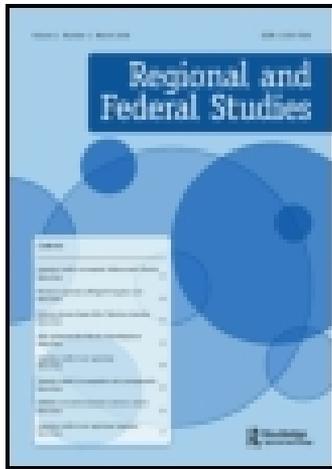


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The 'New' Ukraine: A State of Regions

GWENDOLYN SASSE

The Ukrainian state that emerged from the Soviet Union in 1991 is a historical novelty. While Ukraine's current borders go back to 1954, the year of Crimea's transfer from the RFSFR to the Ukrainian SSR, an independent political entity had never existed within these territorial boundaries prior to 1991. 'Ukraina' translates as 'borderland' and encapsulates a key feature of modern Ukraine: its history as a space between the Habsburg, Russian, Ottoman and Soviet empires. Ukrainian nation-building is 'an undertaking to transform the peripheries of several nations...into a sovereign entity able to communicate directly with the larger world' (Szporluk, 1997: 86). Internationally, this historical development links Ukraine to Central and Eastern Europe, Russia and the Black Sea region. All four empires left their cultural mark on Ukraine, and the Soviet period, in particular, accounts for a complex institutional and socio-economic legacy. Domestically, the disparities between the different territorial components – their ethnic, linguistic, religious and socio-economic cleavages, historical memories and different political and foreign policy orientations – make Ukraine's single most important characteristic its construction as a state of regions. This emphasis on regional differences neither calls Ukraine's territorial integrity into question nor does it preclude the prospect of successful post-Soviet transition and state- and nation-building. It simply highlights the fact that the regional factor was bound to shape Ukraine's post-Soviet political and economic development.

In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse the potential for conflict in Ukraine hinged on questions about the feasibility of an independent Ukraine and its territorial integrity. Ukraine's possible disintegration along an east–west territorial divide appeared to be the predominant internal challenge. Russia's hesitant recognition of independent Ukraine and Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia led Western academics and policy-makers to focus on the potential for instability in Ukraine (Rumer, 1994; Larrabee, 1994). The east–west divide figured prominently in Western accounts of post-Soviet Ukraine and was often tied to speculations about a break-up of Ukraine and its security implications for Europe (Holdar, 1995). Additionally, Crimea emerged as a potential violent flashpoint. Comparisons with the wars in former Yugoslavia were

frequently invoked around 1994 (Kuzio, 1994a/1994b; Meek, 1994). *The Economist* went furthest, depicting a 'long-running, acrimonious, possibly bloody, and conceivably nuclear dispute' over Crimea (*The Economist*, 17 July 1993). Ukraine's national security concept of 1997 also defined regional separatist tendencies as one of the key potential threats. Regional diversity has arguably been the predominant feature of Ukraine's transition and state- and nation-building process. However, as I will argue here, it has also been a key to Ukraine's political stability, although its stabilizing role is generally overlooked.

This contribution will begin by mapping Ukraine's experience with regionalization and decentralization. It will then analyze the regional challenges in post-Soviet Ukraine. The main focus will be on the politicization of Ukraine's regional diversity, most notably in Zakarpattya, the Donbas and Crimea, the latter being the greatest ethno-regional challenge to post-Soviet Ukraine. The 'new' Ukraine is one of the best examples of the contradictory challenge inherent in post-Soviet state-building: strengthening central state capacity within an institutionalized state unit inherited from the Soviet period, while simultaneously engaging with sub-national demands for more autonomy. Kyiv perceived a unitary state as the best guarantor of the centre's control over both a diverse polity and transition strategies. However, as a result of a protracted struggle between regional and national elites the unitary Ukrainian state, as defined in the constitution of June 1996, is perforated by an asymmetric institutional autonomy arrangement in Crimea. Thus, the inherent tension between centralization and decentralization was inscribed in the constitution. Moreover, Ukraine's political institutions, its socio-economic profile, and its administrative structures are permeated by distinct regional characteristics.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF A REGIONALIZED STATE

The ethnic cleavage between Ukrainians and Russians is often portrayed as the key to post-Soviet politics in Ukraine. This simplification rests on several problematic assumptions: first, the 'Russian factor' tends to be projected backwards into Ukrainian history when, in fact, historically the Polish dimension of the Ukrainian nation-building project was equally important. Second, the binary opposition between ethnic Russians and Ukrainians implies clear-cut ethno-political mobilization, although the ethno-sociological and political boundaries between these two groups are extremely blurred (Bremmer, 1994). Third, the juxtaposition of ethnic Russians and Ukrainians – according to the Soviet census of 1989 72.7% and 22.1% – ignores the considerable number of ethnic Ukrainians who

regard Russian as their mother tongue (33–34%), let alone the many bilinguals. The emphasis on language has given rise to the equally problematic notions of 'Russophones' and 'Ukrainophones' which suggest that language is the predominant factor in Ukrainian politics and consists of two mutually exclusive categories. Fourth, an overemphasis on the ethno-linguistic cleavages tends to obscure the political significance of regions *per se* and has effectively delayed a systematic analysis of the role of the regional factor in Ukrainian politics.

The territorial patchwork of Ukraine is the product of a long historical process. 'The various regions that make up modern Ukraine have moved in and out of Ukrainian history at different times, but have never really interacted together as an ensemble... There are therefore serious difficulties in imagining Ukrainian history either as a temporal or a geographical continuum' (Wilson, 1997: 25). This lack of a historical continuum even stirred a debate about whether Ukraine 'has a history' (von Hagen *et al.*, 1995). The recognition that all 'national' histories are tainted and that the comprehensive study of diverse empires, nations and regions is ultimately more important than historical linearity or value judgements about the validity of a certain claim to nation- and statehood underpinned this debate.

Until the middle of the seventeenth century almost all Ukrainians lived in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which extended beyond the river Dnipro eastward. After 1667, parts of this territory – Poltava, Chernihiv and Kyiv – came under the jurisdiction of the Russian tsar. The territory west of the Dnipro stayed within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth until 1793–95, although the 'Polish factor' remained significant until after the Russian revolution of 1917 (Szporluk, 1997: 87). The concept of a modern Ukrainian nation goes back to the late eighteenth century, but in its current boundaries, the Ukrainian state and, in particular, its western border, is by and large a Soviet construct. Ukraine's Soviet past, consequently, is part of the fabric of the state itself. Unlike historical memory in the Baltic states, Ukraine's post-Soviet rewriting of history had to tread carefully and selectively in addressing its post-imperial legacies. As discussed in the introduction to this volume, the internationally recognized principle of territorial integrity imbued the Soviet-era boundaries with new legitimacy.

Today's regions of L'viv, Ternopil' and Ivano-Frankivs'k had belonged to Poland from the fourteenth century onwards. From 1772 to 1918 this region, known as eastern Galicia, was part of the Habsburg empire. After a brief spell of independence as the 'West Ukrainian People's Republic' (ZUNR) in 1918–19 the region came under the rule of the new Poland and, after Poland's destruction, under Soviet rule. In September 1939 Western Ukraine, comprising Galicia and Volhynia, was annexed by the Soviet Union and integrated into the Ukrainian SSR on the basis of the

Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Galicia was briefly occupied by Germany before becoming Soviet again in 1944. Northern Bukovina, the northern part of the former Hapsburg province of Bukovina, including the administrative and cultural centre Chernivtsi, belonged to Romania in the period 1918–40 before it was annexed by the Soviets in 1940.¹ The region was incorporated into the Soviet Union only in 1944 after a brief interim period during which Romania regained control. For centuries Zakarpattya had been part of Hungary before it was incorporated into Czechoslovakia in 1919 as part of the territorial changes after the First World War. From 1939 to 1944 the region became Hungarian once more before being annexed to the Soviet Union in 1945 and, thus, effectively ruled by Moscow for the first time in its entire history. The majority population of Zakarpattya, the Rusyns, were subsequently categorized as 'Ukrainians'.

Today Western Ukraine is generally seen as the heartland of Ukrainian national identity and the home of the Ukrainian national movement. Historically, however, the idea of a separate Ukrainian nation was first articulated in the eastern part of today's Ukraine (Szporluk, 1997: 89). Repressive Russian imperial policies forced the national ideas into exile: they found their primary outlet in the Habsburg controlled Western Ukraine where it thrived on the confrontation with Polish nationalism. Thus, the concept of a separate Ukrainian nation travelled across the territory of today's Ukrainian state and embodied two different, equally important and regionalized struggles of self-determination: the struggle against both Russian and Polish dominance.

