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Publisher: Routledge

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## Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cnap20>

### Language politics in independent Ukraine: Towards one or two state languages?

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Version of record first published: 19 Oct 2007

To cite this article: Dominique Arel (1995): Language politics in independent Ukraine: Towards one or two state languages?, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 23:3, 597-622

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00905999508408404>

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## LANGUAGE POLITICS IN INDEPENDENT UKRAINE: TOWARDS ONE OR TWO STATE LANGUAGES?

*Dominique Arel*

The implementation of language laws in multilingual territories often leads to acrimonious political conflicts, as demonstrated by the recent experiences of Quebec, Estonia, Moldova and Slovakia, to name but a few. The pattern of such conflicts is remarkably similar. First, one group (generally, but not necessarily, the demographic majority) claims ancestry on a territory which it considers its "homeland"; then it succeeds in proclaiming its language (the main marker of group identity) the sole official language in the "public domain" of the given territory. This action triggers organized protest from the other linguistic group (generally the demographic minority), which feels aggrieved over such fundamental issues as group status, equal opportunity for upward mobility, and educational rights.

Language politics is the politics of threatened identity. The "titular" group, after which the "homeland" is called, justifies the exclusionary nature of the policy (one state language where *two* languages compete) on the grounds that its language is under threat of extinction. Since, in these cases, the titular group defines its identity primarily in terms of its distinct language, this amounts to saying that the survival of the group itself is at stake. The perceived threat is largely a function of the unequal geographic span of languages: Russian and English are seen as threatening in Moldova and Quebec, respectively, not only because they are perceived as occupying too much official space in these societies, but because of their regional hegemony in the former Soviet Union and North America. The unequal "natural" competition of languages calls for state intervention and protection of the smaller, titular, language.

Language politics can be so intense, at times, because they play on the symbolism of unequal group standing, make people fear for their jobs or careers, and affect the institution of cultural socialization *par excellence*—the school. To pronounce a single language "official" implies that the people speaking that language have greater political rights than others. To require that people in their official capacities must know the new official language suggests that those who do not adapt may lose their jobs, while native speakers of the official language have a built-in career advantage. To restrict access to non-official language schools may elicit cries of cultural discrimination among linguistic minorities.

Most former Soviet republics, along with smaller "autonomous" units, have been going through the convulsions of language politics since the *glasnost*' years, with the most acute conflicts registered in Moldova and Estonia. Ukraine—the most important

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former republic in demographic, economic, and regional security terms—has seemingly sailed through five years of linguistic peace; this has occurred despite the fact that Ukraine, like all the others, passed an exclusionary language law in 1989, making Ukrainian the sole state language. This stillness may have led some to believe that language was not destined to become a salient political issue in independent Ukraine. However, in early 1994, approximately 90% of the electors in the key industrial provinces of the Donbas voted in an illegal referendum for the proclamation of Russian as a second state language; this demonstrated quite vividly that language *is* indeed a very politically charged reality in Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

For the student of language politics, Ukraine is not merely a new case to explore, but a very interesting one from a theoretical point of view. This is because two of the key features in the Ukrainian case—linguistic closeness and severe linguistic assimilation—are rather unusual for a multiethnic state. First, the titular language, Ukrainian, is so closely related to that of the demographic minority, Russian, that it is at least passively understood by all Russians living in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> Second, as a result of this linguistic closeness, a great many Ukrainians have linguistically assimilated to Russian, for centuries the language of Russian/Soviet/CIS hegemony.<sup>3</sup> These two features may yield contradictory expectations in terms of the intensity of language politics. On the one hand, since the languages are so close, Russians and linguistically Russified Ukrainians (the two groups, henceforth, will be referred to as “Russophones”) can presumably be expected to learn Ukrainian quite easily if they have to, instead of resisting the new language policy. On the other hand, the fact that so many Ukrainians are linguistically Russified means that language politics is, first and foremost, an intra-group phenomenon in Ukraine, and we know from the study of religious and ideological factionalism that internecine conflicts can be the most intense. Ukrainians themselves may have contradictory views as to the significance of language for the national identity of the group, and, thereby, of the new state aspiring to become a “nation-state.”

### Profile of Ukraine

Ukraine is basically a bi-ethnic state, home of 37.4 million Ukrainians and 11.4 million Russians, with every other ethnic group constituting less than one% of the population (most of the once significant Polish and Jewish populations were either deported or killed during World War II). The Russians—eighty%—are concentrated in the urban areas of the eastern and southern industrial regions, bordering Russia and the Black Sea. Virtually all Ukrainians living in these cities use Russian in public, and a very high proportion—exceeding forty% in regional capitals such as Kharkiv or Donetsk—actually claim Russian as a mother tongue.<sup>4</sup> The cities of central Ukraine, including the capital Kiev, are overwhelmingly Ukrainian, but they also wore a Russian “face” in the Brezhnev years. Party and state offices there

functioned almost exclusively in Russian, and the public use of Ukrainian was frowned upon, and could even bring about absurd accusations of “nationalism.” The western provinces, however, were different. Annexed in 1944, they managed to replace Polish with Ukrainian as the language of cities, with Russian playing a comparatively more restricted public role. As for the countryside, all regions are almost exclusively Ukrainian both in ethnic composition and language.

Language politics in Ukraine is co-terminous with regional politics. The western Ukrainians speak Ukrainian and define their identity in *opposition* to Russian. The eastern Ukrainians speak Russian, see the Ukrainian and Russian cultures as *complementary*, and their own affiliation to Russian as central to their complex identity. The central Ukrainians, whose region, unlike the west, had been part of Russia for centuries,<sup>5</sup> seem increasingly to side with their western brothers on language/identity issues, probably because most were brought up in a rural Ukrainian milieu far less penetrated by Russian culture.

Western Ukrainians are adamant that independent Ukraine must not enter into a political association with Russia because this would necessarily mean subordination, a loss of sovereignty for Ukraine, and continuing assimilation among Ukrainians. As a result, the survival of the nation (ethnic group) and of the state would be endangered. Eastern Ukrainians, less preoccupied with Russian cultural hegemony because of their sense of belonging to the Russian cultural world, are outraged at the rupture of links with Russia, especially since this rupture is economically so detrimental to the region. Consequently, they are clamoring for the resumption of links. Western Ukrainians are convinced that their eastern brothers are mistakenly pro-Russian because they *think* too much in Russian. Only by learning and using Ukrainian can they rediscover who they really ought to be. Eastern Ukrainians perceive intentions to “Ukrainianize” their region as arrogant and dangerously “nationalist.” Language politics are thus at the core of a battle over what it means to be Ukrainian, and how this identity is shaped by Russian culture.

### Language Law

The Ukrainian language law, passed in October 1989, was a defensive reaction of the communist old guard, which could no longer justify the *status quo*, since eight Soviet republics had enacted language laws earlier in that fateful year. It was adopted by the old Soviet Ukrainian parliament, which meant that deliberations during the preparation of the draft law remained secret. Public debate was lively, although it was restricted mostly to intellectual circles, and could be expressed only in a few *glasnost*'-breaking outlets, since the conservative authorities still maintained a tight control on the media.<sup>6</sup>

As in the Baltics, Moldova, and the Central Asian republics, Ukrainian society immersed itself into a lengthy debate over the status of languages. Ultimately,

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communist officials had to accept grudgingly that Ukrainian alone be granted the status of "state language," and that Ukrainian, Russian, and other languages be proclaimed languages of "interethnic communication." Russian, therefore, was not accorded distinct status.

Like the language laws already adopted in other republics, the Ukrainian law established four basic principles:

- (a) that the official language, *i.e.*, Ukrainian, was to become the sole language of administration (in Russian, *iazyk deloproizvodstva*), replacing Russian;
- (b) that Ukrainian as a second language was now mandatory in all Russian schools;
- (c) that higher educational institutions (*vuzy*) would eventually have to use Ukrainian as their language of instruction;
- (d) that external signs would have to be in Ukrainian only, or, at the very least, in both Ukrainian and Russian.<sup>7</sup>

Unlike the Baltic laws, however, whose stringency had already led to the mobilization of Russophone movements, the Ukrainian law was not meant to be implemented right away. A delay of up to five years was foreseen in the transfer of the language of administration to Ukrainian, and of up to ten years for the Ukrainization of *vuzy*. Ukrainian officials were in no hurry to effect real changes in language practice, not only because they feared public protests but because a critical mass among the population—Russians and ethnic Ukrainians alike—were not fluent in Ukrainian, and preferred to continue using Russian. As a result, in the first two years after the adoption of the law, very little changed, and state and party organs continued using Russian. The exception was an already much less Russified western Ukraine, where the nationalist movement *Rukh* won the regional elections in 1990, and instituted Ukrainian as the sole language of official communications.

