Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories

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ABSTRACT

The legacy of the tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union is one of the crucial factors for an understanding and an explanation of current affairs in the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for Ukraine and for Russian–Ukrainian relations. Russia regards Ukraine as a part of its own strategic orbit, while many Ukrainians want to liberate themselves from the Russian hegemony and advocate a closer cooperation with the European Union. This controversy culminated in late 2013, when Russian pressure led to a re-orientation of Ukrainian policy and a rapprochement with Russia. In this paper I present some reflections on the significance of the imperial heritage for the Russian–Ukrainian relationship. I analyse the different discourses and the Ukrainian and Russian historical narratives, politics of history and competing memories. The Russian–Ukrainian relationship was and is still characterized by an obvious asymmetry, a hegemony of Russia over Ukraine. Russia uses the Orthodox Church and the traditional dominance of the Russian language as instruments for its policy. Not only Russian historians, but also politicians and even the Russian President try to impose the imperial narrative on Ukraine. They are supported by a significant part of Ukrainians, who adhere to the ideal of a common Russia-led Orthodox East Slavic world. Other Ukrainian historians and politicians use the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian historical narrative with its national myths of liberty and of Ukraine's closeness to Europe in their struggle against the Russian hegemony. The on-going "War of memories" is of special interest. Both sides use and abuse history as a political weapon, and the controversies about the heritage of Kievan Rus', the interpretation of Mazepa, the Holodomor and WW II are not only academic, but also political issues. They reflect the struggle over the geopolitical and cultural orientation of Ukraine which is of crucial importance for the future development of the post-Soviet space and of Eastern Europe.

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The conclusion of an Association and Free-trade Agreement between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine was on the agenda of the Eastern Partnership Summit of November 28/29th 2013 in Vilnius. The Ukrainian government apparently had made his choice in favour of a strategic rapprochement of Ukraine with the EU and against its integration into the strategic and economic sphere of Russia. The outcome of this event was considered being of crucial importance for the future development of

the post-Soviet space. Although Ukraine did not fulfil all conditions for an agreement, among them the release from prison of Yulia Tymoshenko, the former Prime Minister and rival of Viktor Yanukovych in the presidential elections, both sides seemed to be ready for signing the agreement.

However, on November 21st the Ukrainian cabinet declared that it would suspend its preparations for signing the Agreement. President Yanukovych justified the decision with serious economic problems of Ukraine, which was not ready to be integrated into a common European market. Prime Minister Mykola Azarov explicitly mentioned the decreasing trade with Russia and differences of opinion between Ukraine and Russia which had to be settled immediately. For this purpose the Ukrainian government proposed three-way-negotiations between Ukraine, the EU and Russia (Malygina, 2013: 10, 12–13).

Obviously, the Ukrainian government yielded to heavy pressures from Russia which opposed the agreement of Ukraine with the EU and instead invited Ukraine to join the Russian-led Customs Union with Belarus' and Kazakhstan. The Russian government, Russian media and President Vladimir Putin himself warned of the disastrous economic consequences an Association Agreement with the EU would have for Ukraine. Since July 2013 Russia declared import restrictions on several Ukrainian goods and threatened Ukraine with a cut off of gas. In two non-official meetings of Yanukovych with Putin and in a meeting of Azarov with Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev in St. Petersburg on November 20, just one day before the unexpected declaration, the deal was settled. The Russian government promised to offer cheap gas and credits (what was officially confirmed on December 17th), and both countries agreed on a renewal of negotiations about a strategic partnership agreement. So, the Ukrainian government changed its strategic priorities in favour of Russia, at least temporarily.

The manoeuvres of the Ukrainian government and its turning away from an Association Agreement with the EU were answered by massive protests in Ukraine. Several hundred thousands of Ukrainians demonstrated in the centre of Kyiv and called for the resignation of Yanukovych and the cabinet of ministers.

Whatever the outcome of this conflict will be, the events of November and December 2013 demonstrated that Russia's policy towards Ukraine followed the traditional imperial model. Russia exerted heavy political and economic pressure also on other post-Soviet states, especially on Georgia, Moldova and Armenia. While Armenia in September 2013 withdraw his willingness to sign a preliminary Association Agreement with the EU and put its priority on the Russian-led Customs union, Georgia and Moldova signed in Vilnius the respective documents.

So, the imperial past is alive and represents an important political factor in the post-Soviet space. Russia's relationship with Ukraine is of special relevance. Ukraine is the second largest country in Europe by territory (after Russia), it has great geo-strategic and economic importance. By its history, culture and religion Ukrainians are closer connected with Russia than the other former Soviet nationalities (with the exception of the Belarusians). On the other hand Ukraine and its history are intertwined with Central Europe.

In this article I present some reflections on the significance of the imperial heritage for the Russian–Ukrainian relationship. In the beginning I give an overview of the relations between the two independent states since 1991, secondly I discuss the position of Ukraine in the tsarist and Soviet empires, thirdly I present the most important factors of the imperial legacy and their significance for Russian–Ukrainian relations, and finally I analyse the Ukrainian and Russian historical narratives, politics of history and competing memories which are important issues of the Russian–Ukrainians relations. This article has the character of an essay and does not give an exhaustive treatment of the complex problems.

