Policy Issues

No. 9 November 2015

Political culture in Ukraine

Kseniia Gatskova and Maxim Gatskov

The 'Euromaidan' protests in Ukraine (2013–2014) were motivated by people's great expectations of profound change through implementation of reforms and genuine democratization of the society. The realization of these expectations depends on many preconditions, among them the pattern of political culture, which reflects the readiness of people to contribute actively to the establishment of a new democratic regime in their country. An analysis of the political orientations of citizens over the past two decades shows that only a small part of the population can be called strong democrats, whereas the majority of the population avoids active political participation and holds a rather output-oriented position, which may facilitate the persistence of an authoritarian political regime. On the other hand, a new social movement represented by recently emerged numerous volunteer organizations and initiatives points to a substantial positive change in people's political orientations.

'Strong leaders' or political ideologies?

In the 25 years of independence, Ukraine experienced two large democratically oriented 'revolutions' ('orange revolution' in 2004–2005 and the 'Euromaidan' in 2013–2014). At the end of 2004, mass protests in Independence Square in Kiev prevented electoral fraud and helped to launch democratic reforms. Unfortunately, this 'revolution' failed even after successful constitutional reforms, because fundamental institutions and conventional practices remained unchanged.

In the year 2006, tumultuous conditions within the 'orange' coalition resulted in the highest ever level of desire for strong leaders that has been observed before or since – 65.7%. Figure 1 shows that, during 1990s, the proportion of people who agreed with the statement 'A couple of strong leaders can do more for the country than all laws and discussions', considerably increased. In the 2000s, it remained almost unchanged at the level of 60%.

Figure 1: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: A couple of strong leaders can do more for the country than all laws and discussions (%)
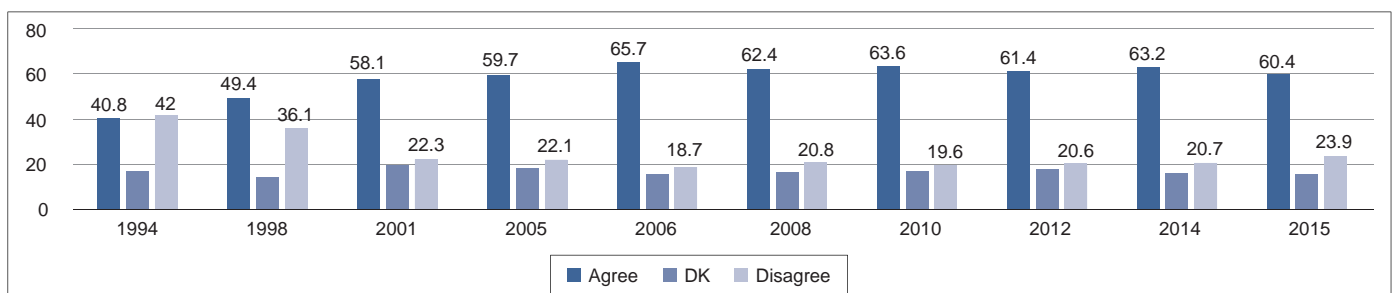
Source: Monitoring 1994–2014 and Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015 Databases. The data of 2015 do not include Crimea.

Nine consecutive years of economic decline after independence led to a substantial impoverishment of the population and disenchantment in the 'democratic disorder'. Many people associated the shambles of the 1990s with the absence of a strong leader – as a result, paternalistic views experienced a revival. The personalistic approach that 'an effective state manager' can compensate for institutional weakness could have been even stronger than in the late Soviet times, when it were state institutions which in the face of communist leaders' senility (Brezhnev and his two successors) made the political system work.

In Ukraine, these strong paternalistic, leader-centered orientations have been repeatedly exploited during parliamentary election campaigns, when political parties were formed around persons instead of programs and principles. Given a list of political ideologies (e.g., 'liberal', 'socialist', 'social democratic' etc.) and an opportunity to suggest another one, up to a half of respondents – 49.3% in the *Monitoring* survey in 2014 – had no preferences, had not decided yet or simply had no notion of these ideologies. One year after the 'Euromaidan', the share of respondents without any preference in the spectrum of political ideologies decreased significantly and made up 38.2%. In this year, the survey documented an increase in number of adherents of social democratic as well as national democratic forces. Still, the proportion of people with no ideological preferences remains very high, which is an indicator of missing knowledge on political system and, apparently, lack of interest in politics.

