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Ethnic Relations and Regional Problems in Independent Ukraine

Janusz Bugajski

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the political emancipation of its constituent republics, the problems of statehood and national identity have preoccupied all the newly independent countries. These issues became particularly poignant in republics such as Ukraine that have had brief interludes of sovereignty and contain sizable Russian or Russified populations within their borders. Problems of political democratization and economic reform became closely intertwined with the quest for national integration and state-building. In order to understand the dynamics of ethnic relations among the major nationalities in post-Soviet Ukraine, it is necessary to examine the population structure, the uneven process of nation-building, and the persistent regional divisions that have threatened to polarize national allegiances, widen ethnic cleavages, fracture the country's territorial integrity, and even undermine its independent status.

DEMOGRAPHY AND NATION-BUILDING

According to the last Soviet census figures, released in 1989, the population of Ukraine stood at 51,452,000.¹ Of this total, 72.7 percent, or 37,419,000 people, were registered as ethnic Ukrainians. Russians constituted the largest minority with 11,358,000 residents, or 22 percent of the population. The remainder, 2,675,000 people, or 5.2 percent of the population, comprised 108 different ethnic groups, including Jews, Tatars, Poles, Belorusians, Greeks, Romanians, Moldovans, and others. Some 4.6 million ethnic Ukrainians claimed Russian as their native language and were considered partially or wholly Russified. Whereas 87.7 percent of Ukrainian ethnics were principally Ukrainian speakers, and 12.3 percent were Russian speakers, 98.4 percent of Russian ethnics declared Russian as their first or exclusive language.

The accuracy of the Soviet census and its ethnic breakdown remained in serious doubt, particularly as it was never completed or fully interpreted and translated. Some analysts contended that the number of residents registered as Ukrainians was either artificially or inadvertently reduced, while the number of non-Ukrainian ethnics was inflated.² The nationality question was self-defined in the census, as individuals simply were asked to specify their ethnicity. Reportedly, many Ukrainians declared themselves as Russian for fear of potential discrimination under the prevailing process of Sovietization. About 20 percent of marriages in Ukraine were mixed, in which most offspring identified themselves as Russian. Between 1970 and 1989, the proportion of Ukrainians decreased by 2.5 percent, while the proportion defining themselves as Russian increased by nearly 3 percent. Simultaneously, there was a decrease in the percentage of the population that considered Ukrainian as its native language, in conditions where linguistic affiliation invariably shaped ethnic identity. Moreover, higher birth rates were recorded among Russians than among Ukrainians, and the inflow of nonindigenous ethnic groups increased. The post-1989 return of over 200,000 Crimean Tatars also had an impact on ethnic demographics.

In assessing the challenges to Ukrainian nation-building and cooperative interethnic relations, one needs to consider several interrelated factors, including the impact of statehood, the position of national and regional elites, the significance of regionalism and decentralization, and the extent of minority rights. Such an approach allows a more accurate evaluation of ethnoregional divergences, divisions, and conflicts in the young Ukrainian state.

In March 1990, Ukraine held its first multicandidate national elections and elected a large block of deputies favoring Ukrainian statehood. In August 1991, the parliament voted to declare the country's independence following the failed coup attempt by pro-Soviet hardliners in Moscow. In a public referendum in December 1991, the overwhelming majority of voters opted for independence: 84.1 percent of eligible voters took part, and 90.3 percent supported parliament's August declaration. Only 7.6 percent voted against. Some significant regional variations were registered in the ballot, however. In the west and the center of the country, over 95 percent of those who voted, voted for independence; in the east, the figures ranged from 75 percent to 90 percent. In the Crimean peninsula, only 54 percent voted positively.³ Ukrainian statehood thereby gained a solid base in the west and center, areas with a briefer experience of Sovietization and russification than in the east and south, where support for independence appeared to be conditioned on the performance of the post-Soviet government. The election results, as one analyst pointed out, indicated that "the road from external independence to *bona fide* internal unity remained rocky: much turbulence lies ahead."⁴

At the base of the problem was a persistent sociopsychological and political legacy. Ukrainians identified themselves as a minority in the Soviet Union and were subject to creeping russification and de-ethnification. Upon independence they found themselves in the majority, but with a predominantly minority mentality that precipitated confusion and a search for new bearings. Conversely, the Russians who were formerly

in a majority suddenly found themselves in the minority, a situation that invariably provoked uncertainty and a crisis of identity.⁵ These contradictions were ripe for manipulation by nationalist and Communist politicians intent on expanding their influence as well as by interelite competition for offices and resources.

The new postindependence Ukrainian political elite primarily consisted of a sector of the old ruling class that adopted nationalist colors. With the escalating crisis in the USSR, they capitalized on an opportunity to retain their positions and to expand their autonomy as controls from Moscow became progressively weakened.⁶ The fracturing of the Soviet Union also had a ripple effect throughout the regions of new states as local elites and industrial managers sought greater political and economic controls. Just as the "nationalized" Ukrainian nomenklatura preferred to be leaders of an independent state rather than provincial bosses of a centralized federation, so also regional elites sought to maximize their autonomy, especially in economic matters, through the devolution of powers to local governments rather than to become mere administrators of a new political center. This process was facilitated by the Soviet heritage, in which Kyiv did not exert strong control over the regions because the lines of Communist authority primarily emanated from Moscow. Subsequently, the unraveling of Kremlin controls under conditions of comprehensive and sometimes chaotic decentralization did not facilitate the emergence of a powerful new center, especially as Ukraine had limited experience of integral statehood. Not surprisingly, regions with contrasting historical, demographic, political, economic, and ethnic backgrounds developed differing levels of national consciousness and proved resistant to homogenization under conditions of expanding pluralism. Regional diversification was further encouraged by the slow pace of economic reform, the contrasting interests of the industrial and the agricultural sectors, the curtailment of the internal Soviet market, and a corresponding decline in living standards. The economic malaise during the first few years of independence tended to breed disillusionment with Kyiv and increased Russia's attractiveness for citizens in some regions, especially for Russified populations exhibiting only limited and conditional loyalty toward the Ukrainian state.