It is only since the independence of Ukraine in December 1991 that the situation began to change. This was due in large part to the active role played by three key central institutions: the newly created presidential apparatus, headed by Leonid Kravchuk;<sup>8</sup> the Ministry of Education, after the appointment of Deputy Minister Anatolii Pohribnyi; and the state-owned Ukrainian television company, under its new director Zinovii Kulik. Two important developments should be emphasized. First, language measures began to be implemented by the aforementioned institutions, but, as we will see below, they were often at odds with the language law. Second, in response to such measures, public meetings and regional parliamentary sessions in eastern Ukraine increasingly protested what they perceived to be the Ukrainization of their region.<sup>9</sup> These protests, however, did not percolate to the floor of the central parliament in Kiev, the *Verkhovna Rada*. Regional representation in the Ukrainian parliament was still fragmented—something which might change after the 1994 elections—and there was most probably a fear of opening a Pandora's box.

### Language of Administration

Since independence, the language of documentation in central state organs has largely switched from Russian to Ukrainian, although Russian is probably still widely used in industrial ministries.<sup>10</sup> When interviewed by the author in the summer of 1993, a number of entrepreneurs all said that they are conducting their correspondence with the state in Ukrainian, since official papers (registration, tax forms, *etc.*) are now issued in Ukrainian only. Official acts emanating from the presidential office, the Cabinet of Ministers or the parliament, such as decrees and laws, are also often published exclusively in Ukrainian, which is contrary to an article of the language law specifying that such documents must, as a rule, be made available in Russian.<sup>11</sup>

Documents sent from central organs to regional bodies are, it seems, exclusively in Ukrainian, when originating from parliament or the presidency. Thus, Donbas miners mentioned to the author that they cannot understand the laws sent to them by Kiev and have to have them translated.<sup>12</sup> When originating from Kiev-based ministries towards the regions, the documents are increasingly in Ukrainian. As for documents emanating from regional organs and enterprises, however, they are still written in Russian in eastern and southern Ukraine, but less and less so in central and western Ukraine. The pattern is thus one of the Ukrainization of official correspondence between the center and the regions, but *within* the regions, Ukrainization in the center and west only, while Russian persists in the east and south. As for the army, the sole use of Ukrainian in official documents was supposed to be introduced in the fall of 1993, but this policy was slowed down after the dismissal of Defense Minister Konstantyn Morozov, perceived as too “nationalist.”

Real inroads, then, have been made for Ukrainian as a language of official documentation, but this is not to say that Ukrainian is now being used as the predominant language of *oral* communications in official organs and enterprises. Since Ukraine’s two prime ministers in 1993—Leonid Kuchma and Yuhym Zvi-ahils’kyi—were not able to speak Ukrainian in public, except from a prepared text, it is hard to imagine how Ukrainian can predominate as the language spoken in ministerial offices. From impressionistic evidence, it is, in fact, quite clear that Russian is still heavily used in central offices. (The author met a martinet-like deputy minister who used only Russian and indignantly asserted that there were no language problems in Ukraine).

The persistence of spoken Russian in central offices raises a sensitive political question: is it enough for people in central offices to produce official *documents* in Ukrainian and be able to read Ukrainian, or must they also be required to speak the language? In practice, written fluency can be effectively managed in a large office by a few proficient clerks, while oral fluency applies to all and can be difficult to attain for adults. To insist on such fluency instills fear in non-Ukrainian-speakers that their upward mobility might be blocked or their job security imperiled. To have this

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requirement waived, however, could mean that Russian, as before, would remain *de facto* the high status language in Ukraine, negating the very spirit of the language law.

Since most key industries are located in urban areas of eastern Ukraine, home to about fifty% of the overall population, officials from these areas are bound to play a major role in central politics. For instance, the aforementioned prime ministers were both from the east. Officials from these areas tend to be of either Ukrainian or Russian ethnic background, but they come from what for all intents and purposes are Russian *unilingual* areas: only Russian is spoken on the streets of eastern cities. Therefore, these "easterners" tend to feel uncomfortable when speaking Ukrainian. This is not to say that they do not have a passive understanding of Ukrainian (which almost everyone has), but many, perhaps a majority from the industrial regions, lack an active command. Although the similar grammatical and syntactical structure of Ukrainian and Russian make it easy for a Russophone to acquire a rough command of Ukrainian, a *precise* command, which is what an active command in an official setting would require, is much more difficult for an adult to attain. This is because of the constant danger of confusing the two languages.<sup>13</sup>

Since central and western Ukrainians, unlike the Russophones from the east and south, tend to have used Ukrainian in their youth, strict language prerequisites could very well favor their mobility at the expense of the easterners and southerners, a recipe for regional confrontation. This is why the 1989 language law remains fairly ambiguous on the question of language requirement. After enunciating the principle that officials must know Ukrainian, the law makes the explicit point that insufficient knowledge of Ukrainian cannot interfere with employment.<sup>14</sup> The law further indicates that those not fluent in Ukrainian will have to acquire it on the job. Yet, since no penalties are foreseen for those who fail to do so, in practice, the use of Ukrainian at work remains *voluntary*. In western Ukraine and in the Ministry of Education, however, resolutions have been passed requesting that review commissions verify the language capabilities of officials and apply administrative measures for unsatisfactory cases.<sup>15</sup> This leaves the door open for dismissals on language grounds. Once again, it must be noted, these resolutions do not agree with the language law, since amendments to this law by parliament have yet to be made.

In the hierarchy of language rights, the right of a member of the titular nationality in his or her homeland (state, territory, province) to use the titular language in interactions with public officials is a most fundamental one, on a par with the right to be educated in one's mother tongue. The right to receive an answer or to be served in the official language necessarily implies that the public official, or even the salesman, has an active command of the language. This is why language prerequisites for public jobs are a central provision of most language laws, such as that of Estonia. In certain regions, such as Central Asia, there may be a problem with sheer incomprehension, where officials know only Russian, and rural folk know only the local language. In societies such as Ukraine, however, mutual intelligibility is never

a problem. Here, the problem may be that people simply *refuse* to hear or use the other's language as a matter of principle.

The issue, once more, has much more to do with identity than with expediency. Virtually *all* Ukrainians are fluent in Russian, as a result of their Soviet upbringing, but nationalists may refuse to speak it, except with people from outside Ukraine. Russophones may feel uneasy speaking Ukrainian because of a lack of practice, or they may refuse to speak it on the grounds that Russian should have equal status in Ukraine, which is, again, a statement about identity. The result is often a truly bilingual conversation, where one party uses only Ukrainian and the other only Russian, a situation only possible when two languages are close and mutually intelligible.

Notwithstanding episodic complaints in the press, nationalists have not made the language spoken at work a priority issue, focusing their attention instead on the building of institutions of the new independent state (border control, formation of an army, foreign policy with Russia and the rest of the world, *etc.*), and assuming that the situation will gradually "normalize" itself. But if Russian remains prevalent in state offices, as it most probably will because of the important presence of easterners in government, it is likely that nationalists will change their tactics and pressure government into adopting a policy of language prerequisites for state employment, as they are already doing in western Ukraine. Since Ukrainian national identity among Ukrainian nationalists is defined by its historical and continuing distinctiveness from Russian culture, it appears inevitable that Ukrainian nationalists will soon reach a point where they will no longer tolerate the use of Russian in offices of the *Ukrainian* state.

Whether they will muster the requisite political support to force the government to implement this linguistic policy is, however, far less certain. Considering the demographic importance of eastern and southern Ukraine, where regional representation in parliament is determined by population, it is hard to see how western and central/Kievan elites will be able to push such a policy.

### **Education: "De-Russification" of Schools**

A common grievance throughout the republics when glasnost' allowed language issues to be aired was that there had been an excessive emphasis on the study of Russian in non-Russian schools, both in terms of hours of instruction per week and the grade in which instruction was started. (Beginning in the late 1970s, it was taught from kindergarten on.) Ukrainian nationalists considered that such a precocious and intensive "bilingualism" was deleterious to a proper learning of the mother tongue.

In Ukraine, however, the school problem was far more serious, since a significant and ever growing proportion of Ukrainian children had actually been studying Russian as a *first* language since the postwar years. This was very unlike the situation in the Baltic republics and the Transcaucasus, where the overwhelming majority of

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children of the titular nationalities never ceased to receive their elementary and secondary education in their mother tongue throughout the Soviet era. By 1989, only 44.6% of all schoolchildren of Ukraine were enrolled in Ukrainian schools, while census results showed that 72.7% of the population was listed as Ukrainian.<sup>16</sup> Since virtually all Russian children, and most from other non-Ukrainian groups, were enrolled in Russian schools, this meant that approximately 25% of Ukrainian children were thus receiving their education in Russian.<sup>17</sup>

Ukrainian schools did not exist before the 1917 Revolution because of a tsarist ban on official use of "Little Russian" (the term used for Ukrainian at that time), but the Bolshevik policy of developing non-Russian languages in the 1920s (*korenizatsiia*, called *ukrainizatsiia* in Ukraine), combined with a successful literacy campaign, brought virtually all Ukrainian children into Ukrainian schools by the late 1920s. Two decades later, remarkably enough, considering all the Stalinist attacks against "nationalism," the figure was still the same.<sup>18</sup> In the 1950s, however, an exodus of Ukrainian children to Russian schools began in earnest, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the "Russification" of schools.

