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SHEVCHENKO
SCIENTIFIC
SOCIETY

founded in 1873

SHEVCHENKO SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY

Letter to Full and Corresponding Members



**To: Full and Corresponding Members
of the Shevchenko Scientific Society
in the US**

28 October 2021

Dear Colleagues,

It was with great disappointment that I read the letter circulated privately by Shevchenko Scientific Society member Bohdan Vitvitsky, full of accusations leveled against me personally and innuendo about academic projects central to our Society's mission since 2009. In academic organizations, accusations of this sort are first broached with an oversight body. In our case, this would be the *Kontrol'na komisii*, (Audit Committee, endowed with broader oversight functions). The Society elects this body of five trusted members every three years at the General Meeting and this body is currently fully constituted. In an election year, of course, a different dynamic might obtain, yet I wonder whether our Society has ever been subjected to such an inflammatory and selective presentation, even in prior election years.

Immediately upon appearance of this letter, the Audit Committee informed me that it is initiating a full review and will report on its findings to the membership. I have assured it of my full cooperation. Those with direct knowledge pertinent to these circumstances are invited to contact the committee chair, Professor Roman Kuc, kuc@yale.edu.

In the interim, our members deserve a response that provides context. In 2009, at the start of the second term of the presidency of Dr. Orest Popvych (and a full three terms before my own election), the Society launched an ambitious Jubilee Project to mark the upcoming 200th anniversary of our patron's birth in 2014. The project involved the following elements: assembling a team of top scholars, including those based in Ukraine, to produce a series of Shevchenkiana publications; convening an international conference and other public events; and sponsoring two English-language publications: a volume of collected essays and a biography of Shevchenko. The sum allocated was \$300,000, approved by the Board and confirmed at the 2012 General Meeting.

Such large projects with generous funding have a long history in our Society. The *Encyclopedia of Ukrainian Diaspora*, begun in the 1980s, published book 1 of the US volume only in 2009, rather beyond the projected deadline and budget, and delivered a final price tag of close to one million dollars. We have provided \$100,000 grants to both the Ukrainian Studies program at Columbia University and to the Hrushevsky Translation Project for the preparation of vol. 3; we have funded the 4-volume *Concordance of the Poetic Works of Taras Shevchenko* in collaboration with the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies; we supported archeological excavations in Baturyn (\$80,000), and countless other ventures, many of them in Ukraine. Often, these projects involved close relationships with board members, as we are a relatively small society dedicated to a single purpose, but the term "piggy-bank" has never been used, even when the wisdom of some of these decisions was questioned.

As part of the Shevchenko Jubilee Project commenced in 2009, a committee (*kuratoriia*) comprised of Drs. Orest Popovych, Larysa Onyshkevych, Anna Procyk, and Vasyl Makhno invited Professor George Grabowicz, an internationally recognized authority on the life and works of Shevchenko, to author an English-language biography. He was offered a grant of \$30,000.

Subsidies for the research and writing of books are an accepted phenomenon in academic life, and university faculty on sabbatical or otherwise often seek additional outside funding for this purpose. It is a mistake to think it a "curious saga," or odd, when a scholar who has indeed written much on a given topic wishes to delve even deeper to produce a definitive work. Had the intent been to make available a basic English-language biography for the general reader, the Society had a perfectly good translation of Pavlo Zaitsev's *Taras Shevchenko: A Life* (co-published with the University of Toronto Press, 1988). To say that the Ukrainian community has been "paying the professor's salary," and thus he is not entitled to such a subsidy is also a misunderstanding, and a sign of disrespect for the Harvard chair that the community so generously endowed. I believe that most NTS-A academic faculty understand that, as did Dr. Popovych and the *kuratoriia* that made the initial proposal on behalf of our institution.