Under the presidency of Leonid Kravchuk, the Ukrainian government found it difficult to promote a unified nationwide political ideology to encourage integration and loyalty to the new state. It has proved both hesitant and hamstrung in imposing its authority in the eastern and southern regions, which have pressed for far-reaching autonomy. Indeed, any forceful centralization would have run counter to the prevailing climate of liberalization and could have been ultimately counterproductive by alienating important regional elites and buttressing public resistance toward the center. One growing problem has been the rise in organized crime and corruption, which is invariably tied to regionally based lobbies and interest groups that may be in economic and political competition for resources and influence, and whose loyalty to the central government is tenuous at best. In particular, power struggles between the Donetsk and the Dnipropetrovsk elites led to an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Pavel Lazarenko in July 1996. Striking an interregional balance between competing interest groups has bedeviled Ukrainian political stability and its state-building program.

Supporters of extensive regionalism have argued that economic reforms, involving decentralization, marketization, and privatization, have to be accompanied by administrative devolution and regional autonomy, if the contradictions between the two tendencies are not to generate conflict. From this perspective, steps to increase regional autonomy do not challenge national integrity or state independence. On the contrary, delaying or preventing such a devolution contributes to separatist tendencies as resentment grows against central state interference.⁷ Moreover, the absence of a coherent economic program under the Kravchuk government and the slow pace of administrative reorganization encouraged regionalism and in some instances, separatism. To counter such disintegrative trends, the consolidation of the state could actually be strengthened through political decentralization, by granting regions greater powers, especially in the economic realm. Some observers have contended that greater self-government at the city and the municipal levels would undermine separatist tendencies among regional elites, in a democratic variant of "Divide and rule."⁸

Integralists, or supporters of a unified state, remained wary that the varieties of ad hoc autonomization visible in Ukraine were fracturing the new country. The government stood accused of lacking a program and instead was simply responding to pressure as local elites wrested power for themselves. Critics decried the phenomenon of "spontaneous regionalization," favoring instead a process of orderly decentralization in which the central government determined the pace of devolution. The dispute between integralists and regionalists was evident in the debate between proponents of a unitary and a federalized state. In general, Ukrainian national democrats, centrists, and nationalists supported the maintenance of a unitary state with limited local autonomy, particularly in the political realm. Politicians upholding this position invariably represented Ukraine's western and central regions. They argued that Ukraine already had a federal type of structure in which several regions, particularly Crimea and the Donbas, were fully empowered and benefited from wide-ranging political autonomy. In contrast, the center-left, Communists, Socialists, some liberals, and regional elites in southern and eastern Ukraine tended to favor a federal system with more pronounced regional autonomy, especially in the economic arena. The disputes between integralists and federalists became muted during the administration of Leonid Kuchma, particularly with the passage of the new Ukrainian constitution in June 1996 that defined Ukraine as a unitary state.

The unitarist-federalist dispute had been impregnated with negative mutual perceptions between westerners and easterners. West Ukrainians tend to believe that easterners lack a national identity and have a "sausage mentality," that is, that they primarily focus their attention on material conditions rather than state sovereignty and national integrity. This orientation allegedly leaves them susceptible to separatist agitation. From this perspective, support for federalization was largely a smokescreen for ultimate secession. Western politicians believe that because the east is so comprehensively Russified, it will take time to construct a Ukrainian national identity and to build allegiance to the new state. This twofold goal will supposedly be accomplished through public education, the adoption of Ukrainian as a state language in all gov-

ernmental offices, and more effective Ukrainian mass media. Such a process could take a generation to complete, but even early results could be registered without surrendering the unitarist principle. Indeed, western integralists argue that regional autonomy, even in education, culture, and economic activities, could undermine this objective by reinforcing a Russified regional identity.

Among easterners, widespread suspicions have been evident concerning the intentions of westerners. Following the achievement of independence, there was a pervasive belief that a process of "ukrainianization" was under way for the past few years, designed to construct a new ethnolnational identity based on west Ukrainian principles. While this trend may have been evident under President Kravchuk, the Kuchma administration deemphasized ukrainianization, especially in the country's military. Moreover, regional elites in Donbas and Crimea feared a loss of political and economic influence if a federal solution were not implemented. They calculated that legislation on local administration did not go far enough in devolving power to the oblasts, or regions. The position of President Kuchma (elected in July 1994) on the federal question remained unclear.⁹ While Kuchma was overwhelmingly supported by east Ukrainians because of his support for closer relations with Russia, he also publicly expressed reservations about a federal type of arrangement that would substantially weaken the center.

Soon after the elections, Kuchma moved to restrict the powers of regional governments that had been extended at the close of President Kravchuk's tenure. After the March 1994 parliamentary elections, the presidentially appointed local administrators were replaced by elected officials. Critics contended that this process of decentralization could foster the disintegration of the state, and Kuchma moved swiftly to reassert presidential authority. In October 1994, he submitted a draft law on local government according to which the president would obtain the power to veto any decisions by the chairmen of oblast and city councils that contradicted the Ukrainian constitution and other laws.¹⁰ Such legislation would subordinate local bodies to the executive branch. Some regional leaders were opposed to such amendments, although there were indications that others would prefer to be answerable to the executive rather than to parliament. The parliamentary opposition criticized the notion of greater presidential controls over the regions, while presidential spokesmen attacked the latter for seeking the recreation of a Soviet-type system with parliament at the apex.

