

Obozrevatel article translated

<http://obozrevatel.com/interview/46893-volonteryi-nova-ukraine-myi-hotim-chtobyi-intellektualyi-sili-konovoj-dolinyi-pomogli-privesti-ukrainu-k-protsvetaniyu.htm>

Nova Ukraine, a charitable organization created by Ukrainians living in the United States, has its offices near Stanford University—the heart of Silicone Valley, the place that makes one think, inspires, and urges to act.

Nova Ukraine is a humanitarian project that rose from the protest organization Maidan San Francisco. During the Kyiv Maidan protests pro-Ukrainian activists in California participated in protest rallies and collected money for Ukrainian “warriors of light.” After the Russian annexation of Crimea and the beginning of the aggression in eastern Ukraine, Maidan San Francisco continued political support of Ukraine, however a group of its volunteers broke off and created its own organization whose ambitious goals went beyond collecting financial aid and raising awareness; they, along with Silicone Valley intellectuals, aim to help rebuild a free and economically prosperous Ukraine. Nova Ukraine was created in March 2014 and includes people of different backgrounds; from programmers and Silicone Valley engineers to architects, businesses and PR specialists.

Our conversation with the Nova Ukraine members had a format of polylogue.

**Nick Bilogorskiy**-President of Nova Ukraine. Originally from Kharkiv (an industrial city in eastern Ukraine), he immigrated to Canada with his family in 1996 at the age of 16. There he sang in a Ukrainian choir and learned the Ukrainian language. In 2006 Nick moved to the United States to work for Facebook. A few years ago he became interested in politics and joined his friends to rally in front of the Russian Consulate to end repressions against Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny, and against Vladimir Putin’s policies. After the start of Kyiv Maidan, Nick used social networks to organize rallies of Maidan supporters in San Francisco.

**Milena Naymark**-Co Vice President of Nova Ukraine. Milena is responsible for connections with business. She was born and raised in Kyiv and has a degree in architecture. Milena also studied in Kyiv’s College of Art, and earned her post graduate degree in Moscow. She immigrated to New York in 1991 and now lives in California. Milena owns her business which has close ties to various Ukrainian companies.

**Iryna Bilokin**- Co Vice President of Nova Ukraine. Iryna is responsible for event coordination. She, too, is from Kyiv, where she worked in an international organization that overlooked issues of migration. Iryna moved to San Francisco in 2012 and works in market research, PR and social media.

**Michael Simbirsky**- A volunteer with a remarkable biography of political activism. In 1988, while living in Kharkiv, he participated in the anti-Soviet rallies and supported Gorbachev’s perestroika policies.

**Anel Nurkayeva**- Another volunteer of Nova Ukraine who helps with marketing. She came to the United States from Kazakhstan seven years ago as an exchange student. “I met these guys at the San Francisco Maidan,” says Anel. “I was inspired by the events in Kyiv because the idea of mass protests

in my native Kazakhstan seems unfathomable. If Ukraine can set an example of successful reforms,” Anel continues, “it may help trigger positive changes in my homeland.” During the time of the Kiev protests the group held about dozen rallies in San Francisco and collected money for Maidan and Automaidan fighters.

### **OUR MISSION IS TO HELP UKRAINE BUILD A NEW CIVIC SOCIETY**

**Nick Bilogorskiy:** Maidan San Francisco was the farthest Maidan from Kyiv. We lobbied Congress to pass pro Ukrainian resolutions and implement sanctions against Russia. We petitioned Barak Obama on behalf of increasing support of Ukraine, and in April 2014 we received a response from the office of the American President. We were assured that the USA will undertake necessary steps to respond to the annexation of Crimea and will continue their support of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity.

**Milena Naymark:** During one of our rallies, we joined a simultaneous live broadcast with Kiyv Maidan to sing the Ukrainian national anthem with the people in the Ukrainian capital. Back then it was important to show our solidarity with the Kyiv Maidan protestors; let them know they are not alone. A few months later we realized that there were lots of issues that needed to be worked on, and our group broke off. Maidan San Francisco continues to work with the political side, providing support for the Ukrainian army, while we in Nova Ukraine decided to concentrate on the humanitarian issues. We think we can achieve more by taking on a mission of helping Ukraine build a new civic society.

**How influential are those American politicians that insist on a doctrine of noninterference in relation to Ukraine? Those who say American help may trigger a new cold war, WWII or provoke the use of nuclear weapons?**

**Milena Naymark:** Such sentiments are definitely represented in American society. There are very few Americans that indeed understand what is happening in Ukraine right now. We certainly are in the news and people finally understand that Ukraine and Russia are different countries, but once you dig deeper, it is clear that Americans know nothing about Ukraine. Our organization wants to remedy that.

**Charity is the main focus of your organization right now. How much have you collected so far and how the money been spent?**

**Nick Bilogorskiy:** We have collected \$46,000 during a period of one year. Back when the Maidan protests were still on, we tried to help family members of the Heavenly Hundred (people that lost their lives during January-February clashes in the streets of Kyiv), then we switched to helping refugees and IDPs (internally displaced people). At the very start of our group, when we transferred the first donations between \$5,000 and \$10,000, we were bombarded with requests for help. We would vet them and give help to the most needy. Just recently, at the end of the last year, we collected \$5,300 for Gifts for Kids, project to buy Christmas gifts for children whose parents lost their lives during anti-terrorist operations in eastern Ukraine. Thanks to this project more than 100 children received gifts.

Before that we transferred \$2,500 to a volunteer that transports medicine to the anti-terrorist operation zone.

We also support Kharkiv Station; a volunteer organization that helps IDPs. We continue to seek partners in Ukraine that are in need of the type of help we are able to provide.

**Michael Simbirsky:** Our connection with the Kharkiv Station formed somewhat spontaneously. I keep in touch with my high school friends, who worked in various humanitarian missions even before the Maidan protests. Last summer a wave of IDPs arrived in Kharkiv and a few available volunteers tried to help them with bare necessities and find a new place to live. They would have a hundred and sometimes two hundred requests each day from refugee families. I used my connections to send them \$1,500, and then for a while we would transfer money daily totaling \$3,900. I reckon our help was important to them as it was the most difficult period of the establishment of the volunteer movement. Government is too slow in collaboration with the volunteers.

**Iryna Bilokin:** I have a friend in Ukraine; he is a foreign businessman and for years has been supporting Ukrainian orphanages. He started working with a group of volunteers that was helping Crimean refugees. They renovated an abandoned building in Puscha Voditsa resort near Kyiv and dedicated it to housing the refugee families. Nova Ukraine sent \$1,500 worth of groceries to them. Most of the time we send not only money, but groceries, clothes, medication, and personal hygiene items. We work with the trusted volunteers that know where our donations are needed the most. When we get requests from new volunteers we always verify their references.

#### **Who gives the most: Ukrainians or Americans?**

**Nick Bilogorskiy:** Altogether we have had about 400 donors. Most of them know us personally. They came to our events or participated in Maidan San Francisco rallies. Most of them are Russians, Russian speaking Ukrainians and Belarusians, however more than half of the monetary donations came from Americans that have connections with Ukraine.

We maintain thorough bookkeeping and we are currently in the final stage of receiving a tax exempt status, which will allow our donors to write off their donations.