The Russification of schools had an urban and regional character. It did not touch the countryside at all, since Ukrainian pupils in rural areas have always gone to Ukrainian schools since the 1920s. (In Crimea, rural Ukrainian schools were closed in the 1930s, but Crimea was not part of Ukraine before 1954.)<sup>19</sup> It also did not affect western Ukraine, the seven *oblasts* incorporated in 1944 (five of which had never been part of the Russian Empire). In 1989, the proportion of schoolchildren in Ukrainian schools matched the proportion of Ukrainians in these areas.

In urban areas, the Russification of schools advanced markedly since the 1950s, especially in eastern and southern Ukraine. In the regional capitals, such as Kharkiv, Donetsk and Odessa, it led to the near or actual eradication of Ukrainian schools, with just about all Ukrainian schoolchildren enrolled in Russian schools. As a result, in 1991-92, only 17.2% of schoolchildren from the east were enrolled in Ukrainian schools, with an eastern population 59.3% Ukrainian, and 24.6% in the south, with a southern population 65.0% Ukrainian.<sup>20</sup> The great majority of these few Ukrainians still in Ukrainian schools lived in rural areas.<sup>21</sup> As for Kiev, the capital, it did retain a contingent of pupils taught in Ukrainian (20.1%), although well below the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians in the city (72.4%).

Since the Soviet campaign of *ukrainizatsiia* in the 1920s, and until the postwar years, the official educational policy was that pupils were to be educated in their mother tongue, with "mother tongue" defined in collective terms (the language of the ethnic group) rather than in individual or family terms (the language considered "native" by the pupil or his or her parents, irrespective of ethnic background). Thus, until the early 1950s, as indicated above, almost all ethnic Ukrainians received their elementary and secondary education in Ukrainian. Only urban areas of the Donbas and southern Ukraine were exceptions to this rule, with many "Russified" ethnic

Ukrainian pupils allowed (if not encouraged) to study in Russian from the mid-1930s on.<sup>22</sup>

In the early 1950s, however, the “mother tongue” policy was *de facto* changed when a critical mass of Ukrainian parents living in urban areas began to enroll their children in Russian schools. What seems to have happened is that eastern and southern cities were flooded with Russians from Russia who migrated south to help reconstruct the industrial infrastructure of Ukraine, which had been devastated by the German occupation. Rural Ukrainians also migrated *en masse* to the industrial cities for the same reason, but authorities seemed to have opened only new Russian schools to accommodate the newcomers.<sup>23</sup>

The number of children in Ukrainian schools thus declined relatively, and then began to decline absolutely when Soviet educational policy changed *de jure*, in 1959. According to the change, parents were granted “freedom of choice” concerning the language of instruction of their children, a euphemism for encouraging non-Russian parents to enroll their children in Russian schools. This elicited protests from Baltic and Transcaucasian officials in particular,<sup>24</sup> yet, contrary to their fears, this new policy had no effect whatsoever on school enrollments in their republics. It was only in Orthodox, non-Russian areas (eastern Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Volga autonomous republics), as well as in capitals of Central Asia, that the transfer of non-Russian pupils to Russian schools was significant.<sup>25</sup>

Not coincidentally, the nationalities most vulnerable to the “Russification” of their school age cohort were precisely the ones lacking a higher educational system in their own language. While Balts, Armenians and Georgians were able to study in *vuzy* in their native tongue,<sup>26</sup> all *vuz* instruction in Ukraine, Belarus, Central Asia, Moldova and the Russian autonomous republics was in Russian, except in certain humanities departments. In the latter territories, titular nationality parents thus had an incentive to enroll their children in Russian schools in order to maximize their chances of later being accepted by a *vuz*, where instruction was in Russian only.

The predominance of Russian in republican *vuzy* (outside of the Baltics and the Transcaucasus) resulted from a conscious decision made by the central authorities in the 1930s, reversing a trend which had developed under *korenizatsiia*. In the 1920s, higher education in Ukraine had been truly bilingual, with students taking some courses in Russian and some in Ukrainian. After the long interruption of World War II, the new policy eventually created a system of incentives for parents to “defect” from the national group and send their children to Russian elementary and secondary schools. Thus, there was some plausibility in the claim by Soviet officials that this exodus corresponded to “demands” from parents themselves. But there were also built-in incentives for Soviet officials to presume the wishes of parents and arbitrarily to change the language of instruction of a particular school from Ukrainian to Russian. National issues, after all, could not be discussed in open forums because the Party had decreed the “national question” to be eternally solved, and those perceived as insisting too much on language demands risked accusations of “nationalism.”

What then could check the decision of a bureaucrat who decided to "Russify" a neighborhood school, especially if official ideology kept extolling the virtues of Russian as the language of true "internationalism," and intimated that languages were undergoing a process of "fusion" to a supra-socialist language?

In the early Gorbachev years, Ukrainian intellectuals demanded that this policy of parental freedom of choice be terminated, but the conservative officials who drafted the 1989 Ukrainian language law (enacted, it must be pointed out, before the reasonably free elections of 1990) held on to the status quo. Freedom of choice was even described as "inalienable" in an article of the law.<sup>27</sup> As Soviet legal documents had continued to indicate even after the change of policy in the 1950s, the law also "guaranteed" the right of every child to be educated in his or her mother tongue, but this right had become purely declarative in most cities of eastern Ukraine, since parents had only Russian schools to "choose" from. In the first two years following the adoption of the language law, nothing was done actively to encourage greater enrollments in Ukrainian schools in cities, except in Kiev, where the proportion of pupils in Ukrainian schools grew from 20.1% to 30.9%.<sup>28</sup>

Following key personnel changes since independence, however, the Ministry of Education has begun adopting an active stance towards "re-Ukrainizing" the school system. The policy focuses anew on "mother tongue" conceived in collective terms, yet it is a gradual policy in that it targets only new students, not those ethnic Ukrainians already enrolled in Russian schools. Local educational organs are now instructed to bring the proportion of *first-graders* "into optimal concordance with the national composition of the population in each region."<sup>29</sup> This would mean that in a city such as Kharkiv, where half of the population is Ukrainian, half of the school-age children should eventually be enrolled in Ukrainian schools, up from one% in 1991.

The new policy has apparently yielded remarkable initial results, with the Ministry of Education claiming that the proportion of children in Ukrainian schools has jumped from 45.1% to 51.4% in a single year, between 1991-92 and 1992-93.<sup>30</sup> Since virtually all changes are necessarily taking place in urban areas of central, eastern, and southern Ukraine, this could mean an increase in Ukrainian-language enrollment of close to ten%age points in urban schools.<sup>31</sup> This is a significant achievement.

The change is quite drastic in Kiev, where four of five students used to be in Russian schools (1988-89), but where it is now claimed just five years later that more than four of five first graders (88%, in 1993-94) are taught in Ukrainian.<sup>32</sup> (The shift is so high that it would mean that many *Russian* children are now enrolled in Ukrainian schools). No precise enrollment figures are available for other cities, but in Kharkiv, 24 schools out of approximately 160 are now admitting pupils to Ukrainian classes only, a figure still far below the proportion of Ukrainians in the city (50%), but much higher than two years ago (two schools).<sup>33</sup> A similar increase in the availability of classes is also apparent in the industrial centers of

Dnipropetrovs'k and Odessa.<sup>34</sup> In the Donbas and Crimea, however, regions with the highest concentration of ethnic Russians, enrollment does not seem to be growing appreciably from its almost non-existent state. Donets'k still has a single Ukrainian school out of about 160, and although there were plans to open Ukrainian classes in four schools of the Crimea for the school year 1993-94, as of the summer of 1993 there were still none.<sup>35</sup>

The Ministry of Education has not formally repudiated the "freedom of choice" of parents, but it seems to assume that, given the opportunity, *all* Ukrainian parents will spontaneously decide to enroll their children in Ukrainian schools. The spectacular growth of enrollment in Ukrainian schools in Kiev might seem to support this assumption. However, there are grounds for questioning whether that growth was truly spontaneous. The policy of the Ministry of Education is not merely to encourage the opening of first grade classes with Ukrainian as the language of instruction in existing Russian schools, but to ensure that when a Russian school does open such Ukrainian classes, it cannot open first grade Russian classes as well. In other words, schools do not have the option of becoming bilingual. They can admit pupils in either Ukrainian or Russian classes, but they cannot offer a choice. What this means is that many Russian schools had to change their status entirely and become Ukrainian, although they will continue offering education in Russian to those pupils already in Russian classes before the change in policy.