In September 1994, President Kuchma signed an edict creating a Council of Regions as a consultative and advisory organ. It was comprised of the chairmen of oblast councils and the city councils of Kyiv and Sevastopol (in Crimea) and was directly answerable to the presidency. Observers felt Kuchma would use the Council to counterbalance parliament and push for a package of amendments to the Law on Local Councils transforming oblast chairmen into fully fledged governors independent of parliament. The Council would thereby bypass a potentially antireformist legislature. The long-term aim was avowedly to transform the Council of Regions into a second parliamentary chamber.¹¹

The first independent Ukrainian government defined the country as a civic rather than an ethnic state, in which citizenship was based on residence, not nationality.¹² The law on Ukrainian citizenship passed in October 1991 declared all people living in Ukraine to be nationals, with no onerous residency requirements as in the Baltic states. It declared Ukraine to be a territorial rather than an ethnic unit. Indeed, Kyiv has tried to be accommodating on the question of minority rights and language use by non-Ukrainian speakers. In November 1991, the Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities guaranteed equal political, economic, social, and cultural rights for all individuals and nationalities. Among other provisions, it guaranteed the existence of “national-administrative units” for the country’s small but territorially compact minorities, and allowed for the language of any national group that was compactly settled in an administrative-territorial unit to function alongside the state language. This ruling clarified the July 1990 Declaration of State Sovereignty, which assured all nationalities the right to “national-cultural development.”

The language issue, however, with its potent symbolism as the expression and encapsulation of national identity, bedeviled interethnic and interregional relations. Soon after independence, the new government set out to restore Ukrainian as the sole state language. The application of this policy was often hampered by inertia fostered by decades of russification. In some southern and eastern regions, the ensconced political apparatus ignored the directives of the Department of Education. Indeed, the government in Kyiv was charged with forcible ukrainianization.¹³ Such accusations were strenuously denied by Kyiv, which offered evidence to the contrary: for example, in the 1988–89 school year, 51.8 percent of pupils were taught in Russian, easily exceeding the percentage of Russian ethnics in the population. Moreover, between 1988 and 1992, the proportion of children receiving instruction in Ukrainian grew by less than 2 percent, while the figure for Russian dropped by approximately the same amount. In addition, Russian speakers in southern and eastern Ukraine used their first language in all official discourse and benefited from a preponderance of Russian publications.¹⁴

The Ukrainian language law guaranteed all citizens the right to use their mother tongue. Nevertheless, Russian did not achieve the status of a “state language” equal with Ukrainian despite the protestations of Russophone forces. Several Ukrainian organizations, including the Writers Union and the national democratic parties, expressed fears that amendments to the language law, which proposed to give Russian “official status” alongside Ukrainian, would undermine the national language and signal renewed Russian dominance.¹⁵ Although such concerns appeared exaggerated, they did signal how sensitive the language question continued to be. The new constitution confirmed Ukrainian as the sole state language. However, it also permitted oblasts to operate with two official languages in administrative affairs; in several regions Russian was selected as a second language. Such measures seemed to appease much of the Russian-speaking population.

To strengthen the state’s civic orientation, the authorities introduced enlightened legislation furthering nondiscrimination toward ethnic minorities. For instance, in

June 1992, parliament passed a law on national minorities in which it codified opportunities for cultural development and political participation. The draft of the Ukrainian constitution confirmed the right of all citizens to preserve and protect their national affiliation (Article 16) and to equality before the law regardless of nationality, language, religion, or race (Article 15); it also specified a host of civil, political, economic, and cultural rights. It stressed the creation of a "civil society" based on equal rights, self-organization, and self-government, and avoided any overt focus on ethnicity or national identity.¹⁶ Kyiv also established a fund for ethnic minorities to promote their cultural, social, and economic development. Despite evident good intentions, however, because of budgetary constraints and inflationary pressures, the sums have been of limited practical value. Given this dynamic political context, ethnic relations in post-Communist Ukraine can be fruitfully examined by reviewing the situation in several key regions where ethnic identity has become politicized to varying extents since the attainment of national independence.

DONBAS: DE-ETHNIFIED REGIONALISM

The eastern regions of Donbas and Luhansk seem to be little understood by outsiders and sometimes deliberately misinterpreted by Ukrainian nationalists. Although there is no strident popular commitment to Ukrainian statehood and independence, nor any strongly developed sense of national identity, it would be too simplistic to characterize the majority of inhabitants as secessionists or as seeking reintegration into Russia or the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).¹⁷ Russian ethnics form 43.6 percent of the population in Donetsk oblast and 44.8 percent in Luhansk oblast. Although the bulk of residents in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts employ Russian as their first language, they do not display a strong loyalty toward Moscow and are reportedly not attracted to nationalist movements in Russia. Indeed, the population exhibits a tangible regional identity that is neither monoethnic nor multiethnic but rather a "de-ethnified" identity in which Russian is the major language.

National identity in the Donbas is ambiguous or multilayered, whereby people may view themselves simultaneously as Ukrainian, Russian, and Slavic, but in which the regional focus takes priority. Some observers have interpreted this as a "transitional identity" that responds to current government policy and prevailing economic conditions rather than ideological pressures. This flexibility stems from centuries of intermarriage and intermixing as well as the privileged industrial-worker status that the region was accorded under Communist rule. Political and national allegiance is thereby more dependent on local economic self-interest than on ethnonationalist commitment, particularly after the collapse of Communism and the dissipation of proletarian ideology. Since independence there has been little evidence of ethnic polarization or conflict in the region, indicating that ethnic identity is not a prime concern for the majority of citizens.

