



*Understanding the EU's Association Agreements
and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas
with Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia*

Youth Essay Competition

Essay on Society, Ukraine, Europe

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My name is Anastasiia Menshykova and I am a 19 year-old Ukrainian. And here all the boring info stops.

I am an easy-going and open-minded young lady, who loves her family, her mates, loves what she does and does what she loves. Well, almost always. I love reading, Jojo Moyes, Sesilia Ahern and Joann Harris are my favorite for today. I love my university and believe education can be interesting. And it's never enough to be educated. I am also interested in sociology, gender stereotypes and marketing. Basically, I am a creative economist who loves singing, beautiful people and cities. I travel, I sing, I love, I learn and it makes me free. Free in thinking, free in decisions, free in living.

Adding some fun to my own and people's life is also one of the most important rituals from my daily routine. Make love, art, money, have fun and remember you are the beautiful one!



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Here I come. With my thoughts.

What is the main topic of my essay? I have no idea. What I am going to share with you are my thoughts, my explanations, my reflections. Probably, lots of my personal questions will be answered at the end of the essay. Now one is answered, by the way. The name of my essay is 'Society, Ukraine, Europe'. After all my doubts, I decided to choose the topic which would be exciting for me firstly, because if it is not for me, it will never be interesting for you or anyone else reading this. So, welcome to my essay and I hope I can encompass my impressions and everything I want to say in next 5 pages.

I knew it will not be easy for me to start writing it, and I was right. It is the 14th of August now, I am at the café having Americano with condensed milk, it is 22:16 and I am starting writing my work. At school, I was taught that an essay means providing of my own thoughts and feelings. So, I am following these rules and let myself start. I am pretty sure it is going to be something cool.

I was at the airport with my friend when it came to me. People, stereotypes, Ukraine, Europe. Sounds good. Lots of questions arose, I immediately opened Notes on my phone and started writing them down. Oh, yeah, I completely forgot. Let me introduce myself. My name is Anastasiia (yes, I have double i there, a perfect Ukrainian transliteration). I am 19 years old and I am Ukrainian. Quite proud of it, by the way. I am a student of Warsaw School Economics, which is located, as you logically could understand, in Warsaw. 'She is super patriotic, but she moved to Poland. Of course, they all move to Poland from their country', - YES. I came to it very fast, even faster than I expected. So here we come with the first stereotype! Each of my thoughts will be separated in its own paragraph and then I am going to sum everything up. And... let us start!

1. Writing about my country is a corny one, nah? No, it is never corny. I am from Ukraine, but what is even more important, I am from Odessa. This is the most beautiful, wonderful, warm city by the Black Sea, and I love it with all my heart. I am so lucky to be born there and so happy to come home every time on holidays. Okay, now it looks like a school essay on a topic 'The place where I live'. So, let us move to the second one.
2. This summer I worked as a personal translator for a band called 'Hurts'. They are British. I love the UK, British people and everything they make (especially music). I love their manners, the mentality, the way they behave. I had lots of conversations with their members and I got to know how they like to perform in Ukraine and in Europe (meaning other European countries) more than in the UK, even though for me they take the first place in almost everything. Now I can understand them. In later points, you will get why. So, keep reading.
3. When I come to a new country and I say 'I am from Ukraine', half ask me if it is in Russia, half asked me how is the war in Ukraine. I am not going to go deep into political problems, I am just saying that I love Ukraine and adore Odessa. Russia and Ukraine are full of differences. I want people abroad to know there are two countries, not because any of us is better or worse, but we are different. Every single Ukrainian or Georgian or whoever is a representative of his or her country. I always try to make foreigners see how cool

country we are. 'If you want to change the world, start up by making your bed.' Start with small things, start with yourself. Every foreigner's opinion I talk to depends on me, and I am trying to do my best. I am in love with their comments when they say they love Ukraine, when they say Ukrainians are always welcome to help, which is absolutely true. It is not because of duties to the good manners like in England or other 'good-manners-countries', but just to help, and this is awesome.