The transfer of the Crimean peninsula from the jurisdiction of the RSFSR to the Ukrainian SSR in 1954 completed the map of modern Ukraine.² Since its annexation in 1783 the peninsula had been under Russian rule. Prior to the Russian conquest, Crimea was part of the Crimean Tatar Khanate, which had split off from the Golden Horde and continued to exist as a protectorate of the Ottoman empire from 1475 onwards. After a brief phase of different autonomy experiments after the 1917 revolution, Crimea became an ASSR within the RSFSR which existed until 1945.³ After the large-scale deportation of the Crimean Tatars under Stalin in 1944, Crimea's status was downgraded to that of an ordinary region. The issue of Crimean autonomy was only revived in the late Gorbachev era and resulted in a regional referendum as early as January 1991. This referendum effectively paved the way for a new ASSR within the Ukrainian SSR and, thus, left Ukraine with a still undefined but existing asymmetric institutional set-up when the Soviet Union collapsed in late 1991 and the majority of voters in all the regions of the Ukrainian SSR voted for independence.⁴ This choice, underscored by hopes for economic prosperity, did not immediately bring about an integrated state identity or a clear concept of the Ukrainian nation,

but it marked the beginning of a political commitment to one. Initially, Ukraine's state- and nation-building process was interpreted as an elite choice between an ethnic Ukrainian identity and a civic identity open to all national groups residing in Ukraine (Liber, 1998: 189). In reality, Ukraine's regional diversity, reinforced by the presence of a large Russian minority, a considerable degree of russification of Ukrainians and economic dependence on neighbouring Russia, meant that the constituency for an exclusivist, homogenizing nation-state building project was small.

Upon independence Ukraine consisted officially of 24 regions (*oblasti*), an as yet weakly defined Autonomous Republic in Crimea plus two cities of republican jurisdiction (Kyiv and Sevastopol'). From the outset, the status of Crimea and Sevastopol' emerged as key issues both in domestic and international politics. While the first changes to Crimea's status had already been introduced in the late Soviet period, Sevastopol' had officially enjoyed federal status alongside Leningrad and Moscow since 1948, following a special resolution of the Supreme Soviet of the RSFSR. Since that time, however, Sevastopol' had maintained an ambiguous position in Soviet decision-making. As archival evidence proves, Soviet economic planning often included Sevastopol' in the Crimean and Ukrainian budgets, and Sevastopol' was a constituency of the Ukrainian SSR in Soviet elections.⁵

In addition to clear challenges arising from the inherited Soviet institutional architecture, such as the status of Crimea and Sevastopol', post-Soviet Ukraine has had to grapple with a range of structural legacies at the regional level, such as a pronounced south-east vs north-west socio-economic cleavage and ethno-linguistic (and to a somewhat lesser extent religious) settlement patterns. There is a widespread tendency to equate Ukraine's regional diversity with ethnicity. Szporluk aptly described the imprecise nature of this measure: 'Some of these people are Soviet in the morning, Russian in the afternoon and Ukrainian in the evening – the order may change' (Szporluk, 1998: 317). Some authors have argued that 'linguistic patterns...demonstrate regional difference best' (Wilson, 1997: 23–4). Language use has often been equated with the ethnic cleavage between Russians and Ukrainians. In fact, language is an inexact proxy for both regional and ethnic cleavages. The use of the Russian and Ukrainian languages is not mutually exclusive and not necessarily tied to ethnic identity, but often depends on an individual's social context or their generation (Arel, 1996; Jackson, 1998: 107–110). Moreover, an overemphasis on language locks the whole discussion about Ukraine's regional diversity into the discussion about national identity and ethnicity, while neglecting socio-economic cleavages or regional political interests. Ukraine's complex religious cleavages (Uniate Church, Ukrainian

Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchy, Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Kyiv Patriarchy, Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church) are often associated with ethno-linguistic categories, in particular when narrowed down to the juxtaposition of Greek Catholic Uniate vs. Orthodox believers. Religious affiliations reflect some historical and political divides, but by itself religion is neither a key political faultline nor a clear-cut ethnic marker, as for example the high number of parishes of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church–Moscow Patriarchy in central and western Ukraine demonstrates (Wilson, 1997: 91). Few studies have challenged the thesis that ethnicity is the decisive element in self-identification in Ukrainian politics more generally. Eastern Ukraine, in particular, is a good case-study to illustrate that socio-economic cleavages have been more important than ethnic criteria (Nemyria, 1999: 80–83).

The economic regionalization of post-Soviet Ukraine does not coincide exactly with the main historical divisions outlined above. Nevertheless, the western and central regions are mostly agriculturally oriented (with some pockets of light industry, manufacturing and mining), whereas the eastern regions represent the industrial base of the country (coal-mining, metallurgy, machine-building, chemical industry). The eastern regions are the most densely populated regions of Ukraine, a fact that translates directly into electoral weight. The regions of Donets'k, Luhans'k and Kharkiv were already the most industrialized regions in the pre-Soviet period. Under Soviet rule the Donbas enjoyed numerous privileges; officials from the region also routinely moved up the Soviet career ladder in Moscow.

The fact that the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine are still characterized by higher wages and lower official unemployment in comparison with western, northern and central regions is an indicator for the lack of structural reform of the Soviet-era economy in Ukraine.⁶ The higher wage arrears and higher living costs in the east and south counterbalance this trend to some extent, but on the whole living standards are still considered to be higher in the previously privileged, highly sovietized areas. While the eastern and southern regions show a greater distribution of small and medium-size enterprises than western regions – usually considered a motor of economic growth – privatization is most advanced in western regions (in addition to the capital Kyiv). As early as April 1991 the legal basis for Free Economic Zones (FEZ) was established (*UCIPR Research Update*, 2000). The rationale behind these zones was to attract foreign investment and to turn them into a model of economic and infrastructure development (*Holos Ukrainy*, 19 September 2000). According to the data provided by the Cabinet of Ministers in September 2000, however, the 11 zones operational in Ukraine have only met 23% of their investment targets and created and saved less than half the jobs envisaged (*UCIPR Research*

Update, 2000). There are special economic zones in Crimea, Zakarpattia, the *regions* of Volyn', Chernihiv, Donets'k, Luhans'k, Mykolaiv and Kyiv, as well as in Kharkiv and Shostka. At present, the zones make for a set of unconnected islands characterized by special tax regimes. At this point the future of Ukraine's FEZ seems uncertain, in particular as the IMF pushes for their abolition. Regardless of their effectiveness varying and their overall impact on Ukraine's economy being unclear, the fact that they were set up by normal legislative procedures that require a parliamentary consensus is a tacit recognition of Ukraine's *de facto* economic regionalization.

The regions (*oblasti*) of the Ukrainian SSR were set up as administrative structures and were not concomitant with historically evolved cultural or functional regions, which often cut across two or more Soviet regions (for example, Galicia, Novorossiia, Donbas). Nevertheless, the region as the key administrative legacy at the sub-national level quickly emerged as a shorthand to denote a Ukrainian 'region' in the post-Soviet period, and the two terms are often used interchangeably. Administrative, political, historical, socio-economic and cultural definitions of regions are used alongside each other without clear distinctions. Scholars have put forward a range of different delimitations, varying from two to 11 regions. These distinctions are based, for example, on the historical divide between the 'Right Bank' and 'Left Bank' along the river Dnipro (Khmelko and Wilson, 1998), five historical regions (former Habsburg regions in the far west, Western Volhynia, Right Bank, Left Bank, former Ottoman lands) vs. the economic division between two regions, the south-east and the centre-north (Birch, 2000: 1018–20), four regions based on the results of the 1994 parliamentary elections (Arel and Wilson, 1994; Khmelko and Wilson, 1998), five regions (West, Centre-West, Centre-East, East, South) based on large-scale Ukrainian sociological surveys (*Hromads'ka Dumka Ukrainy*)⁷ or 11 geographical/geopolitical regions (Nemiria, 1999: 74–5). Thus, while the significance of regional cleavages in Ukraine has increasingly been acknowledged, there is as yet little agreement on what constitutes a region. In transition countries the existence of strong regional identities is often interpreted as a sign of weak state capacity. Some simplistically view them as 'an indicator of an incomplete identity in transition' (Kuzio, 1996: 603–4). This approach turns regional differences into a transitional phenomenon, and reveals a bias for nation-state-building as a homogenizing and assimilatory process, while underestimating the potential for the coexistence of multiple identities in modern societies.

Article 132 of the 1996 Ukrainian constitution refers to both centralization and decentralization of power. Decentralization is primarily interpreted as local self-government. The Soviet-era regions became the

territorial administrative unit at the meso-level, and their lack of historical legitimacy has pushed the issue of autonomization further into the background. In fact, the powers of Soviet-era regions vis-à-vis the centre were reduced to a minimum: power rests, first and foremost, with the centre and, second, with local self-governing bodies, while the regions are simply subordinate administrative 'transmission belts'. The constitution of 1996 subsumes regional self-government under 'local self-government'. The heads of the regional and district administrations are appointed by the president himself. Only the Law on Local Self-Government in Ukraine (1997) stipulated that the assemblies at the region and raion levels were to be directly elected.

As discussed in the introductory essay, the term 'regionalism' is essentially a political term, describing a degree of mobilization around regional cleavages rather than simply the existence of regional diversity. Public opinion polls in Ukraine have continuously highlighted a link between the place of residence and issue polarization (Hesli, 1995; Hesli *et al.*, 1998; Kubicek, 2000), but the sheer existence of spatial characteristics should not be equated with the political phenomenon of regionalism.⁸ The discussion about regionalism in Ukraine is highly politicized: it was generally perceived of as a means of legitimizing regions as independent political actors which would ultimately undermine the centre's control and Ukraine's territorial integrity. The politicization of the term 'region' is also due to the grossly simplified portrait of Ukraine as a culturally 'cleft country' (Huntington, 1996: 165).

