

INTRODUCTION

Russia and Ukraine are united in my blood, my heart, my thoughts. But from friendly contacts with Ukrainians in the camps over a long period I have learned how sore they feel. Our generation cannot avoid paying for the mistakes of generations before it...

We must prove our greatness as a nation not by the vastness of our territory, nor by the number of nations under our tutelage, but by the grandeur of our actions... We must leave the decision to the Ukrainians themselves—let federalists and separatists try their persuasions.

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*

This book contains two main arguments. The first is that the existing sense of national identity of most inhabitants of Ukraine (as of 1998), although very unwelcome to Ukrainian radical nationalists and Russian imperial nationalists—indeed, precisely *because* it is unwelcome to them—contributes greatly to the stability and unity of independent Ukraine, the peace and security of the region, and therefore to the interests of the United States and the West in general.

The reason for the unhappiness of both Ukrainian and Russian nationalists is, paradoxically enough, the same. As will be described in the course of this book, centuries of common history have led ordinary Ukrainians and their Russian neighbors in most parts of Ukraine

2 Ukraine and Russia

to be very close in culture, language, behavior, and attitudes. For Ukrainian nationalists, particularly those from the specific culture of the western Ukrainian region of Galicia, this affinity makes it very difficult to convince the mass of ordinary Ukrainians to support their version of narrow, ethnocentric, often chauvinistic Ukrainian nationalism.

As for Russian imperialists, although they frequently refer to the closeness of ordinary Russians and Ukrainians as an argument for a union between the two states, in fact this closeness is working against their hopes. In the past, when the state was dominated by Russia, the lack of clear distinctions between Russians and Ukrainians contributed to Ukrainians easily becoming Russified. Today, with the state being Ukrainian, this lack of distinction is helping more and more Russians to become to a considerable extent Ukrainianized, in terms of gaining fluent command of the Ukrainian language and developing a real loyalty to a civic version of Ukrainian patriotism. This makes it very difficult to turn the Russians of Ukraine into a rebellious “fifth column,” working to destabilize Ukraine and bring it under Russia’s subjugation—all of which is both good in itself and very much in the West’s interest.

The second argument stems from the first. It is that Russia and Ukraine, although separate nations, are also closely linked. These links have not just been forged over the centuries by Russian, then Soviet, governments but have also developed “organically” through millions of human contacts over hundreds of years, resulting in very important aspects of common psychology, religion, culture, language, and historical identification.¹ These aspects of shared identity are changing and will go on doing so, but this both is and ought to be a gradual process. It can be encouraged, but not forced, by the Ukrainian state. The desire of most inhabitants of eastern and southern Ukraine for close relations with Russia was reconfirmed by the results of the March 1998 Ukrainian parliamentary elections—an increased vote for the Communists and Socialists.

With regard to Western policy, therefore, this book recommends a certain caution. It is certainly very desirable to give various kinds of aid in an attempt to strengthen the Ukrainian economy, on which in the end the stability, unity, and even independence of Ukraine will chiefly depend—while recognizing that as everywhere else in the world, economic reform and economic success will depend on the Ukrainians themselves.

The lack of such economic reform to date and the deepening economic crisis and economic hardship in Ukraine are a dark background to the factors I describe; they also give grounds for concern that if they

continue for a long period, as now seems probable, Ukrainian politics may not remain forever as peaceful as they are at present. In the course of 1998, the Kuchma administration began to show signs of a willingness to step outside the law in order to target opponents and hold onto power. Meanwhile in Russia, all the optimistic promises of a coming boom have once again come to nothing, and the approach of the presidential elections of the year 2000 and the succession to Yeltsin are fraught with uncertainty and danger.

I argue that in these circumstances, to see Ukrainian independence mainly in terms of an anti-Russian stance, and to encourage Ukraine to move in this direction, could have disastrous results, because it would be against the wishes of a very large proportion—indeed, as of 1998, a majority—of Ukraine's own citizens. It would also not serve the vital national interests of the United States in this region, interests which lie above all in the fostering of democracy, peace, economic development, and stability, not in favoring particular nationalist agendas.