International surveys confirm a rather low interest in politics in Ukraine. According to the European Social Survey, in 2012, similarly to other post-communist states of Central Europe, only 5.3% of Ukrainian respondents said to be very interested and 27% to be quite interested in politics, whereas in Western European countries these shares were much higher (Table 1).

Table 1: How interested would you say you are in politics? (%)

	UA	DE	SE	FR	IT	EE	PL	CZ
Very interested	5.3	20.2	13.2	12.6	12.6	5.4	6.2	2.2
Quite interested	27.0	44.5	45.2	30.4	31.6	35.7	33.4	19.6
Hardly interested	43.8	29.9	30.5	36.4	35.8	43.8	42.8	49.7
Not at all interested	23.9	5.4	11.1	20.6	19.9	15.2	17.6	28.5

Source: European Social Survey 2012

Another key element of political orientations of the Ukrainian population concerns international orientations. These orientations do not provide a clear-cut distinction between conservative 'Eastern' and liberal 'Western' values, as Ukrainians are often guided by an intuitive sense of belonging to a respective historically defined cultural space, yet they indicate sympathies either with consolidated authoritarian regimes of Putin's Russia and Lukashenka's Belarus or with the democratic community of EU-countries.

Figure 2: How do you regard the idea of Ukraine's joining… the Union of Russia and Belarus? ... the European Union? (%)
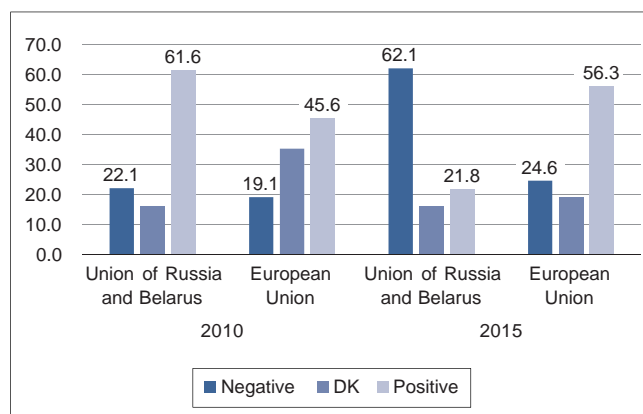
Source: Monitoring 1994–2014 and Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015 Databases. The data of 2015 do not include Crimea.

The 'Euromaidan' protests and the subsequent annexation of Crimea by Russia along with Russia's active involvement in the armed conflict in Donbas led to a re-orientation of many Ukrainians from East to West. While in 2010 61.6% of the Ukrainian population regarded the perspective of Ukraine's joining the Union of Russia and Belarus positively, in 2015, the picture was quite the reverse: 62.1% of respondents rejected this option. At the same time, support of Western integration (joining the European Union) became more popular: it increased from 45.6% in 2010 to 56.3% in 2015 (Figure 2).

Tolerance and pluralism

Being tolerant to those who are different, respecting the rights of minorities and accepting the complexity of the social environment are important democratic attitudes and values. Empirical research has shown that tolerance is associated with economic growth. Open societies are more attractive for people of different backgrounds and provide the most favorable environment for creativity and innovation. A totalitarian state, which suppresses not only political opposition, but – as far as possible – all kind of pluralism, fosters intolerance and one-dimensional thinking.

Many Ukrainians experienced both: the monopoly of the communist party and a great diversity of political parties and movements after 1991. Political pluralism was a new, so far unfamiliar phenomenon for the post-Soviet states. The growing diversity of the political spectrum perplexed inexperienced voters, who tried to adapt to the new conditions, while many parties were formed around political entrepreneurs pursuing their personal economic interests.