Studies of Ukraine's early post-Soviet elections, in particular the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1994, tended to confirm the east-west divide (Arel and Wilson, 1994; Bojcun, 1995; Birch, 1998). In 1994 over half of the Communist, Socialist and Agrarian deputies elected to the *Verkhovna Rada* came from the five eastern regions, whereas the majority of national-democratic deputies were elected in four western regions (Holdar, 1995). In the presidential elections of 1994 the support base of the incumbent Leonid Kravchuk was firmly rooted in Western Ukraine, whereas support for Leonid Kuchma's Russophone, centrist and reformist platform was rooted in the populous south-eastern regions, which secured his victory. Ukraine's electoral geography seemed to suggest a clear-cut reinforcement of ethno-linguistic cleavages and led Western media to spread doomsday scenarios, for example about 'The Birth and Possible Death of a Country' (*The Economist*, 7 May 1994). The presidential elections of 1999 broke the electoral model of 1994 and resulted in a more complex regional distribution of votes. Kuchma's first term in office (1994-99) illustrated how Ukraine's regional diversity and the balance of power with parliament necessitate interregional compromises. By the end of

his first term, Kuchma was more popular in the western parts of the country, while his electoral support base in the south-east, previously his stronghold, had become eroded.⁹ Moreover, region and ethnicity have distinctive effects on different segments of the electorate. Age coupled with an interaction between language and education, for example, explains the leftist vote better than ethnicity or language alone (Birch, 1998b). The change of the electoral system in time for the 1998 parliamentary elections – half of the deputies were now elected on party lists – rendered the actual electoral dynamics at the regional level more visible. By 1998, as Craumer and Clem observed, 'economic reform questions had overwhelmed issues dealing with ethnicity and the Ukrainian state' (Craumer and Clem, 1999: 4). Birch suggests that cultural-historical experiences are strongly correlated with the support for national-democratic parties in the western regions incorporated into the USSR during/after the Second World War, whereas socio-economic factors are more salient in explaining the support for left-wing forces, such as the Communist Party (Birch, 2000). The lesson is that regional factors are significant in voting behaviour, but the regional effect on party preferences depends on the party.

Most factions in the Ukrainian parliament, in particular centrist groups, are formed around regional interest groups. Ideas about regionalization and autonomy tend to be subsumed under other pragmatic short-term interests and do not generate a broader political consensus due to inter- or intra-regional rivalries. Economic interests intersect the debate about autonomization and preclude a concerted attack on the centre's power. By 2001 there were two factions/parties in the *Verkhovna Rada* which explicitly play on Ukraine's regional diversity: the faction 'Revival of Regions' (*Vidrodzhennya Rehioniv*), led by one of Ukraine's most influential oligarchs and Kuchma supporter in 1999/2000, Oleksandr Volkov, and 'Regions of Ukraine' led by Mykola Azarov, the head of the State Tax Administration (UCIPR, 26 March 2001).

Ukraine's executive structures also reflect Ukraine's regionalization: by decree Kuchma set up a Council of Regions in 1994. It effectively replaced the presidential representatives at the regional and district level, who had been introduced in 1992 to ensure the centre's control over the local councils. The presidential representatives were abolished in 1994 when parliament reaffirmed the role of the councils.¹⁰ The Council of Regions was conceived as a strictly consultative body under the auspices of the president. It brings together the heads of regional administrations, who are appointed by the president, the mayors of Kyiv and Sevastopol' and the Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Crimea, and its task is to coordinate regional and national interests, policies and priorities. While this body is clearly an extension of the president's executive, it nevertheless signals a political

awareness that regions matter. So far the existence of powerful cross-cutting elite interests has meant that collective action by Ukraine's regions to secure more power or even a coherent regional policy from the centre has failed.

THE FEDERAL IDEA: PAST AND PRESENT

Different notions of federalism have been part of the Ukrainian political discourse since the nineteenth century when Mykhailo Drahomanov used the term 'federalism' to describe a new role and greater self-determination for Ukraine (consisting of the provinces Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa) within a federalized Russian empire (Rudnytsky, 1987: 243–4). His ideas were reflected in the political writings and activities of the historian Mykhailo Hrushevs'kyi in the early twentieth century. After February 1917 the Central Rada under Hrushevskyyi first pushed for Ukrainian autonomy within a federalized Russia (Motyl, 1980: 11–12; Medvedchuk, 1996: 51). In response to revolution and war the Central Rada subsequently declared the independent Ukrainian People's Republic (UNR). Despite the claim to a unitary state, the draft constitution of the UNR of April 1918, which in the end was never enacted, incorporated Hrushevs'kyi's ideas of decentralization: the UNR was to be divided into 30 lands (*zemli*) plus the three cities Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa (Slyusarenko and Tomenko, 1993: 71). Moreover, the principle of national personal autonomy became one of its founding principles (Slyusarenko and Tomenko, 1993: 75). The short-lived Hetmanate under General Skoropads'kyi tried to square the circle by both proclaiming the 'Ukrainian state' (*Ukrains'ka derzhava*) and Ukraine's federation with an anti-Bolshevik Russian government (Motyl, 1980: 15). The subsequent Directorate under Vynnychenko and Petliura pushed the issue one step further in January 1919 through the proclamation of *sobornist'*, borrowing the ecclesiastic term for 'unity' as a symbol for the agreement of the UNR and the Western Ukrainian People's Republic (ZUNR) to unite. The formal ratification of this union was left to the Ukrainian Constituent Assembly (Motyl, 1980: 17; Slyusarenko and Tomenko, 1993: 123–4). Until then the ZUNR was to continue as the 'Western Oblast of the Ukrainian People's Republic' (ZOUNR), thereby adding a confederal element to the UNR. By the end of 1919 the idea of *sobornist'* had already become a victim of Petliura's political calculations: he tried to secure Poland's political and military support against Russia in return for granting Poland Eastern Galicia and the western half of Volhynia. His pact reinforced the rift that had occurred at the Paris Peace Conference where a separate Western Ukrainian delegation had formed (Motyl, 1980: 18–19). In the end, despite the collapse of the Russian and Habsburg empires, the ethnic Ukrainian

territories remained fragmented between different states: the western borderlands became part of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania, and the Ukrainian SSR emerged as the new 'state' entity to the east.

The special status of Crimea was also on the political agenda in the aftermath of the revolutions and during the early Soviet period. The Central Rada's sequence of proclamations reflects the indeterminate status of Crimea: the Third Universal Declaration of 20 November 1917 still explicitly excluded Crimea from the territory of the Ukrainian state (Slyusarenko and Tomenko, 1993: 74). The debates over Crimea's status – independence vs. autonomy within Ukraine vs. integration with Russia – in the aftermath of the revolution and under the German protectorate during World War I offer some striking parallels with the post-Soviet struggles over Crimea (Torbakov, 1996; Sasse, 1999: 216–26). In the years 1918–19 the Rusyns, who had been Magyarized after 1867, also managed to revive their demand for autonomy in their region south of the Carpathians (Magosci, 1978: 55–6). Out of the options they faced in 1919 – joining the Czechoslovak federation, autonomy within Hungary, a union with Ukraine or independence – only the first one emerged as a realistic scenario (Magosci, 1978: 91–101). Additionally, the Bolsheviks established a short-lived Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic in the east of Ukraine in 1918 which was, however, primarily a means of undermining the Central Rada in Kyiv. The examples of the ZUNR/ZOUNR and Crimea, in particular, illustrate that the period 1917–21 saw a number of provisional institutional arrangements based on federal elements which were never realized due to the short life of the republic. Nevertheless, this period marks one of the few points of reference in the history of Ukrainian statehood, and the sheer fact that regional divisions were addressed during Ukraine's short-lived independence indicates the political significance of the country's regional diversity.

The establishment of the USSR transformed the meaning of federalism once again. The Soviet type of asymmetric, ethno-territorial federalism was by and large a façade for a strictly hierarchical system of state power overseen by the Communist Party at every level. This structure, aptly described by Brubaker as 'institutionalized multinationality', provided a platform for nationalist and anti-imperial mobilization during Gorbachev's liberalization and, thus, greatly contributed to the break-up of the USSR. As soon as the curious combination of an empire and a federation had collapsed, most of the successor states had to struggle with formal and informal Soviet institutional legacies, in particular with institutionalized Soviet autonomies. Initially, the Moldovan ASSR had been set up within the Ukrainian SSR in 1924 as the nucleus of a distinct Soviet Moldovan national identity which formed part of the USSR's strategy to acquire

Romanian territory (King, 2000). After the annexation of Bessarabia the new Moldovan SSR, established in August 1940, replaced the earlier autonomous construct.¹¹ Subsequently, Soviet Ukraine remained without any formal autonomies within its administrative-territorial boundaries until 1991, when a new ASSR status was conceded to Crimea.