4. Ukraine is full of colors. We do not have grey cities and people. In some cases, we have better service than in Europe. But some of us cannot take it right way. This is not because we are bad or wild, some people are just afraid of things they are not prepared for. They do not travel a lot, they do not have opportunities people have in Europe. They work, earn money, spend money, work, earn money and again and again... so when they get more – they become spoiled. I think people who gets money and power become mad and, sure if they have money, they can buy everything and behave the way they want. Still, our people are sincere. Ukrainians are free and talented in music, dancing, literature, etc. But we need a support. We need Europe to be supported.
5. I was at a bar with guys from England, and a girl said 'I really love us for being always intelligent and polite'. I was the only non-British girl at the table and felt a bit heavy-handedly about how much she was right. Because even while talking to the airport workers with a great complaint about the lost suitcase, they said 'Could you please be so kind to tell me where my *bad word adjective* suitcase is'. It makes me smile.
6. Yes, Ukrainians do not care about the law, regulations or any rules sometimes. I came out of the airport and right under 'no smoking' sign I saw 2 men standing with cigarettes. 'If he can, why can't I?' or 'Does not matter, nothing will come from it', - probably one of them thought so. And that is the point, people know nothing will happen. Nothing is punishable, that is a mess. But it is not about people, it is about the government.

Now let us get back to the main topic. Some years ago, our country faced a very important question 'Do we want Ukraine to be a part of Europe?' It was astoundingly for me to follow how it was going, how people who have never been to Europe still did not want to be in. They have never seen Europe, but they still did not want to be in. They have never seen how people live there, except from how the TV shows (this is absolutely not the best source to get the information from, we all know how Mass Media works) but they still did not want to be in. There is a great book, to the point, written by Russian writer Sergey Minaev called 'Media Sapiens-2'. I have read the second part firstly and then found the first part exciting. And it happened to me for the second time... So, the book tells about the power of Mass Media and how people working there just come up with ideas news while drinking their coffee at McDonald's and make of them news for the TV later on. They know everything beforehand. Half of what we see on the TV is lies. People know news lies, but still believe it. Quite funny, nah? The book is really worth reading, by the way.

As about me, I just love my country. And I want it to be united. I want it to be closer to Europe. Now I live in Europe; I know how it goes there and I am pretty satisfied. I want my people to

live the way Europeans live. I want my people to have opportunities and conditions they have. They know what they pay for. They pay taxes and are okay with this just because they are sure money will be spent on them, not on the officials' bellies. I am a representative of younger generation and I have a great want to improve Ukrainians' quality of life. No, it is not only about domestic things, it is about culture also. People do not know any other options except bought competition, rich winners, unfair directors who steal money from the customers. Europe can help us to believe each other. Competitions can be fair, directors of big holdings can be normal, stars can be not a 'star-in-a-head' type.

I am sure we deserve more. Ukraine is the biggest country in Europe. We have 24 cities and Crimea which in my head is still ours. I was on a plane from Odessa to London when the decision was making. And I remember my tears falling right on my cheeks after I got to know it happened. Have they sold the part of a country? Who knows.

By the way, we came to another problem I wanted to mention. And this is... corruption. This is one of the most freaking problems we are facing everywhere, in every single sphere. And it sucks. At the university, I had a subject called Internationalization of a Firm. We had a case study and a question to be answered. It has no correct answer, I suppose. So, the case study included the following: 'You are Vice President of Manufacturing at Company X, a major producer of computer keyboards with factories in various countries that provide jobs to thousands of local residents. The firm imports many of the raw materials used to manufacture its keyboard abroad. At one of its factories in Russia, Company X has begun to experience problems getting parts and components processed through customs, resulting in delays that are hurting profits. Upon conferring with colleagues at the plant, you are advised the problem can be solved if Company X makes a payment to local officials, a common practice in the area. The bribe would expedite passage through customs. However, you strongly feel that bribery is unethical. Moreover, it is illegal in much of the world. For example, under laws of Canada, the United States, and most European countries, a manager can be prosecuted for offering bribes, even in countries where the practice is accepted.