It is also a fact that academic projects are sometimes delayed, perhaps rarely for a period of this length, but in this case there are circumstances of direct relevance and benefit to our Society. The launch of the Jubilee Project also marked the beginning of a fundamental realignment of priorities. Contrary to opinions voiced at the time that perhaps NTSh-A should wind down its own scholarly production (or rather, face the fact that this had already occurred) and gradually spend down its endowment, disbursing our funds to outside bodies—in 2009, the second Popovych administration initiated the arduous task of rebuilding our Society from within and reestablishing its scholarly profile. As Learned Secretary, George Grabowicz guided this process. In short order, by 2013, a three-volume edition of Shevchenko's *Haidamaky* appeared, which included a facsimile of the original edition, a history of its publication written by Dr. Oles Fedoruk, and a groundbreaking 360-page monograph by Dr. Grabowicz written specifically for the Jubilee project. That year (2013) the first of our state-of-the-art *Shevchenko and the Critical Reception* volumes appeared, reproducing and documenting every reference in print to Shevchenko during his lifetime with in-depth scholarly annotations. A second volume of equal size appeared in 2016, containing all documents from the year of Shevchenko's death, 1861. Edited and with 40-page introductions by Dr. Grabowicz, these works rival the best of any academy of sciences and constitute a fundamental contribution to Ukrainian scholarship as such. They also place the Shevchenko Scientific Society in the US firmly on the map as one of the top Ukrainian scholarly institutions in terms of the quality of its production.

These publications were accompanied by numerous public lectures and symposia ahead of the Jubilee year; the mounting of a large art exhibit by the Ukrainian Museum in New York that Professor Grabowicz curated and for which he wrote a monograph-length catalog text that easily meets the requirement of an English-language biography; a concert in Merkin Hall with Metropolitan Opera soloist Oksana Dyka performing arias that Shevchenko loved and poems by Shevchenko set to music; and other events that strengthened our reputation. In 2012, Professor Grabowicz was elected President of our Society for the first of two terms, and the publications program grew, as did our circle of international collaborators. In the past 10 years our Society has published over 25 volumes of Shevchenkiana and Kulishiana alone, all at highest standard of scholarship. The original series *Shevchenko and the Critical Reception* has been joined by a projected 6-volume fully annotated *Spohady pro Tarasa Shevchenka*, as well as participation in a project to publish, for the first time, the complete works of Panteleimon Kulish (a volume of Kulish's translations of Shakespeare is in transit from Kyiv and will be sent to our members as an example of our work). We have collaborated with institutions such as the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard in the publication of up to 30 monographs in total, often at a cost to us of less than \$5,000 per book, but in this way we have made an impact on scholarly research in Ukraine, and thus advanced our mission of promoting Western-standard scholarship in Ukraine itself. The original plan of producing a collection of essays as part of the English-language component of the Jubilee Project launched our own bilingual journal, *Zapysky NTSh-A*, volume 2–3 of which is in press and will be mailed to our membership in the coming weeks. We have also initiated a *Memoiristica* series under the editorship of Vasyl Makhno, which features memoirs from the Society's rich archival collection. Its first volume, a memoir by Mykola Velychkyvsky introduced by Taras

Hunczak, appeared in 2017. The second volume, by Iukhym Kharchenko, will be going to press in a few weeks. All this, in the span of a little over 10 years, has been the direct result of the dedicated, tireless work of George Grabowicz as Learned Secretary (2009–2012), President (2012–2018), and now member of our Board. For this he has received no monetary compensation whatsoever, apart from the ill-starred \$15,000 advance on the Shevchenko biography, which is two-thirds completed and which he has every intention of finishing and delivering to us for publication. For an academic society with a 9 million-dollar endowment, for which an advance of \$15,000 does not constitute particular financial hardship, to create such a hue and cry and to publicly smear a former president is simply beyond words, even if one wants to win an election very badly. We must have more respect for ourselves and for our institution.