Regional elites in Donbas and Luhansk, as well as moderate political forces, have

pushed for greater autonomy, particularly in the economic realm, and have not adopted the maximalist agenda of the separatists. Under Kyiv's decentralization program, during 1993 several oblasts, including Donetsk, Luhansk, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhya, were given more extensive rights in managing state-controlled enterprises. In February 1994, President Kravchuk signed an edict granting a degree of regional self-government to these four eastern oblasts, especially in the administration of state property.¹⁸ As an indication of further pressures toward autonomy, a "consultative poll" was conducted during the March 1994 parliamentary elections to test public support for a federative regional structure, for dual language use, and for full CIS membership. The overwhelming majority of voters, reportedly over 90 percent, supported each proposal.¹⁹ Although the poll had no legal force, it served as a warning to Kyiv that dissatisfaction with economic conditions was mounting and that such frustrations could be exploited by separatist and pro-Russian forces.

Eastern elites have also demanded greater autonomy to trade and to reestablish direct relations with neighboring border regions in Russia, particularly as there remained a high degree of technical interdependence. Indeed, in October 1994 Kharkiv oblast authorities signed a cooperation agreement with Moscow oblast. A large measure of hope and illusion was evident in these proposals amid claims that recreated economic links with Russian industry would significantly revive the local economy. They also indicated that pressures for interconnection stemmed from material rather than political objectives. Regional leaders and directors of large enterprises looked toward Russia for economic development, given the shortcomings of Kyiv's economic reform programs from 1991 to 1994. Such expectations appeared overtly optimistic, as Ukraine had already lost much of its Russian market, which could not absorb a large volume of Ukrainian products. Paradoxically, Kyiv's support for closer regional links could tarnish some of the Russophile glitter as there is likely to be disappointment with Moscow's unwillingness to provide Donbas with financial subsidies. On the other hand, the pursuit of economic reform by Kyiv, with the passage of market-oriented legislation in November 1994, also contributed to social unrest in Donbas, given that the heavily industrialized areas shouldered the burden of state budget cuts, plant closures, and unemployment. The danger remains that such industrial turmoil could be manipulated by separatist forces seeking reunification with Russia.

While Communists, Socialists, and regional leaders in the east have favored economic autonomy, political devolution, and federalization, several pro-Russian groupings have been more outspoken on regional self-determination and integration with Russia. The Civic Congress and the Intermovement of Donbas, with links to parts of the old nomenklatura, have favored the restoration of a Russian-centered union, and envisage a step-by-step approach through economic union, a customs union, a ruble zone, a military union, and eventual political unification. They have been most vociferous in calling for regional autonomy, dual citizenship, and federalization as a stepping stone toward Russia. Indeed, Russophone leaders have supported regional autonomy similar to that which exists in Crimea, whereby Donbas would obtain its own legislature and executive, able to forge direct agreements with the government in Kyiv. The positions of the Civic Congress and Intermovement are not identical with that

of the Socialist or Communist parties or the "red directors" in industry and agriculture, who generally oppose Ukrainian partition and do not envisage Donbas as a future appendage of Russia. Moreover, conflicts have been evident even among Russophones between proponents of a looser CIS-type union that would incorporate all of Ukraine and supporters of a Greater Russian federation that would annex eastern and southern territories following the proposed partition of Ukraine.²⁰

Separatists and Russian nationalists have endeavored to push the Ukrainian authorities into defining the state along ethnic grounds, thus provocatively alienating the large segment of Russian-speakers. The Russophone lobby has attempted to manipulate ethnic and linguistic distinctions and has raised the specter of forceful ukrainianization to increase popular fears, mobilize public opinion behind their policies, and increase opposition to Kyiv. The propaganda line asserted that the Ukrainian administration has been dominated by nationalists who neglected the interests of "Russian-speakers" and were intent on "ethnifying" them. In practice, such allegations have been grossly inflated, especially as Russian schools continue to function and there are more Russian-language publications available than simple demographic proportions would warrant. Indeed, politicians in Kyiv have proved cautious in pursuing ukrainianization in the East, contending that the imposition of a conservative west Ukrainian national consciousness and religious worldview would create resentment and ultimately backfire.²¹

Crimea: The Russian Factor

The Crimean peninsula has presented a more immediate problem for Kyiv, in that the majority of inhabitants identify themselves as ethnically Russian and separatist forces have been prominent. According to the 1989 census, 67.04 percent of the population of 2.43 million were Russian and 25.7 percent Ukrainian. Nearly half of the Ukrainian ethnics considered Russian their native tongue. Nonetheless, there was no public unanimity supporting unification with Russia, and divisions were evident within the peninsula's political and economic elites. In fact, the majority of Crimeans participated in the March 1994 Ukrainian elections despite separatist calls for a boycott.

In January 1991, Crimea achieved the status of an autonomous republic within Ukraine after 93.3 percent of the electorate voted for such an arrangement, initially as a "subject of the USSR and a party to the Union Treaty." The Crimean oblast council had ruled that Crimeans have the right to autonomous statehood while ruling that the decree of the USSR's Supreme Soviet in June 1945 abolishing its autonomous status was unconstitutional. The Ukrainian parliament accepted the change of status in February 1991 and renewed Crimean autonomy "within the borders of the Ukrainian SSR."²²

In September 1991, a week after Ukraine's declaration of independence, the Crimean parliament declared the State Sovereignty of Crimea a constituent part of Ukraine. Some deputies demanded an immediate declaration of separation and continued membership in the Soviet Union and later the CIS. In April 1992, Kyiv passed a law delineating powers between state and republic; but it altered the version of the law approved by the Crimean authorities, thus reducing the powers initially granted

to the Crimean capital Simferopol. In retaliation, the Crimean parliament passed an independence declaration pending a public referendum. Kyiv proclaimed this action unconstitutional. Simferopol suspended its declaration: renewed negotiations resulted in a revised law specifying the powers and responsibilities of the two political entities. Nevertheless, this arrangement failed to stem the bitter political dispute over Crimea's status.

