



Language and identity in Ukraine after Euromaidan

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Abstract

Language has traditionally been an important marker of Ukrainian identity which, due to a lack of independent statehood, has been ethnic rather than civic. The contradictory policies of the Soviet regime produced a large discrepancy between ethnocultural identity and language use. In independent Ukraine this discrepancy persisted, as increased identification with the Ukrainian nation was not accompanied by a commensurate increase in the use of the Ukrainian language, even though the latter was predominantly valued as a symbol of nationhood. The Euromaidan and the subsequent Russian aggression further detached language use from national identity, as many Russian speakers came to identify strongly with the inclusive Ukrainian nation without abandoning their accustomed language or even adding Ukrainian as an active part of their communicative repertoire. The post-Maidan leadership refrained from an active promotion of Ukrainian for fear of provoking alienation among Russian speakers, but this policy exacerbates the disadvantaged position of the titular language in various domains and causes discontent among those viewing it as a crucial component of national identity.

Keywords

Euromaidan, language use, national identity, national language, Russian, Russian aggression, Ukraine, Ukrainian

This article examines a change in the relation between language and identity in Ukraine in the wake of the Euromaidan protests and the subsequent Russian intervention in the Crimea and the Donbas. Although the Ukrainian language has traditionally been an important marker of Ukrainian identity, its symbolic valorization has not been matched by its predominant use in various social domains. Since the times of its promotion by the

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tsarist and Soviet empires, Russian has been more prestigious and, for many people, more accustomed – a situation that the inconsistent language policy of the post-Soviet Ukrainian state failed radically to change. The popular uprising against the authoritarian regime of Viktor Yanukovich and especially the Russian aggression against Ukraine are widely believed to have caused an upsurge in national identification. At the same time, as public discourse implies, a stronger national identity did not lead to a commensurate increase in the use of the Ukrainian language, as many Russian speakers insist that they can be full-fledged Ukrainians and true patriots without abandoning their native language. To gain an insight into the relation between language and identity in post-Maidan Ukraine, I analyze changes in both the structure of identities and the patterns of language use as reported in nationwide mass surveys and focus group discussions in various parts of the country. In addition, I examine political discourse, public activism and social network communication for competing assessments of these changes and their impact on language processes and intergroup relations in Ukraine.

Ukrainian people, language and state

Like other peoples that did not have their ‘own’ independent statehood, Ukrainians were traditionally defined by ethnocultural commonality rather than civic belonging. As the populist intelligentsia sought in the 19th century to instill national awareness in the predominantly peasant masses, it emphasized language as the main feature distinguishing Ukrainians from the neighboring Russians and, at the same time, uniting the Ukrainian population of the Romanov and Habsburg empires. However, this awareness did not become widespread among the masses in the Russian realm until its transformation, in the wake of the First World War, from a tsarist empire into a communist one, which then managed to crush attempts by Ukrainians and other minorities at independence and thus retain most of its predecessor’s territories. It was the communist regime that gathered virtually all parts of the Ukrainian people into one polity, taught these people to think of themselves as Ukrainians and value the Ukrainian language as ‘native’, and used that language in various domains, at least to a certain extent, in the Ukrainian republic within the supposedly voluntary union of ‘brotherly’ peoples. At the same time, the increasing promotion or even imposition of Russian as the language of interethnic communication and centralized governance made it, in the last decades of the USSR, the first language of a large part of those people who designated themselves ethnically as Ukrainians, thereby undermining the established link between language and identity (Krawchenko, 1985; Martin, 2001; Kulyk, 2013a, 2014a).

Having declared its independence in 1991 in a move that crucially contributed to the disintegration of the USSR, Ukraine had to reconcile its post-imperial representation as the national state of the Ukrainian people with the imperial legacy of multiethnicity and multilingualism. While all ethnic groups were granted equal political and social rights, it was the titular majority, whose symbols, history and language were promoted as common to all citizens of the new state, which was presented as implementing the Ukrainian (ethno)nation’s right to self-determination. Moreover, the state sought to deemphasize ethnicity as a factor of social organization, in particular by discontinuing the Soviet practice of registering ethnic identification (‘nationality’) in personal