1. Russian–Ukrainian relations since 1991

23 years ago Ukraine and Russia became independent states after being Soviet republics for 70 years. The separation of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic under Leonid Kravchuk and of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic under Boris Yeltsin from the Soviet Union and their common alliance against the Soviet President Gorbachev were the decisive factors for the dissolution of the Soviet state in December 1991. Moscow (the president of Russia) fought together with Kiev (the president of Ukraine) against another Moscow (the president of the Soviet Union).

However, the Russian society and the Russian politicians were shocked, when they realized that the Commonwealth of Independent States did not become, as expected, the successor of the Soviet Union, headed by Russia. They were surprised by the fact that Ukraine now was an independent state in reality and not only formally (as the former Ukrainian Soviet Republic). They were not prepared and unwilling to recognize Ukraine as an equal state and as a separate nation. On the other hand the Ukrainian government aimed at the maintenance and extension of state's sovereignty and at relations with Russia on the basis of equality (Burkovs'kyj & Haran', 2010; Smolii, 2004).

The relations between the two independent states were from the very beginning difficult. Almost all issues have their roots in the imperial past.

Among the multiple problems I mention

1. The question of Crimea, which had belonged to the Russian Soviet Republic until 1954, when Nikita Khrushchev decided that Crimea should be a part of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, though the majority of its inhabitants are ethnic Russians. This had little importance in Soviet times, but became important after 1991, when borderlines separated the independent states. The former Autonomous Soviet Republic Crimea in 1992 was renamed Republic of Crimea and is the only autonomous territory inside Ukraine. The political leaders of the republic usually support a pro-Russian policy, so recently in the conflict of late 2013.
2. The question of the Russian Black Sea fleet which is closely connected with the question of Crimea. After 1991 the Soviet Black Sea navy was divided between Russia and Ukraine and Russia had to recognize

Ukrainian sovereignty over the naval base Sevastopol. However, in 1997 Ukraine yielded the naval base to Russia on the terms of a 20-year renewable lease. After political disputes with Russia and inside Ukraine in 2010 the Russian Navy's lease of the Sevastopol base was extended through 2042. Sevastopol is an important symbol of the Russian nation, a hero-city of the Second World War and a national site of memory of the Crimean War. Many Russians, among them several politicians, have never fully accepted that Sevastopol now is part of Ukraine.

3. The question of the approximately 8 millions ethnic Russians living in Ukraine (17% of its population) and of the about 50% of Ukrainian citizens with Russian as their first language. The Russian speaking population is concentrated in the cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine. About 3 millions Ukrainians live in Russia, being the second largest ethnic minority after the Tatars. The Russian government tried to instrumentalize the ethnic Russians and the Russian-speaking Ukrainians for political purposes, while the Ukrainian government rarely mentions the Ukrainian minority in Russia.

4. The question of the regional diversity of Ukraine which reflects different histories. Roughly speaking there are four regions. 1. In the West there are the territories which belonged to the Habsburg Monarchy during the 19th century, namely Galicia with its mostly Ukrainian-Catholic population and its Polish past, Bukovyna and Subcarpathian Ukraine which have a long Romanian and Ottoman resp. Hungarian background. 2. Central Ukraine belonged for centuries to the kingdom of Poland–Lithuania, from the 16th to the 18th century it was the homeland of the Ukrainian Cossacks. It became part of the Russian empire in the middle of the 17th and in the end of the 18th centuries. 3. The steppes of Southern Ukraine north of the Black Sea were populated only since the end of the 18th century mostly by Ukrainian and Russian peasants. 4. Eastern Ukraine since the 19th century became an important centre of mining and heavy industry and attracted many Russian workers. Until today the political orientations of the population reflect the history, the ethno-linguistic composition and the geographical location of their regions.

5. The question of energy supplies (especially gas) delivered or not delivered by Russia to Ukraine and through Ukraine to Central Europe. Ukraine is dependent on gas from Russia and a significant part of Russian gas is transported through Ukraine to Central Europe. Since 2005 there were regular disputes about the price of gas and of the costs for transit and Russia used gas prices as political instrument.

6. The question of the place of Ukraine between the European Union and the NATO on the one hand and Russia and its political and economic allies on the other hand. This position reflects the history of Ukraine between Orthodox Russia and Catholic Central Europe. Official Russia harshly criticized the cooperation of Ukraine with the NATO and plans of a possible entering the NATO by Ukraine. In the presidential elections of 2004 President Putin openly supported the pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovych. As already mentioned, this problem recently was of immediate importance, when Russia exerted strong political and economic pressure on Ukraine, while the EU demanded from Ukraine political and legal reforms.

7. In general there is an obvious asymmetry in the relations between the two countries and peoples (Kappeler, 2011). Russia is a great power claiming to the heritage of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, having large resources and a relative prosperous economy. Ukraine is a second-rate power without a continuous state-tradition, having few resources and considerable economic problems. Although official Russia recognizes the independent Ukrainian state, the majority of Russians does not recognize Ukraine as an equal partner and does not consider the Ukrainians as a full and equal nation. The independent Ukrainian national state is regarded as something provisional, artificial which will hopefully reunite soon with Russia. Russia looks at Ukraine as a part of its own strategic orbit, while Ukraine has no ambitions to dominate Russia – a typical asymmetric relationship.