In the post-Soviet period, the national Ukrainian political elite has shied away from federalism and, with the exception of Crimea, rejected autonomy as a principle of state-building. Centralization was inextricably tied to the overall rationale of consolidating the sovereign Ukrainian state and nation. The protracted political struggle over Crimea, in particular the brief phase of Crimean separatism in 1994, had demonstrated the potential for conflict. Simultaneously, it illustrated Kyiv's lack of control in the periphery and further discredited the idea of federalism at the centre of the new polity.¹²

Before the break-up of the USSR federalist ideas had been floated in the west of Ukraine with Vyacheslav Chornovil, the former dissident, leader of *Rukh* and chairman of the L'viv region council after March 1990, as its most prominent proponent.¹³ The special *Rukh* meeting in Zakarpattya in March 1990, which marked the anniversary of the proclamation of the short-lived independent Carpatho-Ukrainian Republic (1938–39) fits this trend (Nahaylo, 1999: 259). Federalism has primarily been an idea of the political opposition in Ukraine (Zolotarev, 1995: 70). Prior to independence it was a means to emphasize the 'Ukrainian' character of Galicia, but once an independent Ukraine had been established, the idea was discarded as being too subversive of central state capacity. Chornovil and with him Ukraine's national-democratic political forces emerged as staunch supporters of a unitary Ukrainian state. The centre of political opposition and the pendulum of support for the federal principle gradually shifted to the east and south. In the 1994 presidential election, Kuchma's 'liberal' opposition based on the Interregional Bloc of Reforms (MBR) stressed the role of the regions.¹⁴

Academics and political analysts, most notably in Donetsk and Kharkiv (Bakirov, 1994; Miroshnik, 1995; Solov'ev, 1995: 14–15; Zolotarev, 1997), kept the issues of decentralization and federalism alive.¹⁵ The need for special regional economic regimes was presented as a prerequisite for successful economic transition (Kravchenko, 1995: 33–7).¹⁶ The most outspoken proponent of federalism in this period was Volodymyr Hryn'ov, the leader of the MBR. He played a crucial role in Kuchma's election campaign in 1994 when victory was gained on a platform of economic reforms and political and linguistic concerns in eastern Ukraine. Whatever Kuchma's real intentions were at the time, the fact that he successfully tapped into the concerns of the population and elites in the south-east and galvanized their support on the basis of a deliberately vague idea of regionalism underscores the political

significance of Ukraine's regionalization. Once in office, Kuchma effectively sidelined Hryn'ov who merely became the president's adviser on regional questions without any direct influence on policy-making.¹⁷ Influenced by Western thought, Hryn'ov elaborated on his ideas about federalism in his book *Nova Ukraina – yakoyu ya ii bachu* [*The New Ukraine – how I see her*] (Hryn'ov, 1995). The harsh public criticism he received demonstrated how much of a taboo federalism was for the political establishment.

Shortly after his re-election President Kuchma held a controversial referendum in April 2000, which aimed to increase the president's powers at the expense of parliament and gained the public's approval for complex institutional changes, such as the reduction of the number of seats in the national parliament (*Verkhovna Rada*) and the introduction of a bicameral parliament (*UCIPR Research Update*, 17 April 2000). The fact that an overwhelming majority of the population supposedly came out in favour of such an abstract concept as bicameralism casts a shadow over the legitimacy of this referendum. Despite a Constitutional Court ruling approving the referendum results, all the issues are pending and it seems highly unlikely that parliament will pass them voluntarily in the near future. In the context of Ukraine's regional diversity the introduction of a bicameral parliament constitutes the most interesting issue, as an upper chamber could dramatically increase the political leverage of regional representatives. At first glance, this institutionalization of regional interests does not seem to fit Kuchma's overarching attempt to weaken the legislature. The referendum was an example of Kuchma's ad hocism, for there was little prior discussion about the specifics of this proposition, and most importantly, about the question whether the deputies of the upper chamber would be appointed by the president or elected. The notion of bicameralism is closely associated with federal systems, but already during Ukraine's lengthy constitution-making process it had been discussed as a separate issue when President Kuchma himself had repeatedly supported a bicameral parliament in which the upper chamber would guarantee the representation of regional interests at the centre. Given the president's effective control of the regional administrations, and the lack of clarity over the composition of the upper chamber, it could end up being little more than an extension of the president's power base.

Despite ideas about federalism and autonomy being a constant in Ukraine's political debates, they have changed over time and failed to result in any substantive institutional change (with the exception of Crimea). They have been a marker of political opposition by strictly confined regional factions, and resonated with some ethnic minorities, but have not generated a cross-regional political strategy. Similar to regional

elite groupings, national minorities adopted the political language of decentralization, tying their distinct national identities to different autonomy concepts. The highly politically mobilized Crimean Tatars made the strongest claim to self-determination as an indigenous population. After initially opposing Crimean political autonomy, they have increasingly tried to interpret Crimea's current autonomy status as a first step towards a Crimean Tatar national autonomy. The Romanian minority in the Chernivtsi region and the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattya have also repeatedly supported the idea of national-territorial autonomies.

The rejection of federalism is one of the few issues on which there is a consensus among national-level elites in Ukraine. The experience with Soviet federalism and its ultimate collapse informs this view. Leftist parties do not oppose regional autonomy, in particular if asymmetrically applied to eastern and southern regions, but wholesale federalism is interpreted as a too radical reform of the inherited structures which could put central state authority at risk. The national democratic forces on the political Right, generally in favour of political reform, see federalism as an obstacle to state integration and national unity. Autonomy is associated with Ukraine's ethno-linguistic cleavages and strengthening of the Russophone regions in the south-east. The arguments against federalism are backed by a number of prominent constitutional lawyers. The ultimate fear is that Ukraine could be pulled apart by centrifugal tendencies in its borderlands in the west, east and south.

MANAGING REGIONAL AND ETHNIC CHALLENGES

In Ukraine the most serious political regional mobilizations occurred in the Donbas, Zakarpattya and, most importantly, in Crimea. Additionally, there was a small-scale movement in Odesa, trying to revive the idea of the old province of Novorossiia, including Transnistria, Odesa, Mykolaiv and Kherson regions as well as Crimea (Nahaylo, 1999: 322). In Chernivtsi *oblast* a question on a special regional economic status was added to the country-wide referendum on 1 December 1991 and approved by 89.3% of the voters (Nahaylo, 1999: 408, 419). The ethnic make-up of Crimea, the Donbas and Zakarpattya and their links – real or perceived – to neighbouring states gave these cases a particular momentum in asserting demands for autonomy or secession.

Zakarpattya (Transcarpathia)

Zakarpattya generated different demands for greater political autonomy based on the region's complex history and ethnic composition. The region had belonged to the Habsburg empire, then became part of Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Nazi Germany before being annexed by the

USSR in 1945. There was also a brief period of independence as the Republic of Carpatho-Ukraine in 1938–39. According to the last Soviet census of 1989, the Ukrainians constitute 78.4% of the regional population, while Hungarians are the biggest minority (12.5%) alongside smaller groups of Russians, Romanians, Slovaks and others. The region is extremely multi-ethnic; intermarriage has been widespread, making multiple identities one of the defining characteristics of the region and the basis for inter-ethnic peace (Batt, 2002). After proposals about regional economic powers had evaporated in the late Soviet period, the region as a whole launched one attempt at greater autonomy: the national referendum on Ukrainian independence on 1 December 1991 was supplemented by a referendum in Zakarpattia *oblast* on 'the status of a self-governing administrative territory'. 78% of those who participated came out in favour of this idea (Solchanyk, 1994: 62–3). President Kravchuk's earlier intervention had led the regional soviet to tone down the referendum question and avoid the term 'autonomy' (Nahaylo, 1999: 408).

The Ukrainian majority population in Zakarpattia has been divided within itself with one part declaring itself to be of a separate Rusyn ethnic identity and demanding political recognition. This movement had been involved in pushing the regional council into holding the region referendum in 1991. After the region's annexation by the USSR the Rusyns had been reclassified as 'Ukrainians'. It is difficult to pin down the distinct nature of Rusyn identity today, but the historical memory is still alive in the region, in Ukraine's western neighbours and especially among Rusyn émigrés in the West. Initial demands for autonomy were informed by the memory of the autonomous unit inscribed in the 1938 Czechoslovak constitution (Magosci, 1978). The Ukrainian state has so far only recognized the Rusyns as a sub-group of Ukrainians, but the fact that the tone of the debate has become less emotional over the years indicates that the Ukrainian state has been consolidated and that the Rusyn community is split within itself along cultural, political and generational lines (Batt, 2002).

In the Berehove district on the Ukrainian-Hungarian border, where the Hungarians are in the majority, yet another set of demands came to the fore when the district council held an additional local poll on 1 December 1991 on the creation of a Hungarian autonomous district. This proposal was met with the approval of 81.4% of the voters and, therefore, must have also appealed to non-Hungarians (Nahaylo, 1999: 419). Disagreements within the Carpathian Hungarian Cultural Association about the extent of 'anti-Ukrainian' demands subsequently weakened the movement's momentum (Batt, 2002). In the Soviet period the Hungarians in the region had been severely repressed. Only the collapse of communism enabled a revival of their national identity, which had a distinct international dimension to it.

Even before Ukrainian independence Hungary had begun to build friendly neighbourly relations with Ukraine in return for guarantees for the Hungarian minority in Zakarpattya. Bilateral treaties stipulate 'collective rights' for the Hungarian minority, which in Hungary is understood not only as cultural but also as national-territorial autonomy (Batt, 2002). In view of its EU aspirations, Hungary has not pushed for a quick implementation of these rights in Ukraine, Slovakia or Romania.

On the whole, the existence of sub-regional and sub-ethnic cleavages in Zakarpattya was instrumental in de-activating a range of different regional and ethnopolitical claims for special autonomy arrangements. Zakarpattya is a post-Soviet region with national minority issues but at this point the potential for radical claims against the centre is minimal, not least due to Zakarpattya's dire economic record.¹⁸ With the region losing its role as the Soviet Union's western military outpost, the local population has become increasingly dependent on cross-border activities along the Hungarian and Slovak borders.