One of the major forces pushing for Crimean independence was the Republican Movement of Crimea, whose leader Iurii Meshkov was elected Crimea's president in March 1994, together with a largely Russophile parliament. The elections were accompanied by a nonbinding referendum calling for a "treaty" between Ukraine and Crimea and for dual citizenship (Ukrainian and Russian). Some 75 percent of voters supported these proposals. Meshkov was propelled to office on a platform of closer links with Russia and independence for the peninsula. After the elections, however, Meshkov tempered his separatist rhetoric and pressed instead for greater autonomy and more wide-ranging presidential powers. Conflicts began to mount between Meshkov and the parliament and between various factions in the broad coalition called the Russian Bloc. This process culminated in mutual suspensions of presidential and parliamentary functions, the effective rescinding of Meshkov's powers, and even appeals to Kyiv to mediate the conflict. President Kuchma adroitly capitalized on these internal conflicts and showed no indications of surrendering Ukraine's territorial integrity. Indeed, in November 1994, the Ukrainian parliament, with Kuchma's evident backing, annulled a long list of laws adopted by Crimea because they openly violated the country's constitution. He also appointed a presidential representative in the peninsula who upheld significant powers in the region. Some nationalist forces even called for a dissolution of the Crimean parliament and the return of the peninsula to oblast status. Kuchma and a parliamentary majority opposed taking such a step, as they were apprehensive about a major confrontation. In March 1995, however, Kuchma abolished the Crimean presidency and annulled its separatist constitution. The Crimean prime minister was replaced with a more accommodating figure. The new Ukrainian constitution afforded Crimea a significant degree of autonomy and its own regional constitution, thus further deflating the separatist lobby.

Kyiv banked on continued political infighting in Simferopol to draw Crimea away from a separatist platform and thus avoid any escalation in ethnic divisions. It also calculated that Crimea's lack of viability as a separate state because of its total dependence on Ukraine for energy, water, and transportation links, as well as Russian wariness about annexing the peninsula, would bring Simferopol into line. Moscow's role in Crimea has been ambivalent. While some parliamentary factions and military leaders have favored bringing the peninsula under Russian jurisdiction, Boris Yeltsin's government has avoided a direct conflict with Kyiv. Nonetheless, it periodically has manipulated the Crimean issue to maintain political pressure on Kyiv. In addition, the activities of radical pro-Russian forces needed to be carefully monitored by Kyiv as the possibility of provocations in order to draw Moscow into a confrontation with Ukraine could not be discounted.²³ The pro-annexationist statements of some promi-

nent Russian politicians, including Moscow mayor Iurii Luzhkov and former presidential candidate Aleksandr Lebed, as well as claims to Sevastopol by the Russian parliament, have contributed to undermining Ukrainian integrity.

Although interethnic relations in Crimea have not been overtly conflictual, Russo-phone nationalists have sought to exploit the specter of ukrainianization and a Tatar invasion to mobilize Russian ethnics against the Ukrainian state. Some Crimean Russians publicly have also attempted to alarm Ukrainians with the specter of Tatar separatism and thereby to embroil them in ethnic conflicts. Since 1989, over three hundred thousand Tatars have been resettled in Crimea, from which they were deported under Josef Stalin's orders during World War II. It is projected that another hundred twenty thousand will return over the next few years at the invitation of the Ukrainian government. The Crimean authorities have remained passive in assisting the resettlement program and in some cases have even obstructed the process. The Tatar leadership supported Ukrainian independence over Crimean-Russian jurisdiction, but they have simultaneously demanded a greater role in the peninsula's government. The Tatar national council (*majlis*) promoted itself as a legitimate self-governing body that should be incorporated into Crimea's parliament as a second chamber representing "native peoples" and with a veto right over all legislation. When this proposal was rejected, the *majlis* sought a third of all parliamentary seats, but eventually settled for an allocation of fourteen deputies in the 450-seat legislature.

Although the Tatar return has been supported by the Ukrainian authorities as a counterweight to the Russian-dominated Crimean government, Tatar numbers have not been large enough to be critical for the peninsula's ethnic and political balance. Tatars have not been afforded substantial financial support from Kyiv in rebuilding their communities. Kyiv's Ministry of Nationalities and Migration was not well equipped to respond to Tatar needs and evidently did not consider these a high priority. Ethnic Ukrainian leaders in Crimea also complained that Kyiv had contributed little to foster their national identity and had failed to establish a single Ukrainian language school for over 626,000 Ukrainians by mid-1994. At the same time, Crimean leaders accused Tatars of draining scarce resources from long-time residents and prevented Tatars from reclaiming the most productive lands. Some attempts were also made to evict Tatar families from new settlements, leading to clashes with police and local inhabitants and raising ethnic tensions on the peninsula. It is useful to note that the Tatar population has exhibited more pronounced political mobilization than the larger Ukrainian ethnic community in Crimea, while leaders of the two groups have cooperated in opposition against the Russian parties.

HALICZYNA: IMPATIENT NATIONALISM

The west Ukrainian oblasts were the first to push toward national independence. In March 1991, the local councils authorized a question on independence as an addition to Gorbachev's referendum to maintain the USSR as a federation. National democrats

clustered around the Popular Movement for Restructuring in Ukraine (*Rukh*) gained important local government seats and during the December 1991 referendum sent nearly twenty thousand activists to eastern and southern parts of the country to advocate Ukrainian independence. *Rukh* subsequently split into a number of parties and factions. The center-right bloc forged a working agreement with the “national Communists” around President Kravchuk in support of state independence. The more moderate and more radical factions, including the Conservative Republicans, were critical of the administration for unnecessarily making compromises with Moscow and the eastern elites and for the slow pace of ukrainianization.

