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the consideration of social interests is promoted by the (slow) activation of the opposition forces, the activity of non-governmental organisations, independent and opposition media.

Hence, the very logic of the market and socio-political processes in Ukraine, despite all the deformity of the former and slowness of the latter, contains the potential and impulses for the choice in favour of European rules, norms and values.

If Ukraine goes this way, this will result in the gradual improvement of the living standards of the population, the establishment of democratic values in the country, formation of the system of governance accountable to citizens and strong civil society. In the foreign policy dimension, this will gradually bring Ukraine closer to the development level observed in the EU countries.

What way will the political elite lead Ukraine?
What we believe in is not lost yet.
(Friedrich Schiller)

The first step of Ukraine towards a breakthrough in the solution of the internal problems on the basis of European values lies in the rotation of the ruling elite at the constitutional presidential elections to be held next year.

Given the present situation and the steps taken by the ruling elite in order to bypass the elections at any cost, it may be stated that there are three key tasks faced by the entire Ukrainian society.