Therefore it might be not very surprising that the share of respondents, who did not support a multiparty system in Ukraine, grew significantly in the 1990s and remained at the level of around 45% after the failed 'orange revolution' (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Do you think Ukraine needs a multiparty system? (%)
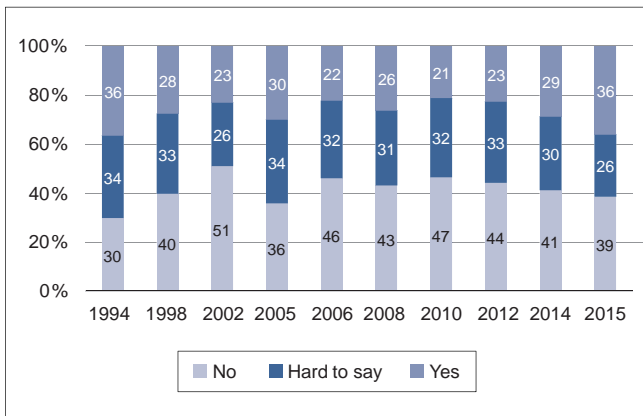
Source: Monitoring 1994–2014 and Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015 Databases. The data of 2015 do not include Crimea.

While rejection of the multiparty system can be, to a large extent, attributed to chaotic politics and a permanent crisis of the political system, to economic hardship during of the transformation as well as the 'after-effect' of Soviet socialization, the high proportion of those who could not (or did not want to) give a definite answer most likely indicates disinterest in political life and alienation from political system.

After the 'Euromaidan' put an end to the authoritarian and criminal regime of Viktor Yanukovych, the share of supporters of political pluralism began to grow again, with 36% in 2015 reaching the level of the year 1994.

Mass protests vs. civil society engagement

In the fall of 2013, activists started to demonstrate against the denial of President to sign the Association Agreement with the EU. The demonstrations rapidly transformed into a protest of population against the government, which lost its legitimation in the eyes of protesters by violently breaking up the peaceful demonstration. The 'revolution of dignity' stood for European (i.e. Western, democratic) values: rule of law, non-oligarchic market economy, welfare state and civil society.

Figure 4: Educational level of the general population and of participants of the 'Euromaidan'
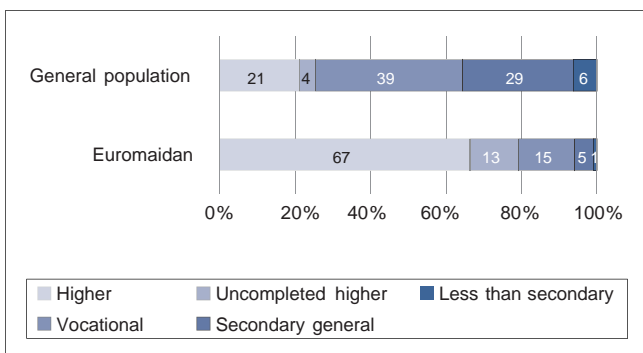

Source: Monitoring 2014 and the 'Euromaidan' Survey 7.–8.12.2013.

According to the surveys of the Institute of Sociology of National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, almost one fifth of the Ukrainian population took part in the mass protests in their city or supported the protesters by providing food, warm clothes or money. The 'Euromaidan' protesters were on average younger, more often self-employed and considerably better educated than the general population of Ukraine (Figure 4).

Five most often mentioned demands of protesters included: release of arrested demonstrators and end of repressions, resignation of the President Yanukovych and appointment of new elections, resignation of the government as well as criminal prosecution of corrupted politicians and those who were responsible for the violent actions against protesters (Ukraine-Analysen 2013). Apparently, the 'revolution of dignity' was made primarily by those representatives of Ukrainian society, who were not ready to tolerate the authoritarian corrupt regime.

The 'Euromaidan' protests and the subsequent armed conflict in the Donbas region have had a great consolidating and cohesive effect on many Ukrainians. A new social movement occurred as a reaction of the population on the hard situation in the East of the country: people started to found numerous volunteer organizations and initiatives that supported the Ukrainian army, provided help to internally displaced citizens from the eastern regions and performed other social and political activities. During the last year, 44% of Ukrainian citizens either supported volunteer organizations and initiatives or provided financial help to Ukrainian army through a governmental channel (Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015). The data show that people donated money or provided in-kind support (food, clothes, medicine etc.) more actively than personally engaged in volunteer activities (Figure 5). Approximately 30% of the population donated money to volunteers in the last 12 months, while 7% transferred money to the specially created account of the Ministry of Defense using an sms service.