In theory, the decision to change the status of a school is made by parents. For a society accustomed to authoritarian decision-making, however, one would expect the role of school authorities to remain quite decisive. Thus, the author was told that there were no problems in changing the status of dozens of Russian schools to Ukrainian because such decisions were made unanimously in assemblies of parents. Asked whether the authorities had encountered cases where parents were split on this issue, an educational official for the city of Kiev answered that her office knew of only one minor case. A Kiev journalist, present at the interview, commented that he had spent his entire life living in a state where decisions were always taken "unanimously" and was always wary of such claims.<sup>36</sup>

As a matter of fact, the arbitrariness of school authorities has long been denounced in the nationalist press, and increasingly now in directives of the Ministry of Education. School directors in the Russified areas are accused of sabotaging the instructions of the Ministry, and not responding to the wishes of Ukrainian parents to have their children educated in Ukrainian.<sup>37</sup> In Kiev, however, they may no longer be responsive to demands of Russian parents.

There is no question that the independence of Ukraine and the Ukrainization of higher educational institutions, at least in Kiev, central and western Ukraine (see below), acts as a powerful incentive for parents to have their children educated in Ukrainian. But the massive transfer to Ukrainian education is also a function of new administrative incentives put in place by the Ministry of Education to induce school authorities to defect from the Russian camp. In the wake of post-communist

educational reforms, schools now have the option to have their educational status raised to the more prestigious level of a college, *lycée*, *gymnasium* or a school specialized in the teaching of a foreign language. In practice, Ukrainian schools are highly favored in the selection process, and some Russian schools have decided to switch to Ukrainian primarily to enhance their chances of being selected.<sup>38</sup> The policy, however, seems to be quite different in the Russified east and south, since a recent circular letter by the Ministry of Education denounced the fact that in that region most new types of schools which have opened of late use Russian as their main language of instruction.<sup>39</sup> This may be an indication that central educational policy, quite effective in the central and western regions, is not being enforced in the eastern and southern regions.

Officially, freedom of choice for the language of instruction in elementary schools is still guaranteed, but in practice the actual choice may be restricted. If, as a top education official asserted, "the enrollment of first grade pupils must take place only *after* the network of schools has been established in accordance with the *national* composition of the population in each region" [emphasis mine],<sup>40</sup> ethnic Ukrainians who consider Russian their mother tongue may no longer have the practical choice of sending their children to Russian schools. This new policy—if indeed central authorities succeed in implementing it in eastern Ukraine—may appear "undemocratic," but one should keep in mind that democratic governments in multilingual territories do not always grant their citizens freedom of choice in the language of instruction in schools. In Quebec, French Canadians and immigrants have no choice but to enroll in French schools, while in Belgium, French can only be taught as a first language in Walloon territory, and Flemish only in Flemish territory.<sup>41</sup> In both cases, the collective right of the national group (right of protecting its core identity—language—against assimilatory pressures) is deemed more important than the right of individuals from these groups to choose for themselves.

In the case of Ukraine, since so many Ukrainians claiming Russian as mother tongue are precisely from those areas with no Ukrainian schools or a paltry few, the threat to the Ukrainian collective identity is perceived by nationally-conscious Ukrainians in very vivid terms. Many self-identified Ukrainians, however, may refuse to have their children educated primarily in Ukrainian (which is an entirely different proposition than having them learn Ukrainian as a *second* language), either because they might still perceive Russian to be the language of upward mobility, or because they may object to the way education is dispensed in Ukrainian schools.

### Education and Upward Mobility

Considerations of upward mobility were always closely linked to the language of higher educational institutions, which was Russian in Ukraine, except in literature and journalism departments. According to the language law and the current educational policy, *all* higher educational institutions will have to shift to exclusive use of

Ukrainian by the end of the decade.<sup>42</sup> Since the fall of 1993, two major steps in this direction were to be undertaken.<sup>43</sup> First, all students wishing admission to any higher educational institution—except for those lacking five years of Ukrainian classes in high school—would be required to pass a Ukrainian language exam for *vuz* entrance.<sup>44</sup> Second, first-year classes in all subjects were to be taught in Ukrainian, except—and this is a very crucial exception—in cities where more than half of the population is Russophone. In the latter case, parallel classes may be offered in Ukrainian and in Russian. Educational authorities are thus proceeding very cautiously, since *vuzy* in eastern Ukraine are all located in cities with a majority of Russophones.<sup>45</sup> The term “Russophone,” of course, refers to the language of the person, and not the ethnicity, which means that Russian-speaking Ukrainians are lumped here with Russians, while for enrollment in elementary schools, as we saw above, educational authorities specifically target the ethnicity of children.

For a transitional period, therefore, the policy appears to favor the creation of bilingual *vuzy* in big industrial towns, making it possible, at last, for a Ukrainian to receive an entire higher education in Ukrainian. This attenuates the incentives to send one’s children to Russian elementary school. On the other hand, if the language of business continues to be Russian, as is the case in eastern Ukraine, and even in Kiev, and if language prerequisites for jobs as described above are not enforced, then it may be difficult to dispel the general perception that Russian is still the main language of mobility, despite the partial Ukrainization of universities. Consequently, many Ukrainians from the industrial regions may still want to have their children educated primarily in Russian, as they themselves were.

Yet the policy for higher educational institutions is not merely to introduce bilingual education, but ultimately to have all existing institutions, shift their language of instruction wholly to Ukrainian. Unlike the policy for elementary and secondary schools, this policy would affect not only linguistically Russified Ukrainians, but ethnic Russians as well. Russians and Russified Ukrainians would no longer have educational institutions in their mother tongue past high school, while, at the same time, their chances of going to Russia to pursue their studies are decreasing because, as foreign students of the “near abroad,” they can no longer expect their tuition to be paid by the Russian state. This is bound to provoke fierce resistance among Russophone populations of the east. Denunciations of “forcible Ukrainization” are already beginning to be heard in industrial centers, such as Donetsk and Odessa.<sup>46</sup>

Ukrainian officials justify their demand for the exclusive use of Ukrainian in higher education by pointing out that European states, such as France or Germany, use a single language, and nobody questions this natural practice. The comparison, however, is misleading in that Ukraine, unlike France or Germany, is not a nation-state, that is, a state comprised overwhelmingly of citizens of the same ethnic group, but, sociologically speaking, a *bilingual* and *biethnic* state, home to two major linguistic groups.<sup>47</sup> Officially, the Russophones comprised thirty% of the population

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in 1989, although the proportion of people speaking Russian most of the time is in fact much higher.<sup>48</sup> In aiming at the wholesale nationalizing of *vuzy*, Ukrainian authorities are acting *as if* Ukraine was a nation-state.

#### Russian in Ukrainian Schools

If Russian was previously used excessively in Ukrainian schools, it may now be, from the point of view of Ukrainians from the east or south, insufficiently used and irritatingly downgraded in status. According to the policy of the Ministry of Education set to be implemented in the fall of 1993, Russian is no longer mandatory in Ukrainian schools.<sup>49</sup> This, too, contradicts the 1989 language law which states that both Ukrainian and Russian are mandatory in all schools.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Russian is relegated to the status of being merely one of the "languages of the peoples of Ukraine" (third in alphabetical order after Bulgarian and Polish).<sup>50</sup> In addition, Russian literature is no longer to be taught as a separate topic in Ukrainian schools, but as part of "world literature," with the strict proviso that it does not take up more than one-fourth of the total time devoted to the course.<sup>51</sup>

Educational officials clearly believe that Ukrainian culture must disassociate itself from Russian culture as much as possible in order to develop freely. But this view, fairly dominant among Kievan intellectuals and western Ukrainians, is unlikely to be shared by Ukrainians living in the Russian quasi-unilingual areas of the east and south who, far from nourishing an adversarial attitude toward the Russian language, actually consider Russian culture to be part of their admittedly mixed identity. It is quite understandable, from a psychological point of view, that nationally-conscious Ukrainians, who suffered for so long the indignities of not being allowed to use Ukrainian in public forums because it was deemed inferior and even politically suspect, now maintain that Russian is no more than a "foreign" language, with no more status than any other minority language spoken in Ukraine. This view, however, is politically confrontational. While Hungarian or Bulgarian is spoken by less than one% of the population, Russian may be spoken as the main language of use at home by as much as half of the entire population. How is a Ukrainian, speaking Russian at home, or a Russian, whose family has lived in Ukraine for generations, expected to react to the proposition that she or he speaks a foreign language? The expectation by nationalists is that such Russophones will "Ukrainize" themselves, but the reaction of the latter is more likely to be one of indignation and of demanding that Russian be granted equal status, as a second state language.

#### Media: More or Less Russian?

A major tenet of Soviet nationality policy was that titular languages were to be provided with a media infrastructure in the republics. Even in the worst years of Russification in the 1970s, when party and state organs began to function almost

exclusively in Russian, each republic broadcast television and radio programs and published newspapers, journals, and books in its titular language. There were criticisms among dissidents and in the West that the number of titles and the circulation (*tirazh*) of periodicals and books in non-Russian languages were getting proportionally smaller over the years. Although this charge may not have been founded in some republics, it certainly rang true in Ukraine.<sup>52</sup>

The center's (*i.e.*, Moscow's) mass media enjoyed a privileged position that was denied to all non-Russian republics. Only central television stations had the right to have foreign correspondents; furthermore, Moscow was endowed with much more modern facilities than republican stations, and central daily newspapers were twice as long as their republican counterparts. In a non-market economy, all such decisions were, of course, planned by central bureaucrats. Titulars resented what they perceived to be a deliberate policy of provincialization of their culture.