The publisher for the majority of these works has been the Kyiv-based Krytyka, a highly respected academic publishing house with no developed commercial model, and which largely depends on subsidies for its publications, as do many niche publishers of this type. It is something of an irony that the organization of which Dr. Vitvitsky is now president, the Ukrainian Studies Fund, supported this publisher for a number of years, fully believing in its importance in advancing Ukrainian scholarship. It was only with the decision of the USF to initiate and direct all its resources to the Ukrainian Studies program at Columbia that the subsidies stopped. Krytyka has received support from many grant-giving bodies over the years, including the Soros Foundation, the Shklar Foundation, the National Endowment for Democracy, the Polish Embassy in Ukraine, and Center for Governance and Culture in Europe, University of St. Gallen, and the University of Bern. Many of our members have published their works with Krytyka: Maria Rewakowicz, Serhii Plokhyy, Vasyl Makhno, Vitaly Chernetsky, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Roman Szporluk, Ihor Ševčenko, as have other known scholars in the field such as Terry Martin and Edward Keenan. Authors and members of the editorial board of the journal *Krytyka* have included Tamara Hundorova, Ola Hnatiuk, Alexander Motyl, and Yuri Andrukhovych. All subsidies go toward operating costs and salaries of staff at a fraction of Western costs, and Professor Grabowicz, despite his majority “ownership,” has never received monetary recompense of any kind. A statement confirming this has been forwarded to the Audit Committee. It must be added that as of 2015, under a Grabowicz presidency, all Shevchenko Society board members are required to sign conflict of interest forms indicating full disclosure of any potential conflicts. It also bears repeating that all funding of our publications is first proposed in the annual budget, discussed and voted on by the full Board, and very strictly and transparently disbursed by the Society’s Treasurer and CFO. The Society’s books undergo a rigorous external audit, most recently by the firm Getzel Schiff & Pesce LLP of Woodbury, NY.

The development of a serious publication program and the broad range of international collaborative relationships that it entails is only a foundation for the vision the present Board and my own presidency has for the future growth of our Society. With the establishment of an impressive academic reputation, and with an increased professionalization of our Society’s profile, from developing an Internet presence to refurbishing the lobby of our building, we have begun to attract new members, serious scholars to our ranks, many of whom hold senior faculty positions and regularly publish

books in our respective fields (Margarita Balmaceda, Paul D'Anieri, Amelia Glaser, Harvey Goldblatt, Olena Nikolayenko, Steven Seegel, Oxana Shevel, and many others). NTSh-A members Timothy Snyder, Michael Flier, Roman Szporluk, and Serhii Plokhii have long been a credit to our organization. In the sciences, we have recipients of multiple NIH research grants (Oksana Berezovska, Alexey Ladokhin) and of the MacArthur "genius" grant (Polina Lishko). We have as a member Yuriy Gorodnichenko, recognized as one of the top ten young economists in the world. As these members enter the ranks of our academic sections, they can begin to enact real change, introduce research projects, network, and strengthen the projects that we already have—for example, our Demographic center; they can publish in our journal and join with the productive scholars among us. (This week we mourn the loss of Marian Rubchak, who mentored so many young historians.) Our endowments and our tradition going back to Hrushevsky, Franko, and Hnatiuk foresee just such a model. It has been the long-term goal of my own presidency and of the present Board. In fact, our future depends on it. This is what dismays me most about Dr. Vitvitsky's letter: What are these people to make of it? Fortunately (in fact, unfortunately), most of them will have not received it, since a merit-based system of induction into our academic sections, and thus into voting status, is still in the future.

There remains to comment on Dr. Vitvitsky's demeaning aspersion that "Grabowicz is one of Hryn's bosses in her day job," which purportedly makes me incapable of independent opinion or action. For the record, I am the editor of *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, the flagship journal in the Ukrainian Studies field, which is published by the Ukrainian Research Institute at Harvard University, and I have something of a reputation of my own to uphold. I have three layers of formal supervision above me: a manager of publications, an executive director, and the Institute director. George Grabowicz has never held any of these positions during my tenure. As a member of a five-person executive committee, he participated in general policy and executive decisions at HURI, with no authority over employees. In 2020 he retired and no longer has a formal affiliation with the Institute. He is Research Professor at Harvard University.