What should you do? Do you make the payment, realizing it reflects the way business is normally carried out in that part of the world?' My answer was yes. My mate said no. We both have an opinion concerning it, and I think they are based on our experience only and both have the right to life. After discussing it with him (my mate), I was almost ready to change my mind, but I did not. Two months later, while having cups of coffee with Hurts Manager called Craig, who is a sixty-year-old lovely man who looks like he is forty-five max and whose age was a secret I told everyone because I did not know it was a secret, I asked him this question. He is British, lived in Los Angeles and most probably has been to all European countries. He was not thinking more than 10 seconds and then answered. And he said yes. I was surprised and of course asked him why. He laughed and said the corruption exists everywhere. He told me: 'You better pay and it works immediately than you wait, lose your money or even something worse.' Once again, he is British. England is one of the best countries to have a business in. But he said yes. Exciting, nah?

But I still think corruption, even if exists, should be regulated. And it is in Europe. It is not ruled by government. We need Europe to give a rise to starting of this process. I know it would take years, but we need to start. Examples time! Some of my friends were trying to make me sure that it does not matter which university you go to, in which city or continent. If you want to study, you do. Well, quite reasonable, but I of course have a story for that. You can study, but can you pass? A few weeks ago, I met a girl Anna. I knew it was her last Master Degree year and what she told me made me being at a loss. So, here is the story. All the students had to choose a tutor and a topic for the diploma. She went to a woman which she wanted to choose and told her hello, I am about to write a diploma, could you please be my mentor or tutor or whatever it called. What that wonderful lady said to her was: 'Okay, 500\$'. Anna went to the Dean Office and told that important man that the wonderful lady did not give her a permission to write a diploma work tutored by her. He told her to go and ask her again. Anna went to the WL, the second was not very happy. Anna asked her one more time. The WL made a very serious face and told her: 'Deal, let it be 400\$.' I know you probably are laughing there on the other side of the screen, but I am not kidding, this is the way it works here.

Black Sea Shipping Company was the largest in Europe and the second in the world, our seamen were the best in Soviet Union. They were treated well. Now everything is sold so our boys should work for foreign companies. But! Beforehand, they should finish the university where one Math exam costs 500\$ (five hundred, I did not do a mistake). Do not pay – do not pass. 'Treat you better' – words from one of the popular modern song by Shawn Mendes, and I think they suit here. We need Europe to treat them better. What they do now? They move abroad. And it is not only about seamen, 70% of my classmates moved to Europe. A lot of my friends moved to Europe. We are young, smart, and we are the future. I want our great brains to come back to the country. I want to build the future here, using all the sources we could get from abroad. I do not want young parents to give children's names that just sound good in English. No, we have our own beautiful names. We have our own beautiful country and I do believe in it. People who take regular, but extremely important jobs like doctors, teachers, drivers, cleaners, office workers, sellers, seamen... everyone should be sure they have a support from the country they worked for during the whole life. We need Europe to make them sure.

There are different gradations of bribes in the country. They depend on the university, the faculty, or the lecturer's conscience. I asked myself if it is possible to give a bribe to any of my lecturers in Warsaw. I think it probably could be in some smaller cities, but I honestly cannot assume how much I would have to pay... just kidding. Now let us assume an algorithm, it is called Student Cycle in Ukraine: pay for the exams – pass everything – get a job. Then we have some options: option 1 – become a boss at a father's office and lose everything because of the lack of knowledge; option 2 – become a doctor and you can get what happens next; 3 – become a teacher at school or university and now take a look at the very beginning of the Cycle. There are hundreds of options which prove my thought, but I, unfortunately, have only 3000 words max. We need European regulations here. What I like about European system – everyone is the same. The rules are for everyone and it does not matter where his or her dad works, there is no exceptions. And I think it is right.