8. The problem is complicated by the fact that many citizens of Ukraine do share these views at least in part. The lack of a long state tradition, the belonging to states dominated by other peoples and high cultures, caused a sort of minority complex of many Ukrainians in regard to Russia. Not only parts of Ukrainians, but also many foreigners are thinking Ukraine to be a part of Russia, the Ukrainian language being a Russian dialect and Ukrainian history merging with Russian history. So, Ukraine and the Ukrainians don't have a firm place on the mental map of Europe until today.

The Russian–Ukrainian relations were especially difficult during the first years of independence until 1997, when a treaty about friendship, cooperation and partnership was concluded, and again during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko from 2005 to 2010. Since Viktor Yanukovych was elected as the new president in 2010, the tensions were reduced, though not eliminated.

2. Ukraine in the Russian and the Soviet Empire

Russia has a long imperial past (Kappeler, 2001; Smolii, 2004). The Muscovite state became an empire in the middle of the 16th century, when Ivan IV conquered the Khanate of Kazan with its polyethnic and multireligious population. In the 17th century Siberia and the Eastern part of Ukraine were added, and in the beginning of the 18th century Peter the Great declared Russia being an Empire (Rossiiskaia Imperiia), what remained the official name of the Russian state until the Russian Revolution.

At the end of the 19th century the huge territory of the Russian Empire extended from Poland in the West to the Korean border in the East, from the coast of the Arctic Sea to the oases and deserts of Central Asia and to the Caucasus in the South. Its population of 140 millions was composed of 44% ethnic Russians, 18% Ukrainians, 11% Muslims, 7% Poles, 5% Belorussians, 4% Jews and 11% other groups.

The Russian Empire was a centralized state, based on the concepts of dynasty and of ascription to an estate. It

widely applied cooperation with loyal non-Russian elites who often were coopted into the imperial nobility. Although Russian was the dominant language and Orthodoxy the state religion, language and religion were not the decisive factors for the coherence of the empire. Its elite was polyethnic and multiconfessional. Non-Russian languages and non-Orthodox confessions were tolerated, at least until the last third of the 19th century.

Among the more than 100 ethnic minorities the Ukrainians were a special case (Kappeler, 2008). They were the most numerous group after ethnic Russians with 13 percent of the total population at the beginning of the 18th century and 18 percent at the end of the 19th century. Before the middle of the 17th Century almost all Ukrainians had belonged to the Kingdom of Poland–Lithuania, by that time one of the major players in Central Europe. Since 1654, however, parts of Ukraine were under the protection of the Russian Tsar. The Ukrainian so-called Cossack Hetmanate had a wide autonomy inside Russia until the second half of the 18th century, when it was abolished. Since the end of the 18th century the vast majority of Ukrainians lived in a state dominated by Russians – the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. Only the West Ukrainians of Galicia, Bukovyna and Subcarpathia, the so-called Ruthenians, became subjects of the Austrian emperor, and their history took its own path, separated from Russia until WW II.

In the 19th century the so-called 'Little Russians' were regarded integral parts of the Russian or all-Russian community (Miller, 2003). The name 'Little Russia' initially was the normal designation of the Ukrainians and was used in a pejorative sense only since the end of the 19th century. According to the dominant Russian view the 'Little Russians' consisted mainly of peasants, speaking a strange Russian dialect and not being able to develop a high culture and statehood. Their aristocracy had been largely Russified already during the 18th century, their written language and high culture had been absorbed by the Russian culture. So, Ukrainians had a low place in the ethno-social hierarchy of the Russian Empire, much lower than the nations with their own nobility and high culture like the Poles, Finns, Baltic Germans and Georgians. On the other hand Ukrainians were not discriminated as individuals, because they were regarded as Russians. Only when a small group of the Ukrainian intelligentsia in the middle of the 19th century started developing a Ukrainian national ideology, tsarist Russia reacted with repressions and prohibited schools and publishing in the Ukrainian language. The Russian government reacted so harshly, because a defection of the Ukrainians was regarded as a danger for the Russian nation, which was imagined as an "all-Russian" East Slavic nation, consisting of Great Russians, Little Russians and White Russians.

After the Russian Revolution and during the Civil War most peripheral regions of the Russian Empire declared themselves independent states, among them the Ukrainian Peoples Republic (Yekelchyk, 2007). Until 1921, the Red Army and the new Soviet state succeeded in re-establishing its rule over the majority of the former peripheral regions, among them Ukraine, Central Asia and the South Caucasus. However, only after the Second World War the Soviet Union became again a powerful empire with a size approximately reaching the extent of the Russian Empire before 1914. With the annexation of Western Ukraine for the first time all Ukrainians were under the rule of a Russian-dominated state. The population of the late Soviet Union consisted of 51% Russians, 15% Ukrainians, almost 20% Muslims, and 14% other groups.