The Donbas

The Donbas region, consisting of the two regions Donets'k and Luhans'k, forms a key part of Ukraine's economic base. After Crimea it is also the region with the highest proportion – though not a majority – of ethnic Russians. According to the 1989 census about 45% of the population of Luhans'k region and 44% of Donets'k region identified themselves as Russians by nationality. Regional political mobilization, however, has occurred along different socio-economic, ideological and cultural faultlines only some of which have coincided and mutually reinforced one another. Already prior to the Soviet collapse the Donbas miners had emerged as one of the most vociferous constituencies of political opposition. From 1989 onwards they repeatedly staged strikes. The effectiveness of this political weapon began to wane only in the mid-1990s after they had forced President Kravchuk to agree to early elections in 1994 and formed an opposition to local party committees (Nahaylo, 1999: 213). The miners' movement was far removed from the Ukrainian national movement that had begun to crystallize in Western Ukraine and in Kyiv. In 1990–91 regional political mobilization, modelled on the Interfront movement in the Baltic republics, resulted in the demand to create a union of 12 regions in southern and eastern Ukraine. This proposal would have effectively split the country into two parts.

In the Donbas demands for regional autonomy were closely linked to socio-economic factors. By mid-1993 the repeated strikes had resulted in political demands for administrative autonomy for the region as a whole. This demand was picked up by the regional councils in Donets'k and Luhans'k *oblast* in conjunction with the question of making Russian the

official language of the region alongside Ukrainian. Ultimately, the prolonged strikes and the threat to hold a referendum on the population's confidence in both the parliament and the president broke through the political stalemate at the centre, and forced early elections in 1994.

In the Donbas a local referendum was run concurrently with the 1994 parliamentary elections. The majority of the population approved all four proposals: making Russian the second state language alongside Ukrainian, making Russian the official language of administration in the region, federalization of Ukraine (this question was only asked in Donets'k *oblast*) and Ukraine's full membership in the CIS (Nahaylo, 1999: 466). Although this referendum and a similar one in Crimea held on the same day were downgraded to 'consultative' referenda, Kyiv could hardly ignore their results. The Donbas had also raised other issues, for example the notion of dual Russian-Ukrainian citizenship and a more open border with Russia. On the whole, political mobilization in the Donbas was primarily socio-economic or cultural in nature – these two cleavages did not always coincide – and concentrated on demands for more political, economic and cultural autonomy rather than outright secession. A vague consensus on some notion of greater regional autonomy was nurtured by a convergence of different regional interests: for parts of the regional elite a degree of autonomy was seen as a means of control over regional resources and policy-making, more specifically the protection of declining industries, such as the coal mines and the military-industrial complex (MIC); for conservative political forces it seemed to pave the way for closer integration with Russia; for the Donbas-based Liberal Party, representatives of small and medium enterprises and the technical intelligentsia regional autonomy was linked to forward-looking development strategies and investment plans, but their initiatives lacked the support of the local and regional administrations despite the fact that pro-reform forces were elected in Donets'k *oblast* and the city of Luhans'k (Nemyria, 1999b: 87). The majority of the regional administrative, industrial and agricultural elites (Labour Party, Inter-Regional Association of Industrialists, miners' trade unions) aimed to use an autonomy status for the exact opposite: the preservation of Soviet economic structures and subsidies. In opposition to both these economic interest conglomerates a circle of leftist, pro-Russian forces (Inter-Movement of the Donbas, Civic Congress, Congress of Russian Communities, Party of Slavic Unity) proved key in organizing the 1994 referendum (Nemyria, 1999a: 312–14). The Communist Party of Ukraine, which has repeatedly turned the Donbas into one of its electoral strongholds, tapped into this strand of regionalism.

Political mobilization in the Donbas has been closely linked to Soviet institutional legacies, in particular the region's socio-economic profile and

the fact that Ukraine's industrial and administrative elites from Kyiv, Donets'k, Dnipropetrovs'k and Kharkiv formed an integral part of the Soviet nomenklatura and traditionally moved up the Soviet career ladder in Moscow. In the post-Soviet era, the regional nomenklatura in eastern Ukraine has tried to either maintain close links with Russia or reassert itself vis-à-vis the new centre in Kyiv, but the different orientations have prevented a coherent regional political stance. The existence of multiple political identities plus a Soviet socio-economic regional profile as opposed to clear-cut ethnic or ethnolinguistic identities have characterized the regional challenge posed by the Donbas (Nemyria, 1999b: 79). These intra-regional cleavages and conflicts of interest allowed Kyiv to neutralize the regionalist challenge. The presidential administration under Kuchma has been dominated by elites from Dnipropetrovs'k (*Dnipropetrovtsi*) who attacked regionalism as a product of 'corrupt' regional elites outside their home region. Once regional interests had translated into central power they were used to replace disloyal regional elites, in particular in Donets'k *oblast*.

Crimea

Crimea has a number of exceptional features which set it apart from all the other Ukrainian regions, secured its place at the centre of the Ukrainian state-building process and necessitated exceptional means of accommodation. Crimea's geographic location and the shape of the peninsula which juts out into the Black Sea and is connected to the rest of Ukraine only by a narrow isthmus, have compounded the image of Crimea as a separate entity and fuelled political mobilization. The region's distinct multi-ethnic population is a result of its complex history under the Crimean Tatar Khanate, the Russian Empire, the USSR and Soviet Ukraine (since 1954). Crimea is the only region in Ukraine with an ethnic Russian majority population (by now about 60% as compared to 23% Ukrainians), a significant Crimean Tatar segment (10–12%) and up to 100 smaller nationalities.¹⁹ The Crimean Tatars have returned *en masse* from their places of deportation in Central Asia since 1990–91. This influx has confronted the authorities in Crimea and Kyiv with specific socio-economic and political problems and the potential for inter-ethnic tensions. Moreover, deeply rooted symbolic, literary and historical memories tied to the region form integral parts of the different national identities and claims to the region.²⁰ Crimea's economy was highly sovietized and dominated by the now bankrupt military-industrial complex and the Soviet tourism industry. The region is almost entirely dependent on energy and water from the centre (dual energy dependence on Kyiv and Russia).²¹ The collapse of living standards and the lack of a

regional cohort of reformers shaped the post-Soviet period. The regional population remained one of the most conservatively 'Soviet' parts of the new Ukraine in terms of its outlook and voting behaviour: with the exception of an interim period during which the Russian movement filled the regional power vacuum after the collapse, the Communist Party has retained its firm grip on the regional assembly. More than any other Ukrainian region Crimea has resonated in two post-Soviet transitions. Being a periphery within the former tsarist and Soviet imperial periphery, after 1991 Crimea emerged as a key interface between two interrelated state- and nation-building processes in Ukraine and Russia. Though not central to Western interests, Crimea is also at the centre of the geopolitical triangle formed by Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

The first attempts at political mobilization in Crimea – a short-lived ecological movement and a small democratic group – were rather feeble. From 1990 onwards Crimean autonomy emerged as the first big issue in regional politics and, ultimately, as a test of Kyiv's authority in domestic politics and of its sovereignty in relations with Russia. What started as an issue of decentralized decision-making within the USSR carried over into demands for territorial autonomy in post-Soviet Ukraine at the end of 1991 and culminated in the Russian nationalist and separatist movement in 1994. The debate about autonomy was initiated in the second half of 1990 when the Crimean soviet set up a committee to study Crimea's future status involving deputies from all political levels (USSR, Ukrainian SSR and Crimean Soviet) alongside cultural and national organizations and journalists. Crimea's previous experiences with autonomy in the aftermath of the revolution and the early Soviet period were frequently referred to; the downgrading of the Crimean ASSR in 1945 to an ordinary region as well as the region's transfer in 1954 were deemed unconstitutional; and a possible referendum on Crimea's place within Russia or Ukraine was widely discussed.²² These discussions prepared the ground for a regional referendum on 21 January 1991 on the establishment of Crimea's ASSR status within the USSR.²³ This referendum reflected both the genuine demand for regionalized decision-making in the USSR, a demand that had been encouraged by Gorbachev's 1990 law on autonomy, and fears of a growing Ukrainian national movement, epitomized by the restrictive 1989 Ukrainian language law.²⁴ The local media reports and the activities of the Crimean Communist Party in the run-up to the referendum highlighted the key issues: regional economic decision-making powers and a vaguely defined regional identity endangered by the new tide of Ukrainian nationalism elsewhere. This early referendum demonstrated a widespread consensus in Crimea: 93.2% out of 81.37% of the eligible electorate that participated came out in favour of the ASSR status within the USSR and the inclusion of this Crimean ASSR in

Gorbachev's plans for a Union Treaty.²⁵ The Crimean Tatars, the majority of whom was still to return to Crimea, were not yet represented in regional politics and had, therefore, boycotted the referendum.

The referendum results were not fully implemented by the Ukrainian Soviet authorities: an ASSR status within the Ukrainian SSR rather than within the USSR was affirmed by law on 12 February 1991 and incorporated into the constitution of the Ukrainian SSR in June 1991.²⁶ The subsequent discussions about the realization of the newly gained autonomy status were cut short by the August Coup 1991 and Ukraine's declaration of independence. The ethnification of the Crimean autonomy issue occurred in the wake of the 'yes-campaign' in the regional referendum and the support of 54.1% of the Crimean population for Ukrainian independence (Nahaylo, 1999: 419). Popular expectations about economic prosperity and an effective regional regime were quickly shattered. Regional elites channelled ensuing discontent along ethnic lines and demanded closer links with Russia. The democratic and centrist regional parties were too weak to counterbalance ethno-political mobilization in Crimea, and the infant regional party system ended up being skewed towards ethno-political mobilization.²⁷ A whole range of Russian nationalist political organizations flourished in 1993–94. Russian political organizations developed parallel to the large-scale return of Crimean Tatars and their political mobilization. Ethnic tension on the basis of a vaguely defined 'Russian' cleavage was the result of contingent political polarization. Even at its peak the regional Russian movement mobilized against the centre in Kyiv rather than ethnic Ukrainians in Crimea.