While *Rukh* has generally displayed tolerance and moderation on the ethnic question, perceiving the danger of alienating eastern Ukrainians, the more radical local leaders in Haliczyna (western Ukraine, historically known as Galicia), some of whom were elected to parliament in March 1994, have been less restrained in criticizing “Russophone” elements in eastern Ukraine. They demanded a government crackdown against separatist tendencies in Crimea and Donbas. Such pressures have in turn fueled charges in Donetsk and Simferopol that a policy of coercive ukrainianization was under way and was supported by the authorities in Kyiv.

An important factor in the self-identity of western Ukrainians has been the reinstated Greek Catholic or Uniate Church. It served as a pillar of resistance to Soviet and Russian rule, but has come under fire among some Orthodox congregations for advancing a nationalist anti-Russian agenda in education, culture, and the mass media. The revival of Ukrainian Catholicism and the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox, and the consequent reduction in the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church, particularly in western Ukraine, has had an important impact on national consciousness and interethnic relations. Soon after the official restoration in June 1991, Cardinal Ivan Lyubachivskyi, the head of the Uniate Church, declared invalid Stalin’s 1946 transfer of Church assets to the Russian Orthodox Church. Simultaneously, there was a dramatic rise in Orthodox congregations opting for affiliation with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church or with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate, which did not recognize the authority of the Moscow patriarchate.²⁴ In western Ukraine, the Russian church effectively lost control over religious life and was denounced by local leaders as a tool of russification and as being out of touch with the Ukrainian national revival.²⁵ Some disputes also surfaced between Greek Catholic and Ukrainian Orthodox leaders, as the Uniates contended that the latter should focus their attention on the traditionally more Orthodox eastern regions.

The struggle between the three Orthodox churches has been particularly vehement in central and eastern Ukraine, especially over territorial and property claims; it has also had reverberations in political and regional conflicts. Observers grew concerned that the revival of independent churches could polarize ethnoregional divisions, especially where church leaders publicly supported specific political options. Indeed, in the March 1994 elections the Uniate and Ukrainian Orthodox hierarchy explicitly backed centrist and national democrat candidates, while the Orthodox-Moscow Patriarchate attempted to stay out of the fray for fear of besmirching leftist and pro-Rus-

sian candidates in the public eye.²⁶ Observers estimated that moderate nationalists and national democrats gained approximately eighty seats in the 1994 parliamentary elections, although many of these deputies canvassed as "independents." The ultra-nationalists did not perform well in the elections, obtaining a mere dozen seats in the 450-seat parliament.²⁷ However, their influence in parts of western Ukraine, in competition with the moderate national-democratic majority, could grow in the event of deepening socioeconomic turmoil and increasing interregional and center-regional disputes.

TRANSCARPATHIA AND BUKOVINA

As with several other Ukrainian regions, the Transcarpathian oblast council in western Ukraine has been canvassing to turn the area into a "special economic zone." It calculated that this would attract foreign investors, bypassing the Kyiv bureaucracy, and strengthen economic ties with neighboring Hungary and Slovakia.²⁸ Demands for economic autonomy have in turn galvanized anti-Ruthenian sentiments among Ukrainian nationalists. Some Slavic residents of Transcarpathia define themselves as Ruthenian, although the majority consider themselves to be Ukrainian ethnics. Disputes have raged since the collapse of the USSR on whether the Ruthenians are a separate ethnolinguistic group or merely a regional segment of the Ukrainian nation. Economic emancipation for Transcarpathia was viewed by nationalists as anti-Ukrainian separatism, particularly as it allegedly had support among "international agencies" in Hungary and Slovakia.²⁹

Autonomist tendencies have grown in Transcarpathia in recent years, with several groups pressing for varying degrees of self-determination. In December 1990, even before Ukrainian independence, the Society of Carpathian Ruthenians (SCR), formed initially as a cultural-educational group, demanded the "return of the status of an autonomous republic" to the Transcarpathian oblast. The SCR sought autonomy similar to that of semi-independent Subcarpathian Ruthenia in October 1938 following the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Such autonomist pressures had some resonance among the local oblast leadership, which called for full autonomy along Crimean lines but underlined their intent to remain a constituent part of Ukraine. They also raised the prospect of conducting public plebiscites on the question of autonomy and "self-governing" status for the region. Indeed, in a regional referendum in December 1991, 78 percent of the population favored the creation of a "special self-governing administrative territory" for the Transcarpathian oblast within an independent Ukraine.³⁰ More radical groups also have emerged in the region, including the Subcarpathian Republican Party, which called for the transformation of the region into an independent state. Their influence has been limited, however, and their objectives were rejected by the regional government.

The Hungarian community in Transcarpathia, which accounts for 12.5 percent of the region's population, has also become active in campaigning for an "autonomous

district" in the Berehiv raion containing the most compact Magyar minority. The Democratic Union of Hungarians in Ukraine (DUHU) organized a poll in 1992 to provide Berehiv with a special "national district" status. Eighty-one percent of voters approved of this measure.³¹ The DUHU also supported autonomy for the whole of Transcarpathia within an independent Ukraine. The authorities in Kyiv have proved fairly accommodating to the Hungarian minority, for example, by acceding to calls for a "special status" for the Berehiv district. This move was positively received by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Ukrainian authorities did not perceive Magyars as a threat to national integrity, but as a bridge toward establishing cooperative ties with Hungary and as a potential lever against the more strident Ruthenian demands for regional autonomy.