An additional problem in Ukraine was that Ukrainian-language media outlets were actually using more and more Russian. Since cultural bureaucrats did not deem it necessary to develop an industry for dubbing Russian and foreign films in Ukrainian, and since most local films were actually shot in Russian, this meant that the great majority of films shown on *Ukrainian* TV were in Russian, without translation. The same applied to films shown in theaters.<sup>53</sup> As discussed before, this policy did not prevent comprehension, but it reinforced the notion that Ukrainian had a lower status than Russian on Ukrainian soil. As for newspapers, the original *korenizatsiia* policy of the 1920s had been to publish the official provincial (*oblast*) daily in Ukrainian only; but eastern *oblasts* were later provided with a Russian daily as well, either an exact translation of the Ukrainian paper, or a different paper altogether. By the 1980s, the circulation of these Russian *oblast* dailies was significantly higher than that of their Ukrainian counterparts, and most large eastern cities had by then acquired an evening paper either in Russian only or with a Russian edition dwarfing the Ukrainian edition in circulation.<sup>54</sup>

The 1989 language law did not really address the question of language use in the media. It did have a paragraph proclaiming that the "language of official mass media is Ukrainian," but the next paragraph ambiguously stated that "the languages of other nationalities" can also be used in the official media. This could be interpreted in two ways: media outlets have the right to be bilingual, or as long as some outlets are in Ukrainian, others have the right to be in Russian only.<sup>55</sup>

Since independence, a new language policy has been in place on Ukrainian TV: it aims toward broadcasting exclusively in Ukrainian. Yet, since the dubbing of films in Ukrainian will take time, and since people interviewed on TV by a Ukrainian-speaking reporter very often prefer to answer in Russian, Russian is still heard a fair amount on the Ukrainian channel (UT-1), perhaps as much as one-third of the time.<sup>56</sup> All news programs, however, are in Ukrainian only, arguably a serious mistake on the part of the television authorities. While this policy may prompt Russophones interested in keeping abreast of developments in Ukraine to watch Ukrainian TV, it

may also have the unintended effect of forcing many, unwilling to watch TV in a language other than Russian, to rely on Russian state TV (*Ostankino*) and its partisan interpretation of Ukrainian events.<sup>57</sup>

In the immediate future, the real political issue, as far as television is concerned, has to do with access to channels from Russia. In the Soviet days, republics used to broadcast on three channels: the two all-Union channels, originating from Moscow, and the republican one. Since independence, television authorities have decided to use half of the air time of the second all-Union/CIS channel (now called Rossiia) to broadcast programs produced by a second studio of Ukrainian TV (UT-2), while leaving the first CIS-wide channel, *Ostankino*, intact. Ukrainian and Russian TV thus have their own channels, and share a third one. But television authorities find it unnatural that programs originating "from another state," that is, Russia, should occupy so much air time on channels provided by the Ukrainian state, since all transmission equipment is state owned.

To remedy this situation, new regulations are being prepared which would force each station broadcasting in Ukraine to have at least half of its programs produced in Ukraine.<sup>58</sup> In the long run, this new policy could usher in a long overdue decentralization of Russian-language programming in the CIS; but if implemented too drastically, *i.e.*, if a decision is made to suddenly cut half of the programs broadcast on *Ostankino*, a political outcry is most likely, since *Ostankino* is by far the most watched station in Ukraine.<sup>59</sup> Ukrainian television authorities seem to work under the assumption that the number of nationwide channels cannot expand. In this view, Ukrainian-language programming can only increase *at the expense* of programs originating from Russia. However, this is a policy which can only antagonize the Russophones from eastern Ukraine, who feel that they have a cultural right to be linked with Russia through television. More Ukrainian-language programs are actually available in certain cities by *increasing the pie*, thanks to the proliferation of private cable channels, but, once again, the picture is highly differentiated according to the regions, with the great majority, if not all, new local channels in eastern Ukraine broadcasting in Russian.<sup>60</sup>

If Ukrainian has become more prevalent on state-owned TV channels, its standing in the newspaper and publishing industry has ironically eroded since independence. The great culprit here is the economy. With state subsidies diminishing, many Ukrainian-language periodicals and publishing houses are having great difficulties competing in emerging market conditions. The most symbolic victim of this economic turnaround has been the weekly of the writers' union, *Literaturna Ukraina*, which had almost singlehandedly championed the cause of the Ukrainian language in the early *perestroika* years. From its standard twelve pages, the paper has shrunk to four pages, and at times does not publish at all. It thus no longer affects public debate as forcefully as it once did. In eastern Ukraine, the Ukrainian press barely survives and the great majority of new papers are in Russian, while even in Kiev, a

new Russian-language daily, *Kievskie vedomosti*, outscores its Ukrainian-language competitor, *Vechirni Kyiv*, four to one in terms of circulation.

The curtailment of the Ukrainian-language press—western Ukraine being, as always, an exception—does not mean, however, that the press from Russia is more widely available. Due to the manifold increases in subscription costs, particularly severe for periodicals from Russia because of the unfavorable exchange rate between the Ukrainian *koupon* and the Russian *ruble*, subscription to *all* newspapers has gone down precipitously.<sup>61</sup> The people of Ukraine may still be watching TV from Russia, but they are no longer reading the press from Russia. If they read newspapers, it tends to be in the Russian language, but published in Ukraine. If they read books, it is also most likely to be in Russian, since book stalls are flooded with Russian titles more than ever, albeit the type of mass-market books one would find in a supermarket in the West.<sup>62</sup>

Serious works and scholarly books, which used to be hard to find in Ukrainian, are now increasingly inaccessible in Russian as well, because distribution networks from Russia have been disrupted and libraries no longer have the means to pay for them. While Ukrainians justly complain that books in Ukrainian are scarcer than ever, professionals and specialists feel that they are the victims of an “information blockade.” A solution to these ailments is likely to be greater government intervention (subsidization of Ukrainian-language cultural products, a normal practice in bilingual countries), and greater economic reforms (privatization of distribution networks, etc.). Still, these policies have yet to be formulated, let alone implemented.

### Concluding Remarks

Four general points can be made concerning the implementation of the Ukrainian language law:

(1) A new language policy has emerged since 1992, the first year of Ukrainian independence, affecting mostly the language of official documentation, the language of instruction in schools, and the language of state-owned TV. That policy, however, is often at odds with the language law itself. Thus, for instance, while the law stated that official documents of state organs must be published in Russian as well, the practice has been increasingly to make them available in Ukrainian only.

Clearly, for nationally-conscious Ukrainians, the law makes too many allowances for Russian—to the point of actually bearing a plural title, “On the Languages of [Ukraine],” as opposed to “On the State Language of [Ukraine].” This Russian-friendly law may have been tactically necessary when Ukraine was still part of the Soviet Union and when parliament was controlled by the Communist Party, but it is now widely perceived as a relic of the Soviet past.

From a legal standpoint, however, the fact remains that the law has never been amended.<sup>63</sup> There were attempts to do so: in 1992, a government commission was formed with the purpose of drafting a revised language law. Its report, as it turned

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out, was shelved.<sup>64</sup> Authorities, seemingly, did not want to have the language question reopened in parliament and risk a possible confrontation.<sup>65</sup> As a result, many of the provisions inserted in that overlooked draft, such as making Russian optional in Ukrainian schools, were implemented anyway. That may be the only feasible way to promote the public use of Ukrainian, but it also means that basic aspects of the law are not respected. The law is also not respected by all those officials still exclusively using Russian in their official capacity, as the nationalist press has consistently complained in the past several years,<sup>66</sup> and, as far as shifting the language of administration to Ukrainian, the government does not really enforce the gradual implementation program which was adopted shortly after the law was passed.<sup>67</sup> In a society emerging from seven decades of communism, where the law, as a matter of principle, was deemed subordinate to the expediency of party decrees, public policy still operates on rules not always firmly grounded on the rule of law.

(2) The implementation of the new language policy has been regionally uneven. In urban areas of central and western Ukraine, where the great majority of Ukrainians claim Ukrainian as a mother tongue, where most of them probably speak it at home, and where relatively few ethnic Russians live, there has been a marked improvement in the public use of Ukrainian. In urban areas of eastern and southern Ukraine, however, where most Ukrainians apparently speak Russian at home, let alone in public, and where there is a great concentration of ethnic Russians, very little has changed and Russian remains the hegemonic public language.