Figure 5: Volunteer activities and support of Ukrainian army
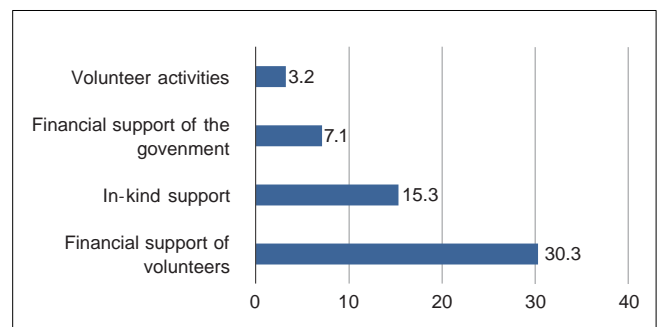
Source: Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015 Database. The data do not include Crimea.

Although engagement in volunteer activities may not be called ubiquitous (only 3.2% of people performed volunteer activities either in the region of military conflict, or outside of it: in hospitals, refugee support groups etc.)

this new phenomenon is still very important for Ukraine, because it strengthens the civil society. The volunteers demonstrate an ability for self-organization and effective solving of different kinds of urgent problems. Besides, volunteer organizations help to cultivate personal activism and social responsibility of citizens.

There are two major types of civic activism that may be distinguished in Ukraine: participation in mass protests and engagement in civil society organizations. These forms of activism overlap only partly. While 17% of citizens participated in the 'Euromaidan' either by protesting or by providing food, clothes or money, only 13% of the population were members of civil society organizations (Monitoring survey 2014). Among the participants of the 'Euromaidan' 73.9% were not members of any civil society organization. Although almost every fifth citizen participated in the 'Euromaidan', the political activism of protesters seems to be of a short-term nature. The formation of mass protests was a spontaneous reaction (as opposed to action), whereas engagement in volunteer organizations has more to do with planned and enduring social activity. For a sustainable development of the pro-democratic orientations, it is essential to foster a long-term engagement of citizens in civil society organizations.

Political orientations and stability of the political system

What in the public discourse is often referred to as 'national character' or 'mentality', can be scientifically captured by the concept of political culture. This concept helps to explain reform failures and – more generally – political instability by analyzing the rigidity (sustainability) of political orientations of the population. The political culture approach (Almond, Verba 1963; Dalton, Welzel 2014) is still one of the best established theoretical concepts that help to find answers to such questions as: Why are some political systems stable and others not? Why does the introduction of democratic institutions not automatically lead to a consolidated democracy? Which role do people's political orientations play in the process of democratization?

A general definition of the term 'political culture' reads as follows: "the political system as internalized in the cognitions, feelings, and evaluations of its population" (Almond, Verba 1963, p. 14). The political culture approach focuses on political orientations toward political objects, such as the system in general, political input and output processes, and the role of the self in the system. The basic idea of the approach is to capture patterns of attitudes, beliefs and values of the population, in order to explore whether political institutions and people's orientations are congruent. The fundamental assumption behind this approach is that "a democratic form of participatory political system requires as well a political culture consistent with it" (Almond, Verba 1963, p. 5). If such consistency is not given, political institutions are likely to fail to perform their essential functions. As a result, the political system may become unstable.

Although the concept of political culture does not encompass explanatory mechanisms of conflicts between people's orientations and institutional performance, it can indicate a mismatch between 'structure and culture' and thus be used for prognosis of possible instability of the political system. For understanding of the post-communist transformation, the political culture approach provides a conceptual framework of analysis of the change in people's political 'mentality', i.e. their perceptions of the rules of the societal game.

Soviet legacy

As political culture – especially the system of values and key social norms – turns up to be less prone to short-term changes than political institutions, the analysis of the transformation of political orientations in the independent Ukraine should begin with the late Soviet period.

On the eve of the breakup of the Soviet Union, a group of sociologists under the direction of Jurij Levada published a famous work, "Ordinary Soviet Man", based on the analysis of survey data collected in all 15 Soviet republics between 1989 and 1991. Similarly to Almond and Verba, Levada suggested that the "quality of the human material" would to a large extent determine political as well as other post-communist social structures.