The reason the United States has a vital interest in the prevention either of a Russo-Ukrainian conflict or an internal Ukrainian one should be obvious but is worth restating here. Several countries in the Transcaucasus have been racked by war without this having much effect on the West; but Ukraine, with 52 million people, is very much larger and also borders on two countries which will soon be North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) members, Poland and Hungary. Conflict involving Ukraine and Russia would have a destabilizing effect on the whole of Europe.

The threat of such conflict has greatly receded since the May 1997 Russia-Ukraine Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership. The most important aspect of the basic treaty was that after years of negotiations and disputes which occasionally reached the edge of violence, Russia and Ukraine agreed on how to divide up the Black Sea Fleet and its main base at Sevastopol, with Russia renting most of the base for twenty years. This agreement will be examined at more length in chapter 4.

While a direct Russian-Ukrainian fight over Sevastopol is still not impossible in the more distant future, such clashes—like the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait—have been very much the exception in the world in recent decades. Much more common has been some combination of internal unrest with outside sponsorship and pressure. This is why the internal stability of Ukraine, and the peaceful, gradual, and voluntary integration of the Russians of Ukraine into the Ukrainian polity, are also vital Western interests.

4 Ukraine and Russia

Russian officials have privately threatened that if Ukraine seeks to join NATO, then Russia will use the Russian minorities in Ukraine to destabilize and even destroy the country. As this book will strongly emphasize, the potential for such deliberate destabilization among the Russians of Ukraine (and of other Soviet successor states) has been greatly exaggerated; it appears even more fanciful in the context of the acute economic downturn that has once again struck both Russia and Ukraine since August 1998. Nonetheless, it is true both that this is indeed Russia's most powerful weapon in Ukraine, and that the extent of its power will depend as much on future Ukrainian governments—in their treatment of the Russian minority—as on actions by Moscow. It is also true that a Ukraine and Russia both endlessly condemned to severe poverty, social stagnation, and pervasive official corruption cannot but in the long run generate political instability that may take on a chauvinist cast.

THE STRUCTURE OF THIS WORK

Experts on Ukrainian and Russian history may wish to skip the first chapter, which sketches the history of the region up to the present. For reasons of space, this is necessarily a brief and fairly superficial overview. I should also stress that this book is not intended as a work of professional historiography and cannot attempt to be a thorough history of Ukraine. Rather, it is a book about aspects of contemporary Ukraine and Ukrainian-Russian relations by a journalist who has spent long periods in the region. As such, I have had to exercise brevity in presenting the religious history of Ukraine and the very important but also very complicated relationships among the different Orthodox patriarchates, the Uniates, and the Roman Catholics.

Furthermore, because of this work's contemporary focus, the first chapter pays only limited attention to the Polish-Ukrainian relationship, even though this relationship was of critical importance in shaping Ukrainian history and western Ukrainian culture, and even though much of modern Ukrainian nationalism (especially of course in areas long under Polish rule) was formulated in opposition to Polish claims. The transfer of Galicia and Volhynia from Poland to Soviet Ukraine by Stalin, and the subsequent deportation of most of its Polish minority, mean that today the Polish-Ukrainian relationship is far more straightforward than the Russian-Ukrainian one. While nostalgia for the lost lands certainly does exist in Polish society, only a tiny fringe of extreme Polish

nationalists have called for the return of these lands. It is quite impossible now and for the foreseeable future that the Polish parliament would declare Lviv a Polish city—in the manner that the Russian parliament has declared Sevastopol a Russian city more than once.

Despite this and other large gaps in my historical account, some historical background is necessary for any serious study of the Ukrainian-Russian relationship today. This is because the centuries of common rule have been obviously crucial in shaping the contemporary identities of Ukrainians and Russians and the relationship between them. Moreover, the nature of several key periods and episodes during this long history has long been a source of contradictory propaganda for Russian and Ukrainian nationalists, both of whose accounts need to be treated with extreme caution. The first step in avoiding being trapped by narrow and biased versions of Ukraine and Russia today must therefore be an attempt to examine their history objectively.