The Bukovina region in southwestern Ukraine has also exhibited some autonomous trends. On the one hand, a rift has developed between western, pro-Haliczyna raions and eastern, conservative raions. The former favored more extensive economic decentralization and the creation of a "free economic zone." On the other hand, a division has also appeared between Ukrainian majority raions and those with a substantial Romanian and Moldavan population. Approximately 20 percent of the total population of the oblast was registered as Romanians and Moldavans.

The minority Eminescu Society has been very active in the region and has lodged various proposals for improving the position of the Romanian community, including the establishment of a Romanian university in Chernivtsi and even dual Ukrainian-Romanian citizenship. This has been interpreted by some Ukrainian spokesman as creeping ethnoterritorial separatism aided and abetted by revisionist circles in Romania. Indeed, the more outspoken minority leaders have supported an eventual merger of Bukovina with Romania. Under the inspiration of nationalist and separatist forces, minority leaders called for a boycott of the December 1991 referendum on Ukrainian independence, while some local village councils have reportedly raised the Romanian flag and adopted other Romanian or Moldovan symbols.³² Kyiv initially proved less accommodating to the Romanian minority than to the Hungarian, clearly fearful that aspirations toward autonomy could snowball into a major confrontation with Bucharest over several territories annexed from Romania at the close of World War II, including Bukovina and the southern Danubian counties in Odessa oblast. Nevertheless, the Romanian/Moldovan population has been granted local self-government in districts where it predominates.

CONCLUSION

The development of ethnic relations in an independent Ukraine hinges on several key factors, including the impact of economic reforms, the extent of national political consensus, and the degree of regional stability. Unless the question of regional devolution is permanently resolved to the satisfaction of western, eastern, and southern Ukrainian leaders, the danger of an escalating east-west conflict is plausible. The lines

of confrontation may encompass a spectrum of contentious issues: economic programs, foreign policy, or questions of language use and education. Clearly, President Kuchma has succeeded to a greater degree than his predecessor in stabilizing the situation by seeking to create a balance between centralism and regional decentralization. Although interregional disputes remain evident, they have not focused on questions of ethnic identity and state allegiance, but largely on economic interests and political influences.

Indeed, the ethnic question has been largely defused in Ukrainian politics; by the close of 1997, even the Crimean issue remained relatively stable. The economic and political turbulence in Russia during 1998 may also have contributed to undercutting any domestic pressures for separatism or proposed reunification with Russia. Nonetheless, the potential for renewed ethno-regional conflicts cannot be completely discounted, particularly as influential forces in Moscow continue to harbor claims to Ukrainian territory. The shortcomings of Kyiv's economic reform program may also help generate social, regional, and ethnic tensions. A great deal depends on the long-term impact of privatization and marketization on broad sectors of the population and whether this will promote or dissipate long-term loyalty to an integral Ukrainian state.

NOTES

1. For census statistics, see Derzhkomstat, *Naseleennia Ukrainskoi RSR (Za Dannymy Vsesoiuzneko Perepuso Naseleennia)*, 1989 (Kyiv: Derzhkomstat, 1990): 144, 153–161.
2. Consult Natalya Lakiza-Sachuk, "Front-Page Topic," *Demokratychna Ukraina*, 28 May 1994, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) *Daily Reports*, Central Eurasia (hereafter FBIS), 21 June 1994, 57–59. See also Stephen Rapawy, "Socio-Economic Indicators for Ukraine," Soviet Branch, Center for International Research, United States Bureau of the Census, Washington, DC, April 1992, with detailed tables on the 1989 census for Ukraine.
3. See the *Report on Ukraine's Referendum on Independence and Presidential Election (1 December 1991)*, United States Congress, CSCE Committee, Washington, DC (20 December 1991).
4. Henry R. Huttenbach, "The (Re)Birth of Ukraine," *Analysis of Current Events* 3, no. 3 (December 1991).
5. An invaluable analysis of ethnic attitudes in postindependence Ukraine can be found in Ian Bremmer, "The Politics of Ethnicity: Russians in the New Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 2 (1994): 261–83.
6. See Eugene B. Rumer, "Eurasia Letter: Will Ukraine Return to Russia?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 6 (Fall 1994): 129–44.
7. See Stanislav Golobokov, "Praise for Autonomy," *Pravda Ukrainy*, 6 August 1993, in *FBIS*, 7 September 1993, 16–17.
8. See "The Absence of Self-Government Is the Cause of the Regionalization of Ukraine," *Holos Ukrainy*, 25 January 1994, in *FBIS*, 28 February 1994, 19–20.
9. For an analysis of the elections, see Dominique Arel and Andrew Wilson, "Ukraine Under Kuchma: Back to Eurasia?" *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report* 3, no. 32 (19 August 1994): 1–12.

10. See the UKRINFORM Report, "Leonid Kuchma Proposes to Bring Order to the Executive Chain of Command," *Donbas* (Donetsk), 18 October 1994, in *FBIS*, 25 October 1994, 64.

11. Oleh Shmid, "One Element is Lacking in the Unfinished Report of Leonid Kuchma: The Price Has Not Been Indicated in It," *Post-Postup* (Lviv), 29 September–5 October 1994, in *FBIS*, 27 October 1994, 73–74.

12. See Roman Szporluk, "Reflections on Ukraine After 1994: The Dilemmas of Nationhood," *Harriman Review* 7, nos. 7–9 (March–May 1994): 1–10.

13. For a useful discussion on the context of "Ukrainianization," see Ivan Z. Holowinsky, "Linguistic Policy as a Political Weapon," *Ukrainian Quarterly* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 13–20.