The policy over public signs illustrates these diverging trends. In L'viv, the regional capital of western Ukraine, all Russian signs have been removed. In Kiev, located in central Ukraine, most new signs are in Ukrainian only, although some are in Ukrainian and Russian. In Donetsk, the heart of the industrial east, all signs remain in Russian, except for certain central institutions, such as the office of the presidential representative, and for a token few old and faded store signs, dating probably from the 1950s.<sup>68</sup> School policy also varies tremendously across regions. In western Ukraine, certain localities no longer have Russian schools.<sup>69</sup> In Kiev, as mentioned above, most first graders are now taught in Ukrainian, but a network of Russian-language schools has been preserved. In Donetsk, as of 1993, there was still a single Ukrainian school in the whole city.<sup>70</sup> While these regional distinctions follow closely the regional linguistic cleavages in Ukraine, what must be borne in mind is that, save Crimea, the language law does not make exceptions for regions. It is precisely at this juncture that the language law becomes intensely controversial.

(3) Russophones in the east and south—a group which include, as we saw above, a great many ethnic Ukrainians—do not want to use Ukrainian in their official capacities, which is what a strict application of the clause making Ukrainian the “language of administration” throughout Ukraine would entail. This is why the demand that Russian be declared a “second state language,” at least at the regional level, has been increasingly heard of late and figures in the political platform of political parties of all stripes originating from the east or south.<sup>71</sup> On the face of it,

Russophones are calling for bilingualism, i.e., two state languages. This is, in fact, truly a misnomer, since official bilingualism implies that state officials must be fluent in two languages, whereas the whole point in the Russophones' language demand is that they be exempted from learning Ukrainian to maintain or obtain a job. The "bilingualism" that Russophones have in mind is *territorial* in nature: Ukrainian would be used in certain regions, such as the west and the center, while Russian would be used in the east and south.<sup>72</sup> This contradicts the *unitary* intent of the language law, which foresees the use of Ukrainian as a state language in all regions.

It is often pointed out that the language law does make provisions for the official use of languages other than Ukrainian. The clause, however, is ambiguous: it refers to "sites of settlement" where citizens of "another nationality" constitute a majority.<sup>73</sup> In such cases, the language of this official minority could be used in official institutions *along with Ukrainian*. In practice, this would affect Crimea, the only province with an ethnic Russian majority, as well as the few rural areas with a Hungarian, Romanian/Moldovan, Bulgarian or Crimean Tatar population. But the real issue concerns Russian.<sup>74</sup> The law is ambiguous because the criterion used is ethnicity ("nationality"): according to 1989 census data, all provinces, except Crimea, and all but two provincial capitals have ethnic Ukrainian majorities. Under the criteria of mother tongue, however, all provincial capitals and most provinces, in the east and south, have Russophone majorities.<sup>75</sup>

Should exceptions be made according to the ethnic or the linguistic criteria? The latter is demanded with greater insistence by the eastern and southern regions, but is deemed unacceptable to nationalist parties based in Kiev and in western Ukraine, because it would mean that institutions in the industrial areas would remain as "Russified" as before. The confusion persists since the latest draft of the Constitution, published in the fall of 1993, used a linguistic criterion, thereby contradicting the law.<sup>76</sup> While the issue has yet to be openly debated, it must be noted that even if the linguistic criterion is adopted, the law specifies that in these "sites of settlement" the minority language (in this case, Russian) would be used along with Ukrainian. In other words, officials would still need to be conversant in Ukrainian, an obligation which Russophones in the east and south do not want to face.

(4) Russophones in eastern and southern Ukraine fear the "Ukrainization" of their region and increasingly reject the unitary nature of the Ukrainian state reflected in the language law. They argue that in order to preserve their "historic" distinctness, regions should be granted a certain degree of autonomy, within a federalized Ukraine. Federalism, here, would mean first and foremost regional control over language policy and thus preserving the hegemony of Russian in the east and south.<sup>77</sup> Ukrainian nationalists generally dismiss these accusations of "Ukrainization" as absurd, since very little has changed in terms of the public use of languages in eastern and southern Ukraine.<sup>78</sup> The point, however, is that the "Ukrainization" of official settings (language used in official documents, etc.) is envisaged by the language law, and this is what makes Russophones anxious. Anxiety about looming

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events is a potent force in ethnic politics and often explains much of mass behavior. Anxiety about the future should not be equalled, however, with discrete events happening at any given moment. Russophones in the Donbas want Russian as a “second state language” not because they are already losing their jobs due to their poor command of Ukrainian, but because they fear they may be losing their jobs in the future if Ukrainian is indeed introduced as a prerequisite. The politics of anxiety among Russophones is colliding with the politics of identity among nationally-conscious Ukrainians, for whom it is a question of principle that Ukrainian be used in public offices in all regions of Ukraine. This is the central issue that can no longer be ignored in Ukrainian politics.

#### NOTES

1. Defying Kiev, the two provinces of the industrial Donbas—Donets’k and Luhans’k—decided to conduct a four-question referendum on the day of the first round of Ukrainian parliamentary elections, on 27 March 1994. One question asked electors whether they were in favor of Russian being proclaimed a “second state language” in Ukraine, while another, more specific, question called for Russian to remain the language of “work, administration, documentation, education and science” on the territory of the Donbas “alongside with Ukrainian.” In Donets’k, 87.1% of electors were in favor of the former, and 88.9% supported the latter, while in Luhans’k, the figures were, respectively, 90.4% and 90.9% (*Aktsent* [Donets’k], 1 April 1994; *Luganskaia pravda*, 2 April 1994). Kiev declared the referendum illegal, since, according to the Constitution, regional authorities do not have the power to organize referenda.
2. According to 1989 Soviet census data, 34.4% of ethnic Russians living in Ukraine claim fluency in Ukrainian, meaning that they claim an active command of the language. With the possible exception of Crimean Russians, however, all *understand* Ukrainian with few problems.
3. One Ukrainian out of eight (12.2%) claimed Russian as a mother tongue during the 1989 Soviet census. As a point of reference, all other titular groups in the Soviet republics had scores of linguistic assimilation lower than 3%, except among the Moldovans (4.6%) and Belarusians (19.8%). For an analysis of linguistic assimilation in Ukraine, see Dominique Arel, “Language and the Politics of Ethnicity: The Case of Ukraine,” PhD dissertation, University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), 1994, Ch. 3. See also Roman Solchanyk’s essay “Language Politics in the Ukraine,” in *Sociolinguistic Perspectives of Soviet National Languages* Isabelle Kreindler, ed. (Berlin: Mouton, 1985), pp. 57–105.
4. As indicated in note 3, the proportion of ethnic Ukrainians claiming Russian as a mother tongue was 12.2% in 1989, but most of this linguistic assimilation is taking place in the east and south (25.3% of Ukrainians living there, compared to merely 3.5% in the center and 0.9% in the west). In the city of Donets’k, mining capital of the Donbas, more than half of ethnic Ukrainians (56.2%) declared Russian as their mother tongue. See Arel, “Language and the Politics of Ethnicity,” Ch. 3, pp. 123, 129.
5. The “Left Bank” of central Ukraine, west of the Dnipro, was integrated into the Russian Empire in the 1650s, while the “Right Bank” joined Russia in the 1770s–90s, following the partitions of Poland. Most of eastern and southern Ukraine was open for settlement after Russia’s victory over the Crimean Khanate in the 1780s. Western Ukraine, for five centuries under Austrian–Polish rule, was annexed to the Soviet Union only during the Second World

- War. (An exception to this is the Volyn' region, which had shifted back and forth between Austria and Russia.)
6. The main public forum was the literary weekly *Literaturna Ukraina*. For a highly critical account of how the law was prepared, see Stepan Pinchuk, "Zakon pro movy: real'nist' i perspektyvy," *Dzvin* (L'viv), No. 9, 1990, pp. 75–84.
  7. The Ukrainian language law was published in the central Ukrainian press (*Radians'ka Ukraina* in Ukrainian, *Pravda Ukrainy* in Russian) on 3 November 1989, under the title "Pro movy v Ukrain'skii RSR" (in Russian, "O iazykakh v Ukrainskoi SSR"). A draft of the law previously appeared in these papers on 9 September 1989.
  8. The first president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, was elected on 1 December 1991, the day when 90% of the voters also endorsed the declaration of independence. Within ten days, following the creation of the CIS and international recognition, Ukraine became an independent state.
  9. In Odessa, there had been attempts to include on the 1 December 1991 referendum ballot a question as to whether Russian should be proclaimed a second regional state language (*Ogonyok*, 23 November 1991). The regional parliament eventually issued such a proclamation two years later (*Khreshchatyk*, 28 September 1993), after a campaign by the Odessa Civic Forum (*Chornomors'ki novyny* [Odessa], 22 April 1993). In Donetsk, one of the demands of striking miners, in June 1993, dealt with the status of Russian as a second state language (*Kievskie vedomosti*, 30 June 1993). The regional parliament then decided to have a referendum on that question in September 1993, coinciding with a statewide referendum on early election of the parliament and the president (*Literaturna Ukraina*, 5 August 1993). The latter never happened, and the Donetsk referendum on Russian as a second state language eventually took place during the Spring 1994 parliamentary elections.
  10. That the shift to Ukrainian has not yet been completed is attested by a recent complaint of the Prosvita Society, a language watch group, that "official blanks, [and] forms..." in "organs of state power" are not yet in Ukrainian (*Uriadovi kur'er*, 27 July 1993).
  11. According to Art. 10 of the language law, "The acts of the highest organs of state power and administration of [Ukraine] are adopted in Ukrainian and published in Ukrainian and Russian." The newspaper of the parliament, *Holos Ukrainy*, is issued in a parallel Russian translation, but the Cabinet of Ministers' weekly, *Uriadovi kur'er*, is not. According to a legal specialist living in eastern Ukraine, all official literature in the field of law is now regularly published only in Ukrainian (*Raboचाia gazeta*, 10 August 1993).
  12. Interview with miners of the Donetsk Strike Committee, Donetsk, 15 July 1993.
  13. Many Ukrainians in the central region speak a *mélange* of Ukrainian and Russian known as *surzhik*.
  14. Art. 6 of the language law. Although the law indicates that officials and state employees must have a command of both Ukrainian and Russian, it indicates that employment cannot be denied due to insufficient knowledge of either. Since in practice everybody knows Russian, the article really refers only to individuals without a mastery of Ukrainian.
  15. On the resolution in western Ukraine, adopted by the L'viv regional parliament, see *Prosvita* (L'viv), No. 31, December 1993. On the new policy of the Ministry of Education, see *Donetskii kriazh*, 12 March 1993.
  16. "Vidomosti pro shkoly i uchniv'ski kontynhenty z Ukrain'skoi movoiu navchannia na terytorii Ukrain'skoi RSR," unpublished document of the Ministry of Education, 1990 [hereafter "Vidomosti pro shkoly"].
  17. Such an estimate assumes that the proportion of Ukrainians to Russians among school-age children is the same as among the general population; this is a fair assumption since the birthrates of the two Slavic groups are similar. As Silver pointed out, however, this