This is obviously even more true of the Soviet period. Stalin's rule in particular imposed the most outrageous suffering on Ukraine and to a lesser extent on Russia, a subject which has also become a matter of bitter dispute between historians and pseudo-historians. The Soviet period, and in particular the vast migration into Ukrainian industrial cities of both Ukrainian and Russian peasants, also in effect created modern Ukrainian society as it exists today across much of the country.

The second chapter looks more closely at contemporary Ukrainian society, focusing on relations between Ukrainians and Russians, on mutual images and prejudices, on the various kinds of Ukrainian national identity, and on the reasons for the lack of a strong sense of a Russian national identity among the Russians in Ukraine. This chapter contains three theses, which are central to the book.

The first is that as a whole, the "Russians" in Ukraine (as in most of the other former Soviet republics) are not really Russians at all; rather, they are Russian-speaking Soviet immigrants. Second, this being so, it follows that there is naturally little to distinguish these "Russians" from their equally Sovietized Russian-speaking Ukrainian neighbors. (In the crucial case of language, for example, while the great majority of Ukrainians in most of the country speak fluent Russian, 34 percent of Russians in 1989 already claimed to speak fluent Ukrainian.² In any case, many people in this region speak Surzhik, a sort of mixed Russian-Ukrainian dialect.) Third, the immigrant nature of these "Russian" populations, added to the atomizing and depoliticizing effects of Soviet rule, helps make it very difficult for them spontaneously to generate

6 Ukraine and Russia

social, political, or labor organizations to defend their economic, political, or national interests.

Chapter 2 also analyzes the national feeling of Russian-speaking Ukrainians, such as President Leonid Kuchma, and argues that while this sentiment is less culture-based than the nationalism of Galicians from western Ukraine, or that of the Ukrainian-speaking nationalist intelligentsia, Russian-speaking Ukrainians have in fact retained a real sense of loyalty to Ukraine—a feeling that, since independence, has become the main foundation of the new Ukrainian state.

Chapter 3 looks at the different regions of Russian-speaking Ukraine and briefly describes their distinct histories and characters. It also analyzes the rule of local elites, or “parties of power,” and the nature of their influence and their priorities in the Ukraine of the mid-1990s. It argues that while most of these elites are hardly convinced Ukrainian nationalists, they now have very good reasons of pragmatism and self-interest for respecting the authority of Kiev; hence, a Russian government bent on destabilizing Ukraine (which has not been the case so far)—even if it were to adopt a ruthless strategy—would be hard put to find local allies. I suggest, however, that the unprincipled greed of many of these elites means that there is a risk of them falling out bitterly over the division of state wealth and patronage, and that the defeated party might then at some stage try to appeal to ethnic sentiment to revenge itself on its victorious rivals.

The possible exceptions to this rule are examined in chapter 4. Crimea and especially Sevastopol contain a Russian population that has a different origin and character from that of the rest of Ukraine; for one thing, it is much less closer to the Ukrainians. There also exists between the local Russians and the Crimean Tatars a degree of ethnic hostility quite unlike the attitudes of most Ukrainians to their Russian neighbors and vice versa. This means that Crimea is the only part of Ukraine where one can imagine future violence of the kind that racked the Transcaucasus and Yugoslavia in the early 1990s.

This chapter will also examine the town and the “question” of Sevastopol, which is a case on its own because of both the presence of the Black Sea Fleet and the immense emotional importance that Russians attach to keeping a stake in this city. If Crimea is the only place in Ukraine where one can imagine spontaneous ethnic violence, Sevastopol is perhaps the only place outside Russia for which one can imagine many ordinary Russians willingly going to war. This is remarkable, for—as the Chechen war has amply demonstrated—the Russian people

of today are hardly in a warlike mood or anxious to seek bloody conflict with their neighbors.