14. See Natalia Lakiza-Sachuk, "The Current Situation and Perspectives of Ethnic Policy in Ukraine as a Factor of International Security," paper presented at conference in Tallinn, Estonia, 14–18 October 1993.

15. "Protest of the Union of Writers of Ukraine," *Literaturna Ukraina*, 21 July 1994, in *FBIS-SOV*, 2 August 1994, 62.

16. For the text of the October 1993 draft of the "Constitution of Ukraine," see the Special Supplement to *Holos Ukrainy*, 30 October 1993, in *FBIS*, 22 November 1993, 10–34.

17. This assessment is based on extensive interviews during the author's visit to the Donbas in July 1994. Also see "Focus on Serious Challenges Facing Ukraine," Briefing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, Washington, DC, May 1994.

18. See Tetyana Khomych, "The Counselor of Rutsky Teaches Us to Live," *Molod Ukrainy*, 1 March 1994, in *FBIS*, 14 March 1994, 29–30.

19. Check the results of the "advisory plebiscite" in *Unian* (Kyiv), 31 March 1994, in *FBIS*, 1 April 1994, 35–36.

20. Some militant separatists have even proposed reviving the short-lived Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Republic of 1918, this time as a Donetsk-Dnieper or Dnieper autonomous republic. For details, see Roman Solchanyk, "'Intermovement' Formed in Donbas," *RFE/RL Report on the USSR* 2, no. 51 (21 December 1990): 9–10. Russophile regionalism has also been evident in Odessa, where autonomists have campaigned for "special state status" for four southern oblasts in the historical boundaries of "Novorossia." For details, see Roman Solchanyk, "The Politics of State Building: Centre-Periphery Relations in Post-Soviet Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 46, no. 1 (1994): 47–68.

21. See the interview with Taras Stetskiy, "New Wave Politicians Already Know that the Ukrainian Superidea Hidden in Conservatism's Coffers Cannot Be Unlocked with a Liberal Key," *Post-Postup* (Lviv), (10–16 June 1994), in *FBIS*, 14 July 1994, 80–82.

22. Roman Solchanyk, "Centrifugal Movements in Ukraine on the Eve of the Independence Referendum," *RFE/RL Report on the USSR* 3, no. 48 (29 November 1991): 8–13.

23. For useful background on the Russian minority question, see William D. Jackson, "Russia After the Crisis, Imperial Temptation: Ethnic Abroad," *Orbis* 38, no. 1 (Winter 1994): 1–17. Delays in signing the Ukrainian-Russian state treaty also encouraged separatist voices in Crimea and elsewhere. Throughout the fall of 1994, several issues remained in dispute, including the granting of dual citizenship and the inviolability of borders. Moscow was willing to guarantee the latter within a CIS context, while Kyiv sought a more specific agreement not tied to the CIS structure, arguing that such language would simply imitate the old Soviet stipulations. See *Unian* (Kyiv), 12 October 1994, in *FBIS*, 13 October 1994, 32.

24. In June 1992, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC) were united into the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchate. The UOC had declared its autocephaly from Moscow in November 1991. See Anatoliy

Kolosha, "The Kyiv Patriarchate: A Difficult Path to Unity," *Holos Ukrainy*, 31 July 1993, in *FBIS*, 20 September 1993, 30. Despite this official merger, conflicts persisted between the two hierarchies, preventing the emergence of a truly unified Church. Consult Jaroslaw Martyniuk, "The State of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine," *RFE/RL Research Report* 3, no. 7 (18 February 1994): 34-41.

25. See Kathleen Mihalisko, "Cardinal Lyubachivskyy Takes Up Permanent Residence in Ukraine," *RFE/RL Report on the USSR* 3, no. 28 (12 July 1991): 19-20.

26. For a useful summary of interchurch conflicts, see Victor Yelensky, "The Crusaders: Ukrainian Churches and Great Politics," *Post-Postup* (Kyiv), 11-16 May 1994, in *FBIS*, 8 June 1994, 53-55.

27. See Dominique Arel and Andrew Wilson, "The Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections," *RFE/RL Research Report* 3, no. 26 (1 July 1994): 6-17; Ivan Bilaniuk, "Plus 60 Deputies: An Analysis of the Parliamentary By-election Results and Their Implications," *Ukrainian Legal and Economic Bulletin* (September 1994); and Ustina Markus, "Results of Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections," *RFE/RL Daily Report* (22 November 1994): 5-6.

28. See Ivan Chopordya, *Novyny Zakarpattia* (Uzhhorod), 21 October 1993, in *FBIS*, 9 November 1993.

29. See Andriy Rak, "Separatists Are Causing Trouble in Transcarpathia," *Ukrainska Hazeta* 40, no. 20 (2-15 December 1993): 4, in *FBIS*, 15 December 1993.

30. For more details on the Hungarian minority in Ukraine, see Alfred A. Reisch, "Transcarpathia's Hungarian Minority and the Autonomy Issue," *RFE/RL Research Report* 1, no. 6 (7 February 1992): 17-23.

31. The compact Bulgarian population in the Bolhrad raion of Odessa oblast also voted in favor of forming a Bolhrad national district. See Solchanyk, "Politics of State-Building," 65, n. 20.

32. See Volodymyr Stafanets, "Reunification of Bukovyna with Romania Landed in Court," *Post-Postup* (Lviv), 26 May-2 June 1994. One additional complication has arisen in recent years, namely, the dispute between Romanian and Moldavian nationalists within the minority community in Bukovina: the former have promoted the restoration of a Greater Romania, the latter of a Greater Moldavia.

Ukraine

The Search for a National Identity

edited by
Sharon L. Wolchik
and Volodymyr Zviglyanich

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