According to Levada (1993) and his research team, the dominant "sociocultural type of personality" in the late Soviet period was the so-called *Homo Sovieticus*. The researchers characterized this type of personality as a de-individualized mass man, who holds paternalistic orientations and is "primitive" with respect to his needs. At the same time, Homo Sovieticus has messianic and imperialistic aspirations and is convinced of being something special in the historical perspective.

In the 1980s, a large share of 'ordinary Soviet people' was socialized during the post-war and even post-Stalin era and experienced a period of relative economic prosperity and ideological stability during Brezhnevian Stagnation. From the early childhood, Soviet people learned to be a part of the bigger whole by participating in different structures that were created and maintained by the state (e.g. *Little Octobrists*, *Young Pioneers*). The channels of social mobility were strictly defined and controlled, while individual initiatives that did not fit into the all-encompassing framework of the Soviet state and ideology were suppressed. Under a full state management of one's life, adaptation to established rules was less costly than attempts to change the situation. Yet instead of true loyalty, the repressive political system cultivated political passivity and reluctance to participate in public life. Contrary to the collectivist doctrine, the real sense of responsibility was restricted to a close circle of family and most trusted friends. The largest part of responsibility for the organization of 'ordinary' people's life including economic activities, housing, education etc. rested with the state.

Individualism – understood as being different from others – was scorned, as it was incompatible with the totalitarian 'same-size-fits-all approach' and the Marx-

ist-Leninist ideology with its ultimate truth claim. Such a context made pluralism of opinions, interests, ways of self-expression impossible and fostered a discrepancy between form and content of people's actions, between artificial formal and genuine informal life, between proclaimed and real values.

One of the far-reaching consequences of this 'double-think' was strengthening of informal social networks that, on the one hand, helped to get access to scarce goods and services and, on the other hand, secured the possibility to articulate personal on politically sensitive issues openly.

On the eve of the breakup of the Soviet Union, Levada meant to observe the dissolution of the 'personality of Homo Sovieticus', not least in the face of an all-embracing institutional crisis and imperatives of modernity (Lewada 1993, p. 36 ff). The end of the Soviet experiment marked a new period of history for the new independent states.

Types of political culture

Almond and Verba distinguished between three ideal types of political culture: parochial, subject and participant. The (1) *parochial* political culture is typical for premodern societies, the population of which has diffuse political-economic-religious orientations, hardly any knowledge of the political system and ambiguous feelings towards it. Typical for the (2) *subject* political culture is a higher awareness of specialized governmental authority and more distinct affective and normative political orientations. However, subjects are mostly output-oriented and do not consider themselves as active participants of the political process. In contrast to that, the (3) *participant* political culture is characterized by active contribution of the citizens to political life, this contribution being guided by comprehensive political knowledge.

In modern societies, participant orientations manifest themselves in vital interest in local and national politics. Active citizens perform collective action by joining or establishing civil society organizations which are known to be a powerful source of bridging social capital (Putnam 2000). Therefore, the level of development of civil society (the so-called third sector) and its relationship with the state can serve as an important indicator of the participant political culture.

Another typical characteristic of participant orientations, which distinguishes them from the parochial and subject ones, is the sense of individual responsibility for the situation in the country and community. *Participants* are conscious of their role as citizens for the establishment of social order and promotion of democratic norms. Ideally, their support of democratic institutions is based on reflection upon and acceptance of the basic principles of democracy: political pluralism, participation and representation, division of powers, and rule of law.

In reality, various mixtures of the three ideal types can be observed. The so-called *civic culture*, which Al-

mond and Verba considered to be the most conducive to a democratic political system, is a pattern of all three types, with a domination of participant features, while "the subject and parochial orientations 'manage' or keep in place the participant political orientations" (Almond, Verba 1963, p. 32).

A reconstruction of the political orientations of Ukrainians on the basis of survey data from the last two decades reveals a picture that is far from being comforting and promising. 'Participant' and other pro-democratic orientations constitute a minor part of the political cultural pattern in the population. On the timeline, notable change in individual attitudes as well as national patterns of political orientations occurred in the aftermath of major political and economic events and not prior to them. The majority of the population avoids active political participation and remains output-oriented, what may facilitate the persistence of an authoritarian political regime.