I am not working in political sphere; I am just a student who studies economics in Warsaw. I love my country. But every time I come here I have more and more questions, some come with the tears. Why people live that way? Why European pensioners can afford almost everything while the Ukrainian almost nothing? Why the hell officials just keep stealing the money instead of making roads? It sounds like a big joke, but it is scary. The country which is full of useful resources is devaluated. Ukrainian traditions are one of the deepest. Ukrainian food is one of the most delicious. Ukrainian girls are one the most beautiful. Ukrainian IT workers are one of the best. Ukrainian views are one of the most impressive. Forests, sea, fields, rivers, lakes – we have almost everything. Except good roads for travelling. Yeah, I had a trip to one beautiful Ukrainian place this summer and when I was there, I caught myself on a thought that the place where I was standing at that moment is a lot more beautiful than plenty of places I have visited in Europe. I swear, my tears were falling right from my eyes after I saw a night sky full of stars. I saw my beautiful Ukrainian sky full of stars. I want it to be clear and always beautiful like it was that night. I travel quite a lot and I just love it, but we chase after something, not understanding and appreciating what is very close to us... But I am telling you, the roads are the nightmare. But still... I have a hope that one day money will stop being stolen and will be spent on people. I know it will happen, and I think we need Europe to speed it up.

‘The refusal of President Viktor Yanukovich to sign an agreement with the European Union caused mass protests in Kiev, and after almost three months of a tough confrontation in late February 2014, President was changed.’ Ukrainian people have opinions. These people are ready to stay for it. These people are brave and patriotic. I do not believe their faith can be broken by any government in this world. But they deserve more, yes, they definitely do.

We have the Ukraine–European Union Association Agreement now, and even if it has limitations, we laid the foundations and this is important. It is important for every country who signed it: Moldova, Georgia, Ukraine. I am happy for all of us. At least, we do not need visas anymore. I think it is great that people can see now how it goes in Europe with their own eyes, not through the prism of the Mass Media, can soberly assess the situation, make their own opinion. Now they have this option. Will they take it or not – the decision is only up to them.

My country deserves more than it has now. People deserve better conditions, higher income, etc. We are a great nation with easy-going kind people, who are always opened to others. We have an experience from Soviet Union, our own Independent history, and now we are ready to make the lives of Ukrainians better. We are the biggest European piece, and we exactly do not deserve the least. We are an independent country which is ready for new possibilities, opportunities, regulations, rights and duties. We are ready to wide our borders.

Ukraine is such a beautiful one. I love her. I am proud to be a part of her. I call her ‘her’ because she is alive. And I speak Russian, by the way. And no one beats me. You see – we are ready. And I speak Ukrainian. And English also. *A jeszcze trochy po polsku. Und ich spreche wenig Deutch.* And at one time *j'ai parlé un peu français*, and I am not even sure it is right. And what is more! *I aprendí español*, but never *hablo*. And the point is that it absolutely does not matter for me.

Ukrainian, Russian, Polish... who cares. We are on the right way. We sing '*Shchedryk*', which is originally a Ukrainian song, when we celebrate Christmas our own way. Children wear *vyshyvanka* on the 1st of September. We make the best borsch ever. We listen to Okean Elzy and believe in every word with all our hurts. Of course, we need time, but we are on. The country is on.

I am Ukrainian. And I am proud of it. I want the sky to be blue, pure and peaceful, and the fields to be yellow and full. I want people to be independent in opinions, desires, wants and things. We need to be heard. And I think we need Europe for this. I know one day Ukraine will be the country every citizen will be proud of. And I will be as always happy to be Ukrainian.

Let me take you back to the #2. Do you get them now? 😊