The fifth chapter analyzes the reasons for the weak, ambiguous, and undefined nature of Russian nationalism and the Russian national identity today against the background of history and with reference to recent events in the Russian-Ukrainian relationship and in areas such as Chechnya, which are outside the immediate scope of this book. It suggests that Russia today is much less dangerous to its Western neighbors than many commentators have assumed, and that this is not just because of its current physical weakness but also for cultural, social, and psychological reasons.

The conclusion examines Western policy toward Ukraine and Russia in the context of the expansion of NATO and (perhaps) of the European Union. It argues strongly that rather than trying to build up Ukraine as a buffer against Russia—as some Western analysts and officials would advocate—the interests of the West, of peace, and of the peoples of Ukraine will be served by encouraging Ukraine's economic development, national independence, and democratic state building, as well as by encouraging friendly and peaceful relations between Ukraine and Russia, because such relations are desired by a majority of Ukrainian citizens and are also in the interests of the whole region.

THE ARGUMENT

On the whole, therefore, my conclusions about the future of Ukraine are optimistic. Assuming that Ukraine achieves a reasonable degree of economic progress, that ethnic tensions with the Crimean Tatars can be restrained, and that the dispute over Sevastopol can be managed peacefully—admittedly big assumptions—I believe that the threat from Russia will be slight, and that the great mass of Russians in Ukraine can be integrated into the new state.

However, it is vital to stress that the peaceful and democratic development of Ukraine will be possible in the long run only if the version of Ukraine and Ukrainian culture presented to the Russians of Ukraine remains on the whole moderate and integrationist, rooted in civic nationalism and not in ethnicity or a narrowly nationalist version of the Ukrainian tradition, and if the Ukrainian state is not seen by large segments of its population to have gone out of its way to create a breakdown of relations with Russia (however, if a Russian regime were seen as principally guilty in this regard, that might be a different matter).

8 Ukraine and Russia

Finally, as chapter 5 will strongly emphasize, Ukraine's stability depends in part on Russia not developing an ethnic chauvinist version of Russian nationalism nor seeking to spread its appeal to Russians beyond Russia's borders.

In light of these tentative conclusions, I would like to endorse the following 1993 statement by a group of Ukrainian and Russian-Ukrainian scholars, published in the journal *Politicbna Dumka*. The statement was written under the administration of President Leonid Kravchuk, at a time when the combined threat from Ukrainian nationalist policies and conflict with Russia looked much greater than at the time of this writing. Nonetheless, its arguments are still worth emphasizing for the future, particularly because the authors' statement on the lack of a direct military threat from Russia has since been entirely borne out by the Chechen war—both by the miserable performance of the Russian army and the extreme lack of enthusiasm of the Russian population and military alike for military adventure.

The threat to Ukraine [from Russia] does not exist in the classical military sense. But that does not mean that one should completely reject the idea of a strategic threat in other ways. . . .

Pursuing classical "balance of power" tactics against Russia would result in the unnecessary economic and psychological exhaustion of Ukraine and could well lead to the state's collapse from an internal threat. . . .

A belief that Ukraine should consistently oppose Russia on the international stage is erroneous. It would be more reasonable and beneficial to move toward the European Union and the non-military structures of NATO independently but in parallel. . . .

A non-confrontational strategy concerning Russia is warranted still more by the domestic circumstances of Ukraine. . . . Ukraine's national security is not threatened by Russian military expansion, but by Russia's potential use of social, cultural and psychological means. . . .

The contradictions and dynamics in Russian-Ukrainian relations are similar to those when you try to separate two Siamese twins. . . . There is no event in world history which parallels in complication the phenomenon of Russian-Ukrainian combined separation and co-existence, both in its quality and in its sheer scale. . . . There is an almost organic entangling of tasks.

Neither Ukraine's security nor favorable conditions for her development as a nation are possible without deep and sincere neighborly relations with Russia. Long-term confrontation is also ruled out for internal cultural and psychological reasons (and this is also true of Russia).

Therefore Kiev faces the tremendous task of rebuilding its centuries-old relationship with Moscow on a qualitatively new basis while also acquiring the means to defend its own interests....

Hence the involvement of non-Ukrainians in the process of Ukrainian nation-building should be considered an important precondition for that process's success....⁵