I would entreat all of us to refrain from ad hominem attacks, to show greater respect for ourselves and for our Society. Despite claims of open-mindedness, Dr. Vitvitsky's letter is thoroughly personal, rooted in conflicts from the distant past. It is also explicitly political, directly linked to the upcoming election. For that reason I have been very reluctant to discuss the details of our administrator's departure in a public forum, other than to repeat that as a full-time employee he was terminated for cause, and that indeed I have been trying to "avoid unnecessarily making public" its exact nature so as to preserve some dignity to the process. But, having been called out in such a public way, and to dispel the notion that there is something to hide, I must now provide a few basic details. I trust that this will remain among us, a family of full and corresponding members, individuals that have the best interests of our Society at heart.

A revitalization of the kind described above, the production of high-quality publications and an infusion of new talented scholars into the organization, has been at the heart of my own presidency. As such, it placed new demands on our administrative infrastructure,

which, while perhaps adequate some twenty years ago when it was put in place, was no longer up to the task and required thorough modernization. Multiple requests from the Board to the administrator for something as basic as a functional address list with electronic addresses and an indication of members' specializations were never satisfied. Any written English-language communication fell to a volunteer board, no longer retirees as in past administrations but with demanding careers of their own. As did the creation, in 2017, of a new English-language website (the old one had imploded years earlier), and the introduction of social media communications that nowadays are an integral part of organizational life. Our very complex and productive network of committees, including the Grants Committee whose workload had rapidly expanded with over 100 applications, was not receiving administrative support. Member dues, also in the purview of the administrator, were not collected in a systematic way. As an example, the average collection of dues in previous years was about \$4,000, whereas a concerted effort this past summer garnered over \$30,000. We could not move forward with either a serious fundraising campaign or program growth. The situation was becoming untenable. Our budget, already bloated with salary costs (our greatest expense by far), could not absorb a third full-time office staff person, nor was there justification for it. Given this, why was nobody fired? Precisely to avoid the kind of crisis we face today.

These were our colleagues, our friends, as well as board members, and each in their own way had contributed much to our Society over the years. Our Saturday in-person events, although at times parochial and attended by less than a dozen people, were popular. They stimulated the life of the local community and provided a platform for scholars from Ukraine to present their research. For many of our local long-time members, this was enough. Our academic sections remained paralyzed, but this did not raise concern (except from one former dedicated president)—rather quite the opposite, since people “from the outside” were generally viewed with suspicion. Our library and archives suffered from years of disorganization and neglect, but most members didn't use them. Attempts to pause, rethink, do a proper job search to avoid hiring the first unemployed person in search of a job and thus be boxed in with an unqualified employee, were misunderstood and met with protest. Unfamiliar guests were made to feel unwelcome; our dark uninviting lobby with broken bookcases and lights reflected our insularity, as did our building, packed to the gills with old equipment and office supplies from years gone by. We were clearly due for systemic change, which had begun incrementally with an influx of new professionals to the Board in 2015, but was running up against strong resistance.

When the pandemic shut us down for 18 months, all staff remained on full salary, as our concern for the welfare of our workers prevailed. The new reality meant taking all our activities online, which presented a challenge, but at the same time also offered a welcome opportunity to demonstrate a polished, professional image to the world. New part-time consultants were hired to assist and train our workers, English-language promotional materials were added; our lectures, many in English, began to resemble the best of university-type presentations. There was never any intent to terminate the employment of permanent staff; I had merely resigned myself to temporary help. Instead, a tremendous amount of time and effort came from members of the Society's executive, who conceptualized and largely executed our virtual presence. Unfortunately, this was

perceived as enough of a threat to provoke a cascading series of events that have led us to the present situation.