The Soviet state and the Communist party controlled the peripheral territories (Martin, 2001). All kinds of political movements and national emancipation were suppressed. However, the Ukrainians now were recognized as a separate nation which had its own territory, the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet republic. During the 1920s the Ukrainian language and culture were developed and many Ukrainians were coopted into the Soviet elite. So, the nationalities' policy of the early Soviet state contributed substantially to Ukrainian nation-building. However, this policy was reversed since the 1930's, Russification of Ukrainians reappeared and the Ukrainians again became subaltern subjects of a Russia-dominated centre. Many educated Ukrainians moved to Moscow and other Russian cities and numerous Ukrainian communists were coopted into the Soviet elite, especially during the Khrushchev era. Because of their numerical strength and the strategic and economic significance of their country the Ukrainians were controlled more tightly than most other Soviet nationalities. So, Ukrainians were late-comers in the emancipation process of Soviet nationalities and only in 1991 played a decisive role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

3. Factors of the imperial legacy

3.1. Russia and the post-imperial space

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, all Union Republics declared their independence. The remaining centre was reduced to the territory of the former Russian Federal Soviet Republic, whose territory corresponded roughly to the Muscovite state in the middle of the 17th century (the exceptions are the North Caucasus and the Far East, conquered only in the 19th century, and the region of Kaliningrad [Königsberg], annexed after WW II). Russia was deprived of most of the imperial peripheries and lost its status as a super-power. However, Russia is still an empire with its huge territory extending from the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea to the Pacific and with its polyethnic and multireligious population, non-Russians having a percentage of approximately 20 percent.

Many Russians and especially the political elites are suffering from the lost status as a great power. There is a wide-spread nostalgia for the tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union, even for the totalitarian Stalinist regime. These tendencies became stronger under the presidency of Vladimir Putin. So one main goal of Russia's foreign policy is keeping the regions of the former empire under its hegemony. Russia tries to control the post-Soviet space, designated as "near abroad", and to restrict the sovereignty of the former Soviet republics by interfering into their inner affairs. Russia had to recognize that the Baltic states were lost, but Central Asia, the South Caucasus, Belarus and Ukraine are regarded as parts of the Russian orbit.

Again Ukraine is the most important and disputed region. Russia fears a complete separation of Ukraine from Russia and its entrance into the European Union and the NATO. As already in tsarist Russia this is regarded as a threat for Russia's position as a great power and also a threat for the Russian nation, imagined again as an Orthodox "all-Russian" nation. So, the asymmetry of the relationship persists until today. Russia exerts considerable economic and political pressure to keep Ukraine in its imperial strategic realm and tries to prevent the integration of Ukraine to EU and NATO. As already mentioned, this problem is on today's political agenda.

3.2. The Orthodox Church

For the Russian Empire the close cooperation of the state and the Orthodox Church was an important factor of legitimation and stability. Today's Russia follows this policy and is using the Orthodox Church as an instrument of its politics of hegemony. On the other hand the aspirations of the Orthodox Church are supported by the state. In Ukraine this policy is facilitated by the fact that a majority of Ukrainian Orthodox believers declare themselves as members of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church headed by the Patriarch of Moscow. Strong minorities are the adherents of the rival Ukrainian Orthodox Church, headed by the Patriarch of Kiev (in Ukrainian Kyiv), which tries to play the role of a national church, and the Ukrainian-Catholic Church, concentrated and deeply rooted in Galicia and Subcarpathia (Vulpius 2011).

The cooperation of the state with the Russian Orthodox Church has been intensified during the presidency of Vladimir Putin. The Russian nation is imagined as an Orthodox nation, and Orthodox Ukrainians are regarded as parts of this community. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow explicitly supported the idea of "Holy Russia" and of "the Russian world", uniting Russia, Ukraine and Belarus'. In summer 2013 he celebrated in Kiev together with the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of Rus', in order to affirm the leadership of Russia in the "Russian" Orthodox world.

3.3. The hegemony of the Russian language

In the tsarist and Soviet Empires the Russian language was the dominant one, although in the Soviet Union the non-Russian languages, among them Ukrainian, were recognized theoretically as equals and the position of Ukrainian was enhanced during the 1920's. However, in practice Russian remained the dominant language and since the 1930's its position was strengthened, while the position of the Ukrainian language was weakened again. Until today the Russian language remains the common *lingua franca* of the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for the Central Asian republics and for Belarus'. Again Ukraine is a disputed battlefield.

In independent Ukraine Ukrainian is the only state language. The government advocates the use of Ukrainian in schools and bureaucracy in order to overcome the subaltern status of the Ukrainian language (Besters-Dilger, 2009). However, the Russian language keeps its strong position until today. More than half of the population of Ukraine is using Russian as its main language, although many of them are bilingual. In the cities of Eastern and Southern Ukraine Russian remains the dominant language. Only in Western Ukraine and in the countryside the Ukrainian language is deeply rooted.