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- assumption is wrong when Russians are compared to titular groups with much higher birthrates, such as the Central Asians. See Brian D. Silver, "The Status of National Minority Languages in Soviet Education. An Assessment of Recent Changes," *Soviet Studies*, 26, No. 1 (1974), pp. 28–40, at 37.
18. On the figure for the late 1920s, see Bohdan Krawchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), p. 89. On the figure for the early 1950s, see "Vidomosti pro rozpodil zahal'noosvitnikh shkil Ministerstva osvity URSR za movamy vykladannia," (1951–52), *Tablytsia 7, Derzhavnyi arkhiv im. zhovtnevoi revoliutsii, Ministerstvo osvity URSR, Viddil: Statystychnyi, Sprava No. 4* [hereafter "Vidomosti pro rozpodil"].
  19. In 1937, Stalin closed all Ukrainian schools in the Russian Federation, which meant that Ukrainian schools in Crimea, then part of Russia, also disappeared.
  20. *Narodne hospodarstvo Ukrainy u 1991 rotsi: Statystychnyi shchorichnyk* (Kiev: Tekhnika, 1992), pp. 196–97. The situation was at its worst in Crimea, with no Ukrainian school at all in the whole peninsula (24.8% Ukrainian population) and in the Donbas with a mere 4.4% of schoolchildren being taught in Ukrainian (51.1% Ukrainian population). The population data are from the 1989 census.
  21. The crucial indicator in the language politics of schools, as far as ethnic groups are concerned, is not the proportion of schools per language of instruction, but the proportion of school-age children enrolled in schools per language of instruction. Because of a lower population density in the countryside, where virtually only Ukrainian schools can be found, the proportion of Ukrainian schools in Ukraine was quite high (74% in 1988–89, "Vidomosti pro shkoly"), but this masked the fact that the average number of pupils enrolled in Russian schools, all located in cities, was more than three times greater than the average number of pupils in Ukrainian schools, located both in urban and rural areas ("Rozpodil zahalnoosvitnykh shkil ta uchniv za movamy navchannia z 1950 po 1990 rik," unpublished document of the Ministry of Education, 1990).
  22. In 1951–52, 55% of ethnic Ukrainian children in *urban* areas of the Donbas province of Luhans'k were enrolled in Russian schools. The figure was 19.4% for the urban areas of Donets'k, the other Donbas province, and 25.3% and 22.7%, respectively, for the urban areas of the southern oblasts of Odessa and Kherson ("Vidomosti pro rozpodil").
  23. Arel, "Language and the Politics of Ethnicity," Ch. 4, pp. 156–158.
  24. Yaroslav Bilinsky, "The Soviet Education Laws of 1958–1959 and Soviet Nationality Policy," *Soviet Studies*, 14, No. 2 (1962), pp. 138–157.
  25. *Narodnoe obrazovanie i kul'tura v SSSR: statisticheskii sbornik* (Moscow: Finansy i statistika, 1989), pp. 88–91; translated in, *Contemporary Soviet Society: A Statistical Handbook* Michael Ryan, ed. (Hants., England: Edgar Elgar, 1990), pp. 128–130.
  26. Since 1975, however, all dissertations—even those produced in non-Russian institutions—had to be written in Russian, in order to be approved by Moscow-based central educational authorities (Gerhard Simon, *Nationalism and Policy Towards the Nationalities in the Soviet Union* [Boulder, CO: Westview, 1991], p. 325).
  27. The very first paragraph of the first article dealing with education (Art. 25) reads: "The freedom of choice of the language of instruction of children is the inalienable right of the citizens of [Ukraine]." That paragraph was inserted at the last minute during the parliamentary debates preceding the adoption of the law. In an earlier draft, what had been deemed inalienable was the right of children to be educated in their mother tongue. See the speeches of Deputy Heorhii Kriuchkov (Odessa), stenographic report of the October 1989 session of the 11th convocation of the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet, pp. 282–283, 292–293.
  28. Statewide, the increase in enrollment in Ukrainian schools remained minimal—from 44.6%

- in 1988–89 to 45.1% in 1991–92 (“Vidomosti pro shkoly” for the 1988–89 data; *Narodne gospodarstvo Ukrainy u 1991 rotsi*, pp. 196–197, for 1991–92 data).
29. Decree No. 123 of the Ministry of Education, issued in September 1992. See *Kievskie vedomosti*, June 30 1993, and *Literaturna Ukraina*, 29 July 1993.
  30. Interview with Pavlo Kyslyi, Deputy Chairman of the Parliamentary Commission on Education, Kiev, 7 July 1993.
  31. Unfortunately, precise regional and urban breakdown of school enrollment are not yet available; thus, these figures are estimates.
  32. Interview with Raisa Sidorova of the Kiev City Division of the Ministry of Education, Kiev, 8 July 1993.
  33. *Prosvita* (L’viv), No. 14 (June), 1993; *Vechernii Kharkov*, 13 May 1993.
  34. *Literaturna Ukraina*, 29 July 1993.
  35. Interview with Sidorova; *Osvita*, 4 June 1993.
  36. Interview with Sidorova. Mykhailo Bilets’kyi, a Kiev-based journalist, participated in that exchange. For reference to administrative pressure on Russian schools to change their language of instruction, see a letter by officials of the cultural “Rus” society, *Holos Ukrainy*, 28 October 1992.
  37. *Osvita* August 27 1993; *Literaturna Ukraina*, 29 July 1993.
  38. *Kievskie vedomosti*, 23 October 1993; Interview with Liubov’ Petrovskaia, school official, Kiev, 11 December 1993.
  39. *Osvita*, 27 August 1993.
  40. Interview with Deputy Minister of Education Anatolii Pohrybnyi, Kiev, 19 July 1993. For decades, it was the choice to send children to Ukrainian schools which was very restricted in urban areas of eastern and southern Ukraine.
  41. While the Belgian criterion is strictly territorial, Quebec’s is not ethnic *per se*; but based on the educational background of parents: if at least one parent of the child has gone to English school in Canada, then the child is eligible to English schools. That renders ineligible the children of immigrants—the real target of the law—as well as the great majority of French-speaking children, since virtually all of their parents went to French school.
  42. Art. 28 of the language law established the principle, while a decree issued simultaneously with the law indicated that this article was to be implemented within a period of five to ten years. The law seemingly made exceptions to this rule for territories where a majority of the population is of another nationality, but in fact this is quite ambiguous. See below, note 75.
  43. *Osvita*, 25 June 1993.
  44. Although the teaching of Ukrainian was, in principle, mandatory as a second language in Russian schools, in the 1970–80s, many students were exempted, if their parents requested such. That practice was decried by nationally-conscious Ukrainians in the *glasnost*’ era and has apparently been discontinued in most places since the language law was adopted. In Crimea, however, it still continues (interview with Crimean sociologist Yurii Prozorov, Montreal, 23 March 1994).
  45. Only three of the nine provincial capitals of the east and south have ethnic Russian majorities (Donets’k, 53.6%; Luhans’k, 54.2%; and Simferopol, 71.6%). All of them, however, have Russophone majorities, i.e., majorities of inhabitants of Russian, Ukrainian and other ethnic background claiming *Russian as a mother tongue*. This ranges from 53.3% for Kherson to 90.0% for Simferopol (unpublished 1989 Soviet census data).
  46. Interview with Oleksandr Charodeev, deputy of the Ukrainian parliament, Kiev, 26 July 1993; *Odesskii vestnik*, 9 April 1993.
  47. As Walker Connor showed in a seminal article in the early 1970s, only 9.1% of all states in the world could qualify as “nation-states,” i.e., “being essentially homogeneous from an