It is important, though, to keep in mind that the people of Ukraine never lived in a consolidated democracy – in fact, the political system of the independent Ukraine has always been more or less authoritarian – and that only a negligible share of Ukrainians had experience of living abroad in a Western democratic society. As a result, many people have a very vague and sometimes extremely distorted idea of democracy and there is no clear notion of democratic principles, institutions, and procedures.

As R. J. Dalton and Ch. Welzel noticed, participants in the true sense may be "absent not only because the system would repress them but also because the citizens have not learned the role model of a participant citizen." (Dalton, Welzel 2014, p. 5). Having no tradition of participant political culture, people in Ukraine tend to reproduce the well-known mechanisms of social interaction from the Soviet and early post-Soviet past. While in consolidated democracies new generations almost automatically learn how 'democracy works', in the countries with no democratic traditions, as Ukraine, such mechanisms have to be learned by other means.

Conclusion and recommendations

One important source of democratic pluralism is certainly the regional diversity of Ukraine. In the last decades, this diversity made it impossible for any power group to become the only alternative in the country. Although it also bears potential for conflict, regional diversity creates a favorable environment for learning how to deal with ethno-linguistic, religious and cultural differences and thus to become more tolerant. This process may be accelerated through promoting internal mobility of the population in the country by improving transport and tourist infrastructure as well as internal student and pupil exchange programs etc.

Formal education is another important channel of forming of political culture: more political education in high schools and universities as well as more student and pupil exchange programs with democratic countries are needed. Universities should get more aca-

demic autonomy and European and American foundations could run rather a 5 to 10 years program of fostering of student self-administration at Ukrainian universities than short-term initiatives. It is important, though, to closely cooperate with the Ministry of Education on this matter and to carefully monitor the results, in order to avoid the possible adverse effect which was described above: that there will be form without content.

On the level of civil society, the donor assistance to Ukraine, which aims to foster the development of the third sector, could be partly readdressed. It might turn out that it is more effective to give money to those who are ready to volunteer than to professionals who are pursuing an alternative career in the third sector. The focus of financial and institutional aid should be less on overall and professional promotion of democratization but more on smaller projects that contribute to improvement of life quality. Although these projects tackle smaller issues, their beneficial outcomes would be perceptible by people, thereby improving the image of associational activities in general. In the medium and long run, it could turn out to be a more effective way of promoting democratization.

Regarding political competition and representation it is crucial to urge and help existing political parties to develop a sharper 'ideological' profile instead of being paternalistic, leader-centered (P. Poroshenko, V. Klychko, O. Lyashko etc.) political enterprises. From the established parties the most promising in this respect seem to be the crisis-tested *Batkivshchyna* ("Fartherland") party and the young party *Samopomich* ("Self Reliance").

On the level of state institutions, democratic partners of Ukraine should maintain pressure on the central state power to become more transparent and to delegate more competences to regional and local bodies. It should also not be forgotten that without an independent judicial system, which is free of corruption, even 'participant' citizens will never develop a habit of respecting the rule of law.

References

Almond, G. A., S. Verba (1963). The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations. Princeton.

Dalton, R. J., Ch. Welzel (2014). The civic culture transformed. From allegiant to assertive citizens. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Lewada, J. (1993). Die Sowjetmenschen 1989–1991. Soziogramm eines Zerfalls. München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verlag.

Putnam, R. D. (2000) Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Ukraine Analysen 2013. Nr. 125: http://www.laender-analysen.de/ukraine/pdf/UkraineAnalysen125.pdf

Datasets

Monitoring 1994–2014. Dataset, Institute of Sociology of National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine.

Public Opinion in Ukraine 2015. Dataset, Institute of Sociology of National Academy of Sciences, Ukraine.

European Social Survey 2012. ESS Round 6: European Social Survey Round 6 Data (2012). Data file edition 2.1. Norwegian Social Science Data Services, Norway – Data Archive and distributor of ESS data.

'Euromaidan' Survey 7.–8.12.2013, Umbrella Research, Kiev (http://umbrellaresearch.com.ua/eu/marsh-millionov-v-kieve-sotsiologicheskij-opros-na-majdane.html).

About the authors:

Kseniia Gatskova: IOS Regensburg

http://www.ios-regensburg.de/personen/mitarbeiterinnen/kseniia-gatskova.html

Maxim Gatskov: BAYHOST, University of Regensburg