The Crimean Russian movement reached its apogee in 1994 with the election of a Crimean President, Yuri Meshkov, in January 1994. On this wave of Russian nationalism and separatism, Crimea held a 'consultative' referendum, coinciding with the Ukrainian parliamentary elections. The Crimean President, Yuri Meshkov, had called for a boycott of the national elections (with the result of 12 out of 23 seats in the national Rada remaining vacant) and concentrated on the election of a Crimean parliament instead in which his 'Blok Rossiya' secured 54 of a total of 98 seats, and a regional referendum which won approval for Crimean autonomy, dual Russian-Ukrainian citizenship and a widening of Meshkov's presidential powers.²⁸ By the end of 1994 the Russian movement was already deeply divided due to elite infighting. The quick rise and fall of Meshkov's movement demonstrated how easily a dormant ethnic sentiment can be mobilized in conditions of change and uncertainty, but also how unsustainable it is in the presence of cross-cutting cleavages, shifting political alliances and the lack of clear policy alternatives. Most importantly, the Russian separatist movement failed to address pressing

socio-economic issues. Its haphazard privatization plan was blocked by parts of the regional elite and led to an effective moratorium on privatization for several years. This, in turn, created inroads for organized crime which came to dominate the regional political economy even more than in other Ukrainian regions (*Finantsova Ukraina*, 11 February 1997). The failure of the Russian movement to address the population's most pressing needs made it lose the electorate's support within less than a year.

The weakness of the Russian nationalist movement in Crimea contrasts sharply with the influential Crimean Tatar national movement with its different organizations and regional and national institutions.²⁹ The shared experience and memory of the ethnocide in 1994 has kept the Crimean Tatars united across generations, political orientations, social strata and business orientations, although the latter two differences have become more visible in recent years. The Russian nationalist movement lacked a comparable unifying element and was instead constructed on the basis of a blurred Soviet-Russian identity with vague political goals. Nostalgia for the 'glorious' Soviet past of the region was couched in the rhetoric of Russian nationalism and separatism. The movement lacked symbolic figureheads and competent political leaders who could have articulated a coherent political programme to sustain the movement's momentum in view of diverging interests among its key elite members. In Crimea, Russian nationalism was, therefore, a default option of political mobilization. Due to its inherent contradictions and regional sub-cleavages its political success was transitory.

Political mobilization in Crimea was hinged on the region's autonomy status, which emerged as the minimum consensus in the period 1990–98, although the term 'autonomy' was interpreted differently by the actors involved at different stages of the political process. Once a vaguely defined autonomy status was entrenched in the late Soviet period and inherited by post-Soviet Ukraine, it proved difficult to remove. Kyiv reacted hesitantly to the Crimean issue, but the early concession of an autonomy status helped to defuse the potential for an early escalation. Only in March 1995, when the Russian movement in Crimea had already fragmented, did President Kuchma crack down on what was coined 'Crimean separatism', abolished the Crimean presidency and set an ultimatum for the regional parliament to draw up a new constitution.

In the first post-Soviet Crimean Soviet, elected in 1994, a consociational quota guaranteed the political representation of Crimea's deported nationalities: the Crimean Tatars were given 14 of the 98 seats, and the Armenian, Bulgarian, German and Greek communities were guaranteed one seat each. The Crimean Tatar faction was the most consistent faction in the regional parliament. Although in the end the result

of the constitution-making process fell short of their demands for a national-territorial autonomy, the quota gave them a voice during the critical phase of ethno-regional politics and defused conflict potential by locking them into the negotiation process. The national quota was abolished in the 1998 regional elections, a move that led to the renewed exclusion of the Crimean Tatar organizations from regional politics. This feeling of exclusion is somewhat counterbalanced by the fact that since the parliamentary elections of 1998 the Crimean Tatars are for the first time represented at the national level by two of their most vociferous leaders.³⁰ At the local and regional level the Crimean Tatars to some extent supported the Ukrainian national movement Rukh, a coalition which could mark the beginning of the end of ethnically defined party politics. Electoral sequencing at the national and regional level, which saw legitimacy shifting between the two levels of governance throughout 1990–98 ultimately helped to integrate Crimea into the Ukrainian polity.³¹ By the 1998 parliamentary elections at the national and regional level, regional parties had officially been curtailed by the legal requirement to register as a national party in a number of Ukrainian regions, although pockets of the former Russian movement are still represented in the regional assembly.

In Crimea domestic politics and foreign policy issues are inextricably intertwined. The foreign policy dimension has continuously framed the Crimean issue but it has, on the whole, remained secondary to the domestic dynamics. The location and economic dependence of Crimea made reintegration with Russia a low priority on the agenda of the Russian Federation under President Yeltsin. For Moscow and, in particular, for individual populist politicians, the status of Crimea, Sevastopol' and the Black Sea Fleet are welcome symbols to manipulate in political rhetoric, but they have not provided the basis for an assertive Russian foreign policy towards Crimea. Moreover, the Chechen war sent at least two important signals to Ukraine: first, Russia's military capabilities do not match the neo-imperial rhetoric of some of its politicians and left the country struggling with its own centre-periphery problems. The Chechen war, therefore, established Crimea more firmly as a domestic Ukrainian issue. Second, the bloody consequences of Moscow's confrontational approach to Chechnya (as opposed to Tatarstan) seem to have fed into Kyiv's more gradual and bilateral approach to the issue of Crimean autonomy. The status of Sevastopol' and the Black Sea Fleet as well as a 20-year lease of its bases were clarified in the long-awaited Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty of May 1997, the detailed provisions of which were eventually ratified by the Russian and Ukrainian parliaments in early 1999. Recently, the possibility of sharing the bases in Sevastopol' and control the remaining ships of the Black Sea Fleet jointly have been floated in

Russian–Ukrainian talk, but as of yet no new agreement has been reached. Whatever the outcome of any re-negotiation of the Sevastopol' bases may be, the sheer presence of the Russian neighbour provides a constant check on Ukrainian policy in the region. At the same time, Russia is bound by international agreements, such as the trilateral agreement with the US (1994) on the transfer of Ukraine's nuclear weapons in return for a guarantee of Ukraine's territorial integrity. The third potential foreign policy actor in the region, Turkey, has refrained from openly getting involved in Crimean politics. In general, Turkey regards Ukraine as an ally in the Black Sea littoral. The extensive Crimean Tatar diaspora in Turkey has mainly confined itself to humanitarian and cultural aid. Nevertheless, a certain fear of the unquantifiable 'Turkish influence' or 'Islamic factor' permeates the public discourse in Crimea despite the fact that military training of special Crimean Tatar units is as yet a marginal phenomenon. OSCE involvement in Crimea presents an important additional international dimension. In particular the personal involvement of the High Commissioner on National Minorities at the time, Max van der Stoep, helped to embed the Crimean issue as a domestic dispute over a constitutional autonomy arrangement, to preserve a regional autonomy status and to keep the Crimean Tatar issue on the agenda (Packer, 1998: 295–316).

Crimean Autonomy within a Unitary State

The single most important means of ethnic and regional conflict prevention in the Crimean case was the institutionalization of an autonomy status. While it was by no means a carefully designed strategy on Kyiv's part from the very beginning, the 'constitutional sequencing' of the national and regional constitutions (1990–98) as part of the protracted constitution-making process proved a vital mechanism in defusing conflict potential. Constitution-making in Ukraine took longer than in any other post-Soviet state. The constitution represents a minimum compromise and remains ambiguous in places. One of the contradictions inherent in the constitution is the attempt to reconcile the ideas of a unitary state and a federal element, the so-called 'Autonomous Republic of Crimea'. The label 'Autonomous Republic', the existence of a Crimean government, a regionally elected assembly as well as the possibility to build on regional tax and language provisions mark the constitutional starting-points of a territorial political rather than an ethno-political Crimean identity.³²

The issue of Crimean autonomy came to the fore before Ukrainian independence and has since then passed through five stages. The first, preparatory phase led to the referendum in January 1991. The second stage lasted until early 1994 when the 'Russian wave' swept across the peninsula.

During this phase various attempts were made at adjusting the last-minute Soviet ASSR status to post-Soviet realities. Regional politicians, including the Crimean Supreme Soviet, jumped on the bandwagon of the autonomy movement, stressing cultural-historical or economic factors, respectively.³³ The emerging Russian nationalist faction initiated Crimea's declaration of independence in 1992, which was backed up by a first regional constitution on 6 May 1992 supported by the moderate regional parliament and representatives of the Russian movement alike. This constitution defined the Republic of Crimea as a 'state' (*gosudarstvo*) with sovereign powers on its territory and over its resources, law enforcement structures and independent foreign relations.³⁴ The Ukrainian parliament immediately rejected this constitution. A moratorium was imposed on a referendum on Crimea's status and a compromise constitution was drawn up by the Crimean parliament and enacted on 25 September 1992. This constitution emphasized that the 'Republic of Crimea' was a 'state' within Ukraine.³⁵ Both constitutions defined Crimea's status in territorial terms, referring to the 'multi-ethnic people of Crimea' (*mnogonatsional'nyi narod Kryma*) and 'the people of Crimea' (*narod Kryma*).