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- ethnic viewpoint." Ukraine is thus no exception. Connor, "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying?" (1972), reprinted in *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 29.
48. Data from the 1989 census indicate that 28.6% of the eastern city of Kharkiv claimed Ukrainian as mother tongue. According to a survey conducted by Jerry Hough, of Duke University's East-West Center in January 1992 (results still unpublished), only 7.1% of Kharkiv residents speak exclusively Ukrainian at home, and an additional 5.1% speak both Ukrainian and Russian. A similar pattern seems to hold in the southern city of Odessa: census data indicate that 24.3% of the population claim Ukrainian as mother tongue, but I. M. Popova's survey found that only 7% speak it at home (*Odesskii vestnik*, 13 April 1993). Were "Russophone" to be defined in terms of language used at home rather than claimed mother tongue, then the proportion of Russophones in Ukraine would probably exceed 40%.
  49. Art. 27, par. 5 of the language law states: "The teaching of Ukrainian and Russian in all general educational schools is mandatory."
  50. "Bazovyi navchal'nyi plan seredn'oi zahal'noosvitn'oi shkoly z Ukrain's'koi movoiu navchannia na 1993-1994 navchal'nyi rik," unpublished document of the Ministry of Education.
  51. *Ibid.* See also Abraham Brumberg, "Not So Free At Last," *The New York Review of Books*, 39, No. 17 (22 October 1992), pp. 56-64.
  52. Between 1970-82, the circulation of Russian newspapers in the Soviet Union increased by 37%, while that of Ukrainian newspapers increased by only 13% (Roman Szporluk, "The Press and Soviet Nationalities: The Party Resolution of 1975 and Its Implementation," *Nationalities Papers*, 14, nos. 1-2 (1986), pp. 47-64. In 1986, in the Soviet Union there were 0.47 book titles in Russian for every Russian, and only 0.04 in Ukrainian for every Ukrainian (Ya. K. Rebane, "Izmeneniia natsional'noi struktury, mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniia i iazykovaia situatsiia v Estonskoi SSR," *Sovetskaia etnografiia*, No. 2, 1989, pp. 4-17).
  53. As of 1988, only 7% of films in the catalogue of films produced in Ukraine were in the Ukrainian language. Virtually all films shown on TV, or available on videocassette, were either in Russian or dubbed in Russian (*Radians'ka Ukraina*, 6 December 1988; *Literaturna Ukraina*, 18 October 1990).
  54. Szporluk, p. 63; Solchanyk, "Language Politics in the Ukraine," p. 87.
  55. Art. 33 of the language law.
  56. Interview with Zinovii Kulik, Director of Ukrainian Television, conducted by the author's research assistant Liudmila Maiorova, Kiev, August 1993.
  57. In the words of a journalist from southern Ukraine: "The Russophone population, not receiving enough information in the Russian language, is pushed to turn on *Ostankino* or *Maiak* (Moscow radio)... . He who provides information forms public opinion" (*Odes'ki visti*, 18 February 1993).
  58. Interview with Kulik. A law, "O televidenii i radio," adopted on 21 December 1993, did contain such a provision (*Vremia* [Kharkiv], 4 January 1994).
  59. Russophone activists take very seriously what they call "the threat of cutting off the *Ostankino* broadcasts in the near future" (*Nash Donbass* [Donets'k], January 1993). A reduction in *Ostankino* broadcasting would most probably also be opposed by non-Russified Ukrainians, since most would admit that *Ostankino* programs are of a higher quality than those broadcast on the Ukrainian channel.
  60. Interview with Kulik; author's observations. The Kiev newspaper editor Vitalii Karpenko claims that all 31 private TV channels in the provinces of Mykolaiv (south) and Luhans'k (east) broadcast exclusively in Russian. Karpenko adds that this constitutes a violation of the

- language law, but, as we saw above, the law is ambiguous on this point (*Vechirni Kyiv*, 11 June 1993).
61. Recent surveys show that residents from Ukraine now read one newspaper, generally a local one, or none at all—down from four or five a few years ago (*Holos Ukrainy*, 28 August 1993). Moreover, the Ukrainian publishing industry is dependent on Russia for its printing paper, and the imposition of high tariff duties by the latter has meant steep increases in subscription prices (*Odesskii vestnik*, 30 March 1993).
  62. In 1992, 38.1% of the book titles published in Ukraine were in Ukrainian. As for the number of copies published for these books, only 28.1% were in Ukrainian, compared to 56.7% in 1988. Ukrainian books thus fared much better in the Soviet era (*Narodna hazeta*, No. 27, 1993; *Literaturna Ukraina*, 25 March 1993).
  63. In other former republics, the language law, while not formally amended, has nonetheless been partly superseded by other laws. In Estonia, for instance, the new citizenship law makes citizenship for most Russophones eventually dependent on language skills in Estonian. In Ukraine, however, the citizenship law adopted in the fall of 1991 granted automatic citizenship to all residents of the republic at the time of independence (“zero option”) (*Demokratychna Ukraina*, 10 October 1991). As for the new Constitution, which had gone through four drafts as of early 1994, it has yet to be adopted.
  64. Interview with Pohribnyi. Mr. Pohribnyi headed the commission. See also *Narodna hazeta*, No. 44, 1993.
  65. Interview with Ivan Yushchuk, vice-chairman of the Prosvita Society, 19 July 1993.
  66. See, for instance, an appeal of the Prosvita Society, “Vidrodzhenniu ukrains’koi movy—derzhavnu uvahu!” published in various newspapers in July 1993. See also an appeal by cultural figures (*Kul’tura i zhittia*, 18 July 1992).
  67. A special commission in charge of the implementation of this “State Programme” was created in 1990, but when its chairman left the government, the commission was forgotten (*Narodna hazeta*, No. 44, 1993).
  68. Observations of the author, who visited these three cities in the summer of 1993.
  69. In the province of Ternopil’, there are apparently no longer any Russian schools (*Kievskie vedomosti*, 23 October 1993). The 1989 Soviet census listed 7.2% of Russians in the city of Ternopil’.
  70. Interview with Leonid Hromovi, Director of School No. 65, the only Ukrainian school in Donetsk, Donetsk, 13 July 1993.
  71. This includes not only the “leftist” parties (Communist Party, Socialist Party, Peasant Party), and the Russophone pressure group “Civic Congress of Ukraine,” but also the alliance of factory directors and new entrepreneurs, “Interregional Bloc of Reforms,” headed by the former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma and former Vice-Speaker of Parliament Volodymyr Hryn’ov.
  72. This notion of bilingualism was already propounded when the draft of the language law was debated in 1989 (*Pravda Ukrainy*, 28 October 1989).
  73. Art. 3, par. 2 of the language law. The next paragraph adds that in cases where no “national” group constitutes the majority in a given locality, then the language of local organs can be either Ukrainian or a language “acceptable to the whole population,” *i.e.*, Russian.
  74. Crimea proclaimed Russian as “official” language, and Ukrainian and Crimean Tatar as “state” languages in the fall of 1992 (Roman Solchanyk, “The Politics of Language in Ukraine,” *RFE/RL Research Report*, 2, No. 10, [1993] p. 3), but the status of the latter two languages is largely symbolic, since Russian remains the hegemonic language of administration on the peninsula.
  75. A “Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities,” issued by the Ukrainian parliament a month

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before the December 1991 referendum on independence, was even more ambiguous about the actual criterion to be used in determining official bilingualism in regions. The Declaration stated that another language could have the same status as Ukrainian wherever a certain nationality "is living compactly" (*kompaktno prozhivae*), without mentioning whether a majority was needed to qualify as "compact." The July 1992 Law on National Minorities made it clear, however, that a majority was indeed needed, an ethnic majority (Russian) to boot, not a linguistic (Russians + Ukrainians claiming Russian as a mother tongue) majority. This would mean that Russian would not be able to function as a regional state language outside of Crimea.

76. Art. 7 of this draft indicates that "in sites of compact settlement of one or several national groups, the language acceptable to the majority of the population...can be used as an official language, along with Ukrainian, in state organs and institutions." See "Konstitutsiia Ukrainy. Proekt. V redaktsii vid 26 zhovtnia 1993 r.," inserted in central Ukrainian newspapers, November 1993.
77. Dominique Arel, "Federalism and the Language Factor," Unpublished paper presented at the Annual Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies, Phoenix, November 1992.
78. Reportedly, President Kravchuk "without diplomatic good manners" told deputies from Crimea: "How can (you) talk about Ukrainization...when on the peninsula there are no Ukrainian newspapers and no Ukrainian schools or kindergartens?" (*Osvita*, 25 June 1993).