Many Russians and numerous Europeans and Americans regard Ukrainian as a dialect of the Russian language. The Ukrainian culture is considered as a peasant culture with beautiful folk songs, traditional costumes and Cossack dances. The Ukrainian literature and music is not taken seriously. On the whole the "backward Ukrainians" have to be "civilized" by Russia, by its language and by its developed culture.

The Russian government often has reproached the Ukrainian government with forceful Ukrainization of Russians and the Russian-speaking Ukrainians by enforcing the use of the Ukrainian language in schools and state institutions. So, under the pretext of the protection of the rights of linguistic minorities it uses the language question as an instrument of pressure and intervention into the internal affairs of Ukraine. In reality, as already mentioned, the Russian language keeps its strong position and the Ukrainian language only slowly recovers from the russification during the imperial past. Again there is an obvious asymmetry: Most Ukrainians do not regard the Russian language and culture as inferior, and the Ukrainian government does not use the largely russified Ukrainians in Russia as a political weapon.

3.4. The heritage of the Soviet Empire

As already mentioned, the politics of nation-building during the 1920's is an important factor of the Soviet legacy (Smolii, 2004). The existence of a Ukrainian Soviet Republic and the recognition of Ukrainians as a nation were important preconditions for the independent Ukrainian state, created in 1991. On the other hand the politics of russification from the 1930's on weakened again Ukrainian nation-building. The Soviet regime fostered the myth of the "friendship of peoples" and of the family of Soviet nations, the Russians being the older, the Ukrainians the younger brothers.

Russia has declared itself the legal successor of the Soviet Union. This includes the nuclear weapons, this includes imperial ambitions and the maintenance of the hegemonic discourse. Ukraine on the other hand did not abandon fully its subaltern position in regard to Moscow, the former Soviet centre.

In Soviet times the economies of the republics had been closely intertwined, and Ukraine and the other Soviet republics were dependent on the Soviet centre. The situation did not change fundamentally after 1991. Russia remains the main trading partner of Ukraine and Ukraine is dependent on Russian gas and oil, and Russia uses this dependency as a political instrument.

In the Soviet Union Ukraine and the Ukrainians had been integrated into the Soviet state, society and economy. Many Ukrainians worked in Russia, numerous Russians migrated to Ukraine. So, there were many interethnic personal ties and networks on the level of political and

economic elites as well as between workers and employees, especially in the border areas. Russians and Ukrainians took part in the common Soviet political culture with common values and ideological traditions. This transnational heritage of the Empire has not been destroyed entirely by the new borderlines between the new nation-states. On a personal level there are hardly any antagonisms between Ukrainians and Russians, with the exception of Galicia.

4. Competing historical narratives and memories

The question of the historical heritage is the most controversial issue of the Russian–Ukrainian relations. History is one of the crucial factors of national identity and it is used in the politics of history by states and societies (Miller, 2012). Among the building blocks of the Ukrainian nation collective memory may be the most important one. Nations define themselves in delimitation from other nations, their historical narrative competes with other narratives. For the Ukrainian and for the Russian national identities the delimitation from the Russian imperial respectively the Ukrainian national narratives is crucial (Kappeler, 2011, 2012: 183–190; Kravchenko, 2011: 391–454; Plokhy, 2008; Sanders, Ed., 1999; Velychenko, 1992, 1993).

In the Russian and Soviet imperial narrative Russia and Ukraine did have not only a common history, but also a common memory. Ukraine is included into the national-imperial narrative of Russian history from medieval "Kievan Russia" until the Russian Revolution and the common victory in the "Great Patriotic War". The periods, during which Ukraine was part of other states, above all of Poland–Lithuania, are interpreted as times of national and religious oppression. They only interrupted the main stream of common history. The so-called "reunifications" of Ukraine with Russia in 1654, 1793 and 1939/44 are regarded as cornerstones of this Russian national vision. For Russian nation-building the inclusion of Ukraine and the Ukrainians was and is of crucial importance.

In the Ukrainian national narrative Ukrainian history is separated from Russian history, beginning with medieval Kievan Rus', regarded a Ukrainian state, and ending with the independent Ukrainian state, with highlights in the Cossack Hetmanate of the 17th century and the independent Ukrainian Peoples' republic of 1917–1920. According to this narrative the Ukrainian nation had to suffer under Russian rule and had to fight against Russia, until the final goal of its history, the independent nation-state, was attained.

Ukrainian national ideologues stress the fact that the majority of the Ukrainian lands belonged during more than four centuries to Poland–Lithuania and only two centuries to Russia respectively the Soviet Union. In this period, from the 14th to the 18th Centuries, Ukraine became part of the Central European space and was influenced by Western ideas, by renaissance, humanism, reformation, German municipal law and Jesuit schools. Ukrainians emphasize that the first stage of the Westernization of Russia originated in Ukraine, especially in the Kiev Academy, founded in 1632, which was the first institution of higher learning in the East-Slavic world. Graduates from the Kiev Academy became prominent Westernizers in Russia since the middle

of the 17th century and even more so during the reign of Peter the Great. One can speak of a Ukrainization of Russia in this period. According to the Ukrainian national narrative Russian and Soviet rule separated Ukraine from the common European world, and only independent Ukraine now re-establishes the traditional ties with Central Europe. This argument is used in support of the integration of Ukraine into the European Union and against closer relations with "non-European" Russia.