The third stage began in early 1994 with the election of the first and last Crimean President, Yuri Meshkov, and lasted until March 1995. This stage is best described as the rise and fall of Crimean separatism. At one point President Kravchuk was forced to admit to losing control over Crimea.³⁶ Presidential turnover at the centre coincided with Crimea becoming a policy priority in Kyiv. Against the backdrop of the ongoing constitutional tug-of-war between the president and the parliament at the centre, President Kuchma cracked down on Crimea in March 1995, placing the region firmly under his direct control, abolishing the Crimean presidency and setting an ultimatum for the Crimean parliament to draw up a new constitution.³⁷ By this time the Russian movement had already discredited itself in the eyes of the local population. The only change that outlived the Meshkov era for a few years was his switch to the Moscow time zone.

The fourth stage from March 1995 to June 1996 consisted once again of protracted negotiations during which Simferopol' regained parts of its lost status. Personal power struggles and the inexperience of many Crimean politicians, the delay of much-needed reforms in Crimea and the conflict between the regional executive and legislature had all contributed to the disintegration of the regional political alliance and had, thus, not only cost Crimea substantial parts of its autonomy, but they had also effectively undermined the legitimacy of the regional institutions.

The fifth and last stage in the constitution-making process began with the adoption of an incomplete Crimean constitution in April 1996 which left contentious issues such as a separate Crimean citizenship, Crimea's 'state'

symbols and the explicit delineation of devolved powers to be decided. It was followed by the ratification of the Ukrainian state constitution in June 1996. In the end the majority of Ukrainian deputies accepted the phrase 'Autonomous Republic of Crimea', although the downgrading to an amorphous *avtonomiya* based on a statute rather than a regional constitution had already been on the cards.³⁸ The long night during which the Ukrainian constitution was finally passed saw a number of clever package deals: the vote on Crimean autonomy, for example, was tied to Ukraine's state symbols, thus appeasing communists and national-democrats alike.³⁹ The timing of the ratification of the incomplete regional constitution, followed by the national constitution guaranteeing a very basic autonomy status for Crimea including a regional assembly (*Verkhovna Rada*), government and constitution, further reduced the potential for conflict. Kyiv had repeatedly delayed decisions about Crimean autonomy. The Verkhovna Rada, for example, had waited five months before considering the Crimean draft constitution forwarded by the Crimean Supreme Soviet in November 1995. Although these delays were most likely not part of Kyiv's initial strategy, they paid off politically, as the final constitutional negotiations took place when the emotional dust had settled and the potential for conflict had by and large dissolved. The constitutional sequencing of the five stages from 1990 to 1998, which to some extent mirror the effect of electoral sequencing outlined by Linz and Stepan (Linz and Stepan, 1992: 123–39), generated different coalitions of regional interests and actors and allowed for the institutionalization of a minimum consensus: the preservation of Crimea's autonomy status. In effect, Crimea's special treatment has also increased Kyiv's control over the region through, for example, the presidential representative in Crimea, the regional branch of the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs and security forces staffed by Kyiv.⁴⁰ However, even a symbolic degree of regional autonomy can act as an important basis for conflict-prevention (Coakley, 1993: 14). After the 'ratification-in-parts' of the Crimean constitution in 1996 regional politics returned to economic-distributive issues, most importantly the struggle between two rival clans tied to the region's criminal structures and directly represented in the Crimean assembly. In the end, the regional Communist Party under its leader Leonid Grach, who is one of the key figures in the Ukrainian Communist Party, managed to capitalize on these rifts. The elections of 1998 saw the Communist Party regain the position it had only temporarily lost to the 'Blok Rossiya' in 1994–98 by securing the majority of seats in the regional assembly.⁴¹ The Communist Party became the central player and stabilizing force in this final phase of the constitution-making process culminating in the ratification of the revised Crimean constitution on 23 December 1998 by the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada. This constitution refers

to the Crimean assembly as a 'representative organ' with the right to only pass normative acts rather than laws.⁴² The responsibilities of the Crimean Verkhovna Rada are limited, but frequent references to further specifications in Ukrainian laws introduce an element of flexibility and the possibility of subsequent modifications. The constitution does not only put the emphasis on Crimea's links with Ukraine and Kyiv's ultimate control over regional politics and security, but also repeatedly refers to the inviolability of the autonomy status.

While it would be too strong to say that institutional design led to successful conflict-management, the constitutional process locked most of the key actors into bargaining mode and eventually led to an institutional compromise. Crimea's autonomy status was primarily the effect of a protracted negotiation, which was shaped by the different political, economic and ethnic interests. The process itself, rather than the constitutional status, was the key to conflict-prevention. The Crimean Tatars are the key group alienated from the constitutional settlement. Their recurrent demonstrations illustrate that the Crimean Tatar issue remains the single most important potential for ethnic conflict in Crimea and in Ukraine as a whole.

CONCLUSION

Regional diversity has shaped Ukraine's history and vice-versa. The collapse of the USSR and Ukrainian independence saw centrifugal forces dominate in Ukrainian politics in the period 1990–94. While the historical memory of previous experiments with autonomy fuelled the imagination and mobilization of regionalist demands, the dismantling and reassembling of Soviet legacies was the driving force for these demands. In the three regions where the most serious political mobilization occurred – Zakarpattia, the Donbas and Crimea – these movements were intertwined with ethno-cultural demands.

Within and across regions elites have generally been divided among themselves in terms of their political, economic and foreign policy views (Nemyria, 1999a). This diversity of interests has facilitated the centre's ad hoc and 'divide and rule' approach. Moreover, mainly due to Soviet legacies, many Ukrainian regions are dependent on the centre: Crimea is highly dependent on water and energy supplies as well as subsidies, Zakarpattia is economically dependent, and even the ailing Soviet economic base in the Donbas' is ultimately in need of central restructuring programmes. So far Kyiv has managed – partly by defusing or buying off potential for conflict through a controlled institutionalization of regional interests, and partly by default and luck – to contain a range of centrifugal

challenges and assert vertical executive control.

The political integration of Crimea into the new Ukrainian state has been one of the most significant cases of successful conflict-management in a post-communist state. Given that Crimea was considered Ukraine's biggest potential ethno-regional flashpoint, the prevention of conflict here puts the debate about conflict in other Ukrainian regions and the prognoses about the fracturing of the Ukrainian state in perspective. Four factors explain why ethno-regional conflict did not erupt in Crimea: first, the historically evolved intrinsically multi-ethnic setting lacked clear-cut ethno-political boundaries; second, Russian ethno-political mobilization proved unsustainable due to underlying socio-economic problems, a blurred Soviet-Russian identity and the internal fragmentation of the movement; third, an active external prop for nationalism or separatism was missing, as Russia – and even more so Turkey – refrained from supporting their ethnic kin groups as part of their official foreign policy; and fourth and most significantly, the dynamics of the protracted bargaining process over the institutionalization of regional autonomy provided the basis for effective conflict-regulation. In the case of Crimea three potential conflicts have been averted: a clash between Ukraine and Russia, intra-regional conflict and, most importantly, a centre-periphery conflict. A key issue – that of the Crimean Tatars (the question of their status as an indigenous people, minority representation, political integration and their socio-economic problems) – has yet to be addressed. The management of the Crimean Tatar issue and the implementation of long-postponed structural reform of the regional economy are the key to future stability in Crimea.

The institutionalization of Crimean autonomy has strengthened the notion of a civic Ukrainian state- and nation-building project. Ukraine began its nation-building with a zero-sum citizenship law and a gradual implementation of the Ukrainian language law. The resolution of the Crimean issue demonstrates that regionalism is not necessarily an obstacle to state- and nation building as such, but it is certainly an impediment to exclusivist ethnic nation-state building. Ukraine's regionalization has, in fact, played an important stabilizing role in Ukraine's transition and state- and nation-building. Of critical importance is the way in which ethnic and regional cleavages in Ukraine are cross-cutting, rather than reinforcing. Thus, they provide an effective equilibrium-making mechanism and a constant check on ethno-political mobilization. Ethnicity is only one of several cleavages that can be politically mobilized at the regional level, though it can temporarily gain in importance and disguise other, more deeply rooted regional or sub-regional cleavages, such as multi-ethnicity, cultural or socio-economic factors that cross-cut ethnic markers.

Post-Soviet Ukraine faced a myriad of political and economic

challenges. The way in which it dealt with its ethnic and regional diversity and, above all, with its most precarious region Crimea, belongs to its political achievements. In Ukraine's current political system it is primarily the president who has to balance the different regional interests and provides an element of continuity into Ukrainian politics. There is no doubt that demands for regional autonomy were strengthened by the continuous tensions between the executive and legislature during the constitution-making process of 1991–96. There is a correlation, however, between the phases of presidential strength and improved management of regional demands, most notably in the Donbas and Crimea. The maintenance of political stability and the consolidation of the Ukrainian state, however, came at the price of postponing other major reform issues, and in particular the delay of macro- and micro-economic reforms.