Our former administrator dedicated months of his formal employment hours to conduct a disparaging campaign against this Board, fomenting dissatisfaction, “pushing buttons” of latent grievances, accusing the Board of “doing nothing,” and spreading other patent untruths, particularly about the upcoming election by fear mongering about Hryn and Grabowicz executing a Putin-Medvedev-Putin scenario, in those words. In total secrecy from the Board except for one person, during working hours, he availed himself of all the Society resources, membership lists, and his position as longtime primary contact for the members, to assemble a competing slate with himself as President. Whereas he had every right to do this privately as a Full member of the Society, the terms of his full-time employment on a comfortable salary did not include lying daily to the face of his direct employer. As I stated at the meeting that Dr. Vitvitsky quotes, I had indeed “lost confidence” in my employee and still consider his behavior unethical, as would most reasonable people. I further stated that, had our administrator been open about his intentions, if not to me then at least to either the Audit or Nominating committees, we would have made every effort to accommodate him, removing him from the specific task of organizing the upcoming election and assigning other duties. And yes, removing him from a situation of potential conflict of interest. The fact that three former presidents were caught up in this deception, as well as members of the now reshuffled alternate slate, is, at best, testament to naiveté and irresponsibility. Even more surprising were offers to “make a deal,” by having the former administrator withdraw his candidacy for President. He eventually did just that, and, revealing the true intent of such offers, is now campaigning as First Vice President on his former slate. A review of institutional documents in the aftermath of his departure not only confirmed events as described above, but also revealed voting improprieties in elevations within sections. I wonder: which former president would have been expected to keep such an employee?

These escapades, and the whispering campaign of innuendo that has culminated in Dr. Vitvitsky’s open letter, have hurt our Society, plunging us into a crisis of trust and raising doubt about the integrity of our democratically elected officers. Accusations of misappropriated funds are especially damaging, and understandably raise fears among well-meaning people. The full review by the Audit Committee now underway will hopefully allay some of these fears. Personal relationships and long-standing friendships, however, have been put to the test, and healing will take some time.

Since April, we have continued to professionalize the Society’s infrastructure. While the Ukrainian-language Bulletin remains a core means of communicating with members, the reach of the English-language newsletter and other electronic mailings has increased. Over the summer, our staff performed a detailed audit of the organization’s membership list: creating a spreadsheet of contact information and laying the groundwork for a real database, correcting numerous errors, and generating accurate records of dues paid. This has resulted in a dramatic increase in the size and quality of our mailing list and notable growth in membership revenue. I am encouraged to see the office providing support to the Board and the Sections in unprecedented ways. Without adding staff skilled in online

communications, Board management, and best practices in recordkeeping, none of this would have been possible. Preparations for the upcoming elections are underway, following best practices and established procedures of previous Society elections. As a visible sign of our renewal, we are close to completing first-floor renovations to our building according to the design of renowned architect Larysa Kurylas, the designer of the Holodomor memorial in Washington, DC.

Despite this long digression into administrative matters—which, though pedestrian and non-academic, are necessary to take us to the next level—my overriding concern has always been scholarship, of which high-quality publications and research projects by our own members are an ultimate goal. We must become a center of intellectual pursuit and networking for like-minded people, and it is in this way that we can best fulfill our other mission of enhancing Ukrainian scholarship worldwide and lending support to colleagues in Ukraine. If we are to do that, we must not drive talented and dedicated colleagues away. This Saturday’s full Board meeting will discuss all matters raised, the Audit Committee will present their findings in due course, and we will find a solution that we believe is fair and just. In lieu of further letter writing I will be happy to conduct Zoom meetings with individual Sections or Branches to answer further questions.

In the meantime, it is up to all of us to decide what kind of Society we want. The upcoming election will give us a clear choice. My dedication to the goals enumerated above will remain unchanged regardless of the outcome.

Respectfully,

Halyna Hryn
President

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