Although the most important Ukrainian national myth, the Cossacks, is not exclusively Ukrainian, because there were also Russian Cossacks, only the Ukrainian Cossacks in 1648 succeeded in creating their own political body. According to Ukrainian national thinking the Cossack tradition and the central European influences during Polish rule made Ukraine and the Ukrainians more European and more democratic than Russia and the Russians.

This image is contested, of course, by Russia and the Russian national ideologues looking at the Ukrainians as uncivilized Russian peasants or anarchic Cossacks who have to be ruled and civilized by Russia which brings European culture to Ukraine.

Thus, the different and competing, often incompatible, historical narratives are an important element of the imperial legacy. Russia and Ukraine conducted a "War of memories", which was accelerated by the national politics of history of the former President Yushchenko and the increasing imperial tendencies in Russian politics (Kas'ianov & Miller, 2011; Portnov, 2013).

I will mention four examples

4.1. The heritage of Kievan Rus

My first case is the issue of the heritage of medieval Kievan Rus'. This first political body in East-Slavic territory was among the leading powers in Europe at the beginning of the second millennium. Medieval history seems to be far away from contemporary politics. However, if we look at other countries, e.g. on the Balkans, it becomes evident that many of the political disputes concern medieval or even ancient history, the question of the heritage of ancient states and high cultures. Among numerous examples I mention the discussions concerning the heritage of Macedonia between Macedonians, Greeks and Bulgarians, the controversies about Transylvania between Hungarians and Romanians, the controversies between Serbs and Albanians concerning Kosovo or between Armenians and Azeris about Nagorno-Karabakh.

So, the disputes between the Ukrainian and the Russian national narratives concerning the heritage of Kievan Rus' are by no means an exception. In the history of the construction of a Ukrainian national narrative and national consciousness, this was one of the crucial issues. In the work of Mykhailo Hrushevs'ky, the father of modern Ukrainian historiography and first President of Ukraine in 1917/18, the question of the Kievan heritage is the most important founding myth of the Ukrainian nation (Plokhy, 2005). Hrushevs'ky and his work have been condemned in Soviet times and are canonized in today's Ukraine. The portrait of Hrushevs'ky is represented on the 50 hryvni note, and the portraits of the Kievan princes Volodymyr

(Vladimir in Russian) and Yaroslav on the 1, respectively the 2 hryvni-notes. In an article, published in 1904, Hrushevs'ky protested "against the usual scheme of Russian (East Slavic) history" and claimed that Kievan Rus' was an exclusively Ukrainian state, while Russia and the Russians emerged only later in the forests of the North as a mixture of Finno-Ugric and Slavic elements. The heritage of Kievan Rus' according to Hrushevs'ky was taken up by the princes of Galicia–Volhynia, then the grand Princes of Lithuania and later the Ukrainian Cossacks.

This interpretation of the heritage of Kievan Rus' is contested by almost all Russian historians and politicians, and also by the majority of historians in other countries claiming the Kievan heritage at least partially for Russia. Arguments for this view are the continuities of the ruling dynasty from Kiev to Moscow and of Orthodoxy from the baptism of Rus' in the end of the 10th century until today. The Ukrainian-Russian controversy about medieval Rus' is a-historical, projects the modern terms Russia and Ukraine into deep history. Nevertheless, the issue of the heritage of medieval Rus' is of primary importance for historians as well as for politicians.

One example, how Kievan Rus' is used in contemporary politics is a recent talk of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. He declared in September 2013 at the Valdai Forum that Kievan Rus' was the nucleus of the Russian Empire and that since then Russians and Ukrainians had a common history and culture.

"Ukraine, without a doubt, is an independent state. That is how history has unfolded. But let's not forget that today's Russian statehood has roots in the Dnieper; as we say, we have a common Dnieper baptistery. Kievan Rus' started out as the foundation of the enormous future Russian state. We have common traditions, a common mentality, a common history and a common culture. We have very similar languages. In that respect, I want to repeat again, we are one people" (http://valdaiclub.com/politics/62880.html).

An example of the contrary national-Ukrainian view is the statement of the prominent Ukrainian writer Mykola Riabchuk who stresses the significance of the exclusive Kievan heritage for a Ukrainian identity:

"We can see that the identity issue is in the core of internal and international problems Ukraine is coping with. In a sense Ukraine is coping with the consequences of a perdicious historical myth that, being internalized, heavily influenced Ukrainian identity and, being internationalized, heavily influenced the Western perception of both Ukraine and Russia. In brief, it is the myth of a thousand-year-old Russian state which in fact has neither been thousand-years old, nor Russian. Hardly any historical myth has ever made such a great international career as an indisputed historical "truth". Hardly any was so broadly and uncritically accepted in academies, multiplied in mass media, and enshrined in mass consciousness and in popular discourse as a common wisdom" (Kappeler, 2011: 421–22).