Although the term 'federalism' is still highly stigmatized in Ukraine *de facto* the federal principle is already inscribed in Ukraine's Crimean Autonomy, and the regional diversity which permeates its policy-making, political bargaining, electoral politics and has left its mark on the transition process in general. This situation is aptly described by Livingston's concept of a 'federalized society' (Livingston, 1952). This concept describes the reality of territorial cleavages without implying the existence of matching political structures. A federal vs. unitary state are only the ideal-type end-points of a scale – between them lies a whole array of institutional arrangements. The institutional management of Ukraine's state of regions may still evolve towards an as yet unknown new equilibrium. In the meantime, Ukrainian policy-makers and analysts have to come to terms with its existence as a regionalized unitary state.

NOTES

1. Bukovina belonged to the Ottoman empire until the end of the Russian-Turkish war in 1774 when the Habsburg empire annexed the territory. See Magosci, 1996: 385.
2. For a detailed discussion of the 1954 transfer of Crimea on the basis of archival materials, see Sasse, 1999: 150–99.
3. For an overview of the different Crimean experiences with autonomy in the Soviet period, see *ibid.*, chapter 6. For the parallels between the post-Soviet debates about Crimean autonomy and the period 1917–18, see Torbakov, 1996.
4. The support for independence in the western regions reached on average 95%, in the eastern regions over 80% and in Crimea a slim majority of 54.1%.
5. See Sasse, 1999: 313 (footnote 925).
6. For the regional breakdowns of economic indicators, see Derzhavnyi Komitet Statystyky Ukrainy, *Statystychnyi Shchorichnyk Ukrainy za 1999 rik*. Kyiv: Tekhnika, 2000.
7. These regular surveys represent one of the most reliable sources on Ukrainian public opinion. They are conducted by the Natsional'nyi Universytet Kyievo-Mohylyans'ka Akademiya i Kafedra Sotsiologii, Kyiv's'kyi Mizhnarodnyi Instytut Sotsiologii.
8. Kubicek uses the term 'regionalism' to describe the existence of regional diversity (p.274). While his finding that regional divisions are here to stay is a well-founded observation, it

- should not be taken as a reliable parameter of regional political mobilization, Ukraine's reform success or its survival as an independent state.
9. See data compiled by the Ukrainian Central Electoral Commission and the OSCE.
 10. In Crimea the institution of the presidential representative survived the abolition of this position elsewhere. It demonstrates the recognition of both Crimea's exceptional role and the potential for conflict. The Crimean presidential representative was highly involved in the protracted regional elite bargaining process over the constitution.
 11. The new Moldovan SSR comprised six Bessarabian counties and the six western raions of the former Moldovan ASSR. Northern Bukovina, the rest of Transdnistria and part of the counties of Hotin, Akkerman and Ismail in northern and southern Bessarabia became part of the Ukrainian SSR. See King, 2000: 94.
 12. According to Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravchuk, federalism was never considered a realistic option for Ukraine. This was his response to the author's question following his talk at the conference 'From Soviet to Independent Ukraine', University of Birmingham, 13 June 1996.
 13. See *Perturbatsii*, Warsaw, No.1, Autumn 1989, pp.70–76, quoted in a profile on Chornovil prepared by the *Nezalezhnyi Tsentri Ukrainy'skykh Politychnykh Doslidzhen*, Kyiv 1996. In this article Chornovil is even said to have supported the idea of Crimean independence. Volodymyr Hryn'ov, Adviser to President Kuchma on Regional Issues, confirmed Chornovil's early views on federalism in an interview with the author, Kyiv, 25 October 1996.
 14. See *Mizhrehional'nyi Blok Reform: Prohramni partiini dokumenty*. Kyiv, 1995.
 15. See, for example, the issue of the journal *Biznes Inform* (Kharkiv, 1995) titled 'Federativnaya Respublika Ukraina?', which discussed the advantages of political and economic decentralization.
 16. A draft concept of regional policy in Ukraine was prepared by the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Economics; see *Kontseptsiya rehional'n'noi polityky v Ukraini*, Donetsk 1994.
 17. Kuchma himself came to embody the dilemma of Ukraine's regionalization: on the one hand he recognized the importance of the regions, but on the other hand he was afraid of losing his grip on the regional administration. Author's interview with Volodymyr Hryn'ov in Kyiv, 25 October 1996.
 18. Zakarpattia has consistently been one of the two or three weakest regions in terms of key economic indicators, such as the regional share in GNP or national income. For the economic data 1990–94, see A.P. Pavlyuk, 1996. For the more up-to-date economic developments, see Derzhavnyi Komitet Statystyky Ukrainy, 2000.
 19. These figures are the estimates of the Crimean administration in 1998. In 1989 the Russians still accounted for 67% of the Crimean population. With the return of the Crimean Tatars the Slavic share of the regional population has dropped.
 20. See Sasse, 1999: 102–49.
 21. See *ibid.*: 298–307. For up-to-date comparison with other Ukrainian regions see the regional breakdowns in Derzhavnyi Komitet Statystyky Ukrainy, 2000.
 22. For an overview of the main issues and positions emerging from these committee discussions, see *Krymskaia pravda*, 5 April 1990, 19 June 1990, 23 June 1990, 19 August 1990, 30 August 1990, 5 September 1990, 18 September 1990.
 23. The wording of the key question about the 're-establishment' of Crimea's ASSR status was misleading: Crimea had previously existed as an ASSR within the RSFSR; the ASSR status within the USSR, envisaged by the referendum, was a new construct. It reflected Gorbachev's attempt to equalize the status of Union republics and ASSRs in order to secure support for a new Union Treaty.
 24. Language had an even greater potential to become the key issue dividing Crimea and the rest of Ukraine, given that only about 4% of the regional population considered themselves to be Ukrainian-speakers. See Dawson, 1996: 158.
 25. For the formulation of the referendum question, see *Krymskaia pravda*, 5 January 1991; for the official results see *Krymskaia pravda*, 22 January 1991.
 26. See *Krymskaia pravda*, 13 February, 22 February, 26 February, 14 June 1991.
 27. For a detailed discussion of regional party development and political mobilization in Crimea, see Sasse, 1999: 251–88.

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28. *Krymskaia pravda*, 18 January 1994, 1 February 1994, 13 March 1994, 17 March 1994, 6 April 1994, 8 April 1994, 12 April 1994; *Krymskie izvestiia*, 12 April 1994.
29. For the most systematic description and analysis of the Crimean Tatar national movement from their deportation to the 1990s, including key documents, see Guboglo, Chervonnaya (eds), 3 vols., 1992–96; I. Kuras (ed.), *Kryms'ki tatory: istoriia i suchasnist' (do 50-richchya deportatsii kryms'kotatars'koho narodu). Materialy mizhnarodnoi naukovoï konferentsii, Kyiv 13–14 travnya 1994r.*, Kyiv: Instytut Natsional'nykh Vidnosyn i Politolohii NAN Ukrainy, 1995; Y.Z. Adnylyuk (ed.), *Kryms'ki tatory 1944–1994rr. Statti, dokumenty, svidchennya ochevidstiv*, Kyiv: Ridnyi krai, 1995; Edward Allworth (ed.), *The Tatars of Crimea. Return to the Homeland*. London: Duke University Press, 1998 (2nd rev. ed.).
30. The two Crimean Tatar deputies in the national Verkhovna Rada are Mustafa Dzhemilev, the head of the Crimean Tatar Medzhlis, and his deputy Refat Chubarov. Dzhemilev was elected on the Rukh list; Chubarov was elected as an independent candidate.
31. For an analysis of these electoral dynamics and the change in elite composition, see Sasse, 1999: 251–88 and 329–52.
32. The Crimean constitution of 1998 allows for locally raised taxes to stay in the region. The Ukrainian constitution of 1996 stipulates that special language provisions are possible in regions with compact settlement of national minorities (Chapter 1, Article 10). This clause seems highly relevant to the Crimean case.
33. Author's interview with Nikolai Bagrov, Head of the Crimean Supreme Soviet until 1994, Simferopol', 5 April 1996.
34. See *Konstitutsiia Respubliki Krym*, Simferopol', 6 May 1992, Preamble and Part 1, Articles 1 and 10.
35. See *Konstitutsiia Respubliki Krym*, Simferopol', 25 September 1992, Article 1.
36. In his speech to the Ukrainian Parliament on 1 June 1994 Kravchuk said: '*De jure* Crimea is part of Ukraine...but *de facto* is already absent. ...It is neither in the state structures, nor in other organs, nor in any concrete questions', *Stenographic Report*, Bulletin 18. The author is grateful for this quote provided by Dominique Arel.
37. The 'Law on the Autonomous Republic of Crimea' of 17 March 1995 was published in *Holos Ukrainy*, 18 March 1995. For a collection of documents and reactions, see 'Chy rozhoryt'sya kryms'ka kriza?', *Zapysky Ukrain's'koho Nezalezhnoho Tsentru Politychnykh Doslidzhen'*, Kyiv, 1995.
38. Author's interview with Evgenii Suprunyuk, then Speaker of the Crimean Soviet, Simferopol', 8 April 1996.
39. Author's interview with Vladimir Yegudin, Crimean deputy in the Verkhovna Rada in Kyiv, Simferopol', 7 October 1996.
40. At the height of the Crimean separatist movement, the control of the security forces had effectively passed to the regional elites, signalling the centre's loss of control in the region.
41. *Krymskaia pravda*, 22 April 1998.
42. See *Konstitutsiia Avtonomnoi Respubliki Krym*, Simferopol', 23 December 1998, Article 1.

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