4.2. Hetman Mazepa – traitor or national hero?

My second example is the Ukrainian Cossack Hetman Mazepa who defected from Russia in 1708 in order to join King Charles XII of Sweden. During the last years there were fervent discussions about the historical role of Hetman Mazepa (Kappeler, 2009: 220–223; Kappeler, 2003: 25–27). He may be the historical figure polarizing opinions in Russia and Ukraine more than any other. In Russia, he has the reputation of the archetype of a traitor, who broke his oath to Peter the Great and fought together with Charles XII. against Russia at Poltava where they were defeated in 1709. The Russian Orthodox Church even laid an anathema on him which has not been revoked until today. Peter the Great and the battle of Poltava are prominent sites of Russian national-imperial memory, immortalized by Alexander Pushkin and Peter Tchaikovsky. In the Russian and Soviet Empires disloyal Ukrainians were qualified as 'Mazepists' and even today the term is used as a negative stereotype for Ukrainians. So, during the propaganda campaign against the conclusion of an Association Agreement of Ukraine with the EU in late 2013, the prominent Russian journalist Dmitry Kiselev reproached the Ukrainian government with "neomazepism" (http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2013/09/24/6998567).

In Ukraine, Mazepa is widely regarded as a national hero. According to this narrative Mazepa with the support of the Swedish king tried to liberate Ukraine from "the Russian yoke" in order to attain an independent Ukrainian state. Peter the Great is blamed for having violently subjugated Ukraine, an image confirmed in the writings of the national poet Taras Shevchenko.

In connection with the 300th anniversary of the battle of Poltava in 2009, the arguments over Mazepa and Poltava were charged with political meaning again (Kliewer & Hausmann, 2010). There were political disputes about a joint Russian–Ukrainian celebration of the battle in Poltava, proposed by the Russian President Putin. The proposition was declined by the Ukrainian President Yushchenko, and the celebration in Poltava took place without higher political representatives. However, the Russian victory was celebrated in the former imperial capital St. Petersburg. Yushchenko for his part advocated a joint Ukrainian-Swedish celebration of the battle and the erection of monuments of Mazepa and Charles XII in Poltava. The late Viktor Chernomyrdin, then Russian Ambassador in Ukraine, commented this idea with a provocative question drawing a parallel between Charles XII and Hitler: "What would you think if we would erect a monument for Hitler in Stalingrad?" (Kappeler, 2009: 221). After long discussions the monuments, as far as I know, have not been erected and the monument of glory and the monument to the victor Peter the Great remain the only ones in Poltava (Shebelist, 2012). This outcome shows that the discussion about Mazepa like many of the other discussions is not only one between Russian and Ukrainian historians, journalists and politicians but it takes place also inside Ukraine. There are numerous Ukrainians sharing the view of Mazepa as a traitor.

The discussions about Mazepa, Peter and Poltava inside Ukraine and between Ukraine and Russia are aggressive and express antagonistic, exclusive interpretations of the past. They were conducted not only by historians and journalists, but also by politicians, including the presidents of both countries. So again, a historical topic was politized and instrumentalized in the competition of memories.

4.3. Holodomor

My third example is Holodomor, the Ukrainian name of the terrible famine of 1932/33, man-made by the politics of Stalinist Soviet Union, which caused the deaths of more than 5 millions people, among them more than 3 millions Ukrainians. In Soviet times the famine had been taboo and was never mentioned. In post-Soviet Ukraine, especially after 2004, it was officially interpreted as a genocide directed against the Ukrainian people. Today, it represents one of the crucial elements of the historical narrative and of the national mythology uniting almost all parts of Ukraine and delegitimizing the Soviet past (Kasianov, 2010).

The interpretation of Holodomor was internationalized and became a source of tensions between Ukraine and Russia. In today's Russia the famine is recognized as a disaster, but Russian historians contend that the Holodomor was a common tragedy of all Soviet peoples and that as many of the victims of Holodomor were living in Russia. The controversy among historians about Holodomor turned into a "War of memories". Ukrainian nationalists accused Russia (instead of the Soviet Union) of the crime of Holodomor and even demanded an official excuse. Russian media attacked the Ukrainian interpretation and in 2008 the Russian President Medvedev harshly criticized in a letter to President Yushchenko "the nationalist interpretations of the mass famine of 1932/33 in the USSR, calling it a genocide of the Ukrainian people". He deplored that "these efforts are aiming at maximally dividing our nations, united by centuries of historical, cultural and spiritual links, particular feelings of friendship and mutual trust" (http://www.kremlin.ru/news/2081; http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=052421).

So, the Russian President interfered in the interpretation of the Ukrainian past and appealed to the Soviet myth of the "friendship of peoples". However, Russia may consider itself as the legal successor of the Soviet Union, but Russia is not responsible for the Stalinist crimes. On the other hand Ukrainians have to accept that Russia is not the Soviet Union and that among the perpetrators and victims of Holodomor there were Ukrainians and Russians. The common heritage as victims of the Stalinist terror would indeed have the potential for a common Russian–Ukrainian remembrance of Stalinism and a common coming to terms with the Soviet past. There are good arguments against the interpretation of Holodomor as a genocide. However, the attempt of the Russian President of imposing a hegemonic discourse on Ukraine is again an imperial message.

4.4. "Great Patriotic War" or "Ukrainian war of liberation"?

My last example is the interpretation of the Second World War. In Russia the victory in the so-called "Great Patriotic War" is the most important element of the collective memory and of national consciousness. So, official Russia as well as Russian society and Russian historians react harshly to all attempts of revisionism concerning this topic.

In Ukraine, especially in its Western part, there were activities for a re-evaluation and rehabilitation of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent army (UPA), both organizations having fought against the Soviet Union (Golczewski, 2011; Jilge, 2008). However, numerous members of these organizations collaborated with Nazi Germany, participated in the extermination of the East European Jews and committed massacres among the Polish population of Volhynia. Nevertheless, the revisionism in the interpretation of WW II was supported by the official politics of history during the presidency of Yushchenko. It culminated in the erection of numerous monuments to the UPA and in awarding the title of hero of Ukraine to Roman Shukhevych, the leader of the UPA, in 2007 and to Stepan Bandera, the leader of the OUN, in 2010. So, in Ukraine, the myth of the "Great Patriotic War" of the Soviet Union was partially substituted by the myth of a Ukrainian national liberation war against the Soviet Union.

Official Russia and the Russian media protested against this revisionist re-interpretation of the "Great Patriotic War". The expression "banderovtsy" together with "mazepintsy" was used for a negative designation of nationalist Ukrainians already during the Soviet era and is still used today. In 2009, the Russian President founded a "Commission of the Russian Federation to Counter Attempts to Falsify History to the Detriment of Russia's Interests", and to "defend Russia against … those who would deny Soviet contribution to the victory in World War II" (http://document.kremlin.ru/doc.asp?ID=052421). Obviously the activities of the commission should be directed against the re-interpretation of WW II in Ukraine and in the Baltic states.

However, the interpretation of WW II as an anti-Soviet liberation war is by far not shared by all Ukrainians. Especially in Eastern and Southern Ukraine OUN and UPA, Bandera and Shukhevych have a bad reputation and many Ukrainians remain supporters of the Soviet and Russian view of the "Great Patriotic War".

So, the divided memories over WW II show that things are not so simple. Russians and Ukrainians have not only one history and one narrative and not a single memory, but many histories, narratives and memories. The historical memory is divided not only between Russians and Ukrainians, but there are different remembrances inside of Russia and Ukraine. This is more important for Ukraine, where Russian and Soviet narratives are deeply rooted in the minds of many Ukrainian citizens, than for Russia. This concerns many Ukrainians in the Eastern and Southern parts of the country, while the national narrative supported by Ukrainians in the West and the centre fundamentally distinguishes itself from the Russian one. So the issues of the national narratives and the historical memory are disputed not only between Ukraine and Russia, but also inside Ukraine. In Russia there are also distinctions and disagreements between imperial, national and liberal memories and narratives, but to a lesser degree than in Ukraine. The national-imperial narrative seems to be shared by a majority of Russians.

5. A short summary

The legacy of the tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union is one of the crucial factors for an understanding and an

explanation of current affairs in the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for Ukraine and for Russian–Ukrainian relations. It is undeniable that Ukraine and Russia have a special relationship. They are closer entangled than other nations by the common religion (Orthodoxy), by a partially common East-Slavic culture, by long periods of a common history and parts of a common memory. Most Ukrainians over centuries were parts of the Russian Empire and the Russia-dominated Soviet Union. So, the Russian–Ukrainian relationship was and is still characterized by an obvious asymmetry, a hegemony of Russia over Ukraine.

This asymmetry is reflected in the competing discourses. Many Russians regard Ukraine as part of the Russian orbit and even of the Russian nation. Independent Ukraine tries to liberate itself from the Russian hegemony, while Russia wants to keep Ukraine in its own sphere of influence. Russia uses the Orthodox Church and the traditional dominance of the Russian language as instruments for its hegemonic policy. It is supported by a significant part of Ukrainians of Russian and of Ukrainian origin, who adhere to this view of a common Russia-led Orthodox East Slavic world. Not only Russian historians, but also politicians and even the Russian President try to impose the imperial narrative on Ukraine. Ukrainian historians and politicians use the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian historical narrative with its national myths of liberty and its closeness to Europe in their campaigns against the Russian hegemony. The on-going Russian–Ukrainian "War of memories" is of special interest. Both sides use and abuse history as a political weapon, and the controversies about the heritage of Kievan Rus', the interpretation of Mazepa, the Holodomor and WW II are not only academic, but also political issues.

So history and memory matter. It is impossible to understand and to explain what is going on in Russia and the other post-Soviet states without taking into account the imperial heritage of the tsarist Empire and of the Soviet Union and its interpretations and remembrances. The ongoing struggle over hegemony in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus between Russia on the one hand and the European Union and the NATO on the other hand, is focused on Ukraine, the second state in Europe by territory. In 2013 Russia again exerted considerable pressure on Ukraine in order to keep Ukraine in its own strategic orbit and to prevent the integration of Ukraine into the European Union. The outcome of the struggle over Ukraine will have a decisive impact on the future development of the post-Soviet space and of Eastern Europe.

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