documents and refusing to recognize ethnically designated territorial autonomies (Wanner, 1998; Kulyk, 2001; Stepanenko, 2003). These policies contributed to both the popular perception of Ukrainian nationhood as encompassing all citizens regardless of their origin and the gradual embrace of Ukrainian ethnocultural symbols and values as its core content. In mass surveys, civic characteristics such as respect for Ukrainian laws, citizenship and the perception of Ukraine as one's homeland scored much higher than language, ethnic origin or religion on the list of qualities making one a fully-fledged member of Ukrainian society (Shulman, 2004). This inclusive view of the Ukrainian nation was reflected in the growing willingness of people of Russian or other minority origin to declare their identity as Ukrainians in responses to census and survey questions, whereby this identity was reinterpreted as civic rather than ethnic (Kulyk, 2010: ch. 6; 2013a). As far as the ethnocultural content of this identity was concerned, a large part of the population, particularly among the minorities, continued to view with suspicion those symbols and figures that the Soviet regime had smeared as 'nationalist'. At the same time, the young generation that was born and/or educated in independent Ukraine mostly accepted their new designation as valuable elements of national identity (Kulyk, 2014b).

Ukrainian had been proclaimed the sole state language of the Ukrainian republic already in 1989 as a counterbalance to the *de facto* status of Russian as the state language of the entire Soviet Union. However, as the latter status became invalid with the disappearance of the USSR, the exact meaning and even the appropriateness of the former came to be strongly contested. Ukrainian nationalists wanted to make Ukrainian the main language of all social domains, like the titular languages of the European nation-states. In contrast, Russian nationalists, communists and many cosmopolitan liberals advocated granting Russian the same legal status as Ukrainian, which would supposedly ensure equal rights for their speakers. (Their opponents argued that the formal equality of the two languages would instead perpetuate the inherited advantage of Russian in actual use.) Pragmatic 'centrists' supported the legal priority of Ukrainian but did not want to infringe on the use of Russian well beyond its status as one of the minority languages, a discrepancy that made the exclusive status of the titular language primarily a symbolic marker rather than a factor of communicative dominance (Arel, 1995; Kulyk, 2006, 2013b). For the first two decades of independence, this 'centrist' orientation prevailed among policy-makers, which contributed to both the continued prevalence of Russian in communicative practice and the growing perception of Ukrainian as a symbolic value for all citizens. In a 2006 survey, 71% of respondents fully or 'rather' agreed that 'the Ukrainian language is a symbol of Ukrainian statehood'; even among those using mainly Russian in their everyday life, the level of support for the statement was as high as 58%. Many fewer, however, wanted the titular language to become the main language of communicative practice: the share of those supporting its use 'more than now' constituted 42% for all respondents and only 18% for Russian speakers, most of whom thus manifested their preference for the continued prevalence of their accustomed language (Kulyk, 2013a: 23). This preference resulted in a virtually unchanged percentage of people using primarily Russian in everyday life, which remained roughly equal to the share of those usually relying on Ukrainian (a third, smaller group was comprised of people who used both languages depending on the domain or the interlocutor). Given a considerable increase in the share of citizens identifying as Ukrainians, the discrepancy

between identity and language which originated in the contradictory policies of the Soviet regime actually increased during the years of independence (Khmel'ko, 2004; Kulyk, 2014a).

Changes in identity after the Maidan and war

The Euromaidan and the subsequent Russian aggression against Ukraine brought about a dramatic change in Ukrainian identity.¹ In various media one could encounter assertions of individuals' increased self-identification as Ukrainian, greater pride in being a citizen of the Ukrainian state, stronger attachment to symbols of nationhood, enhanced solidarity with compatriots, increased readiness to fight and/or work for Ukraine, and greater confidence in the people's power to change the country for the better. Most spoke of their own experiences or those of people around them, while some generalized individual changes and asserted that a greater consolidation of the Ukrainian nation had taken place, or even the 'birth' of a nation out of people supposedly lacking in national consciousness. The reverse side of this consolidation of Ukrainianness was a sense of alienation from or even enmity towards Russia, targeted primarily at the state but sometimes also at the people, who, it was believed, overwhelmingly supported the state's aggressive policy towards Ukraine. Some argued that the consolidation of national identity primarily resulted from the war, while the readiness to contribute to democratic change originated in social mobilization against the authoritarian regime. Others believed that national transformation and consolidation had started on the Maidan itself, resulting in readiness to defend the common cause and support other people fighting for it – people who came to be perceived as Ukrainians rather than merely fellow protesters. Many authors of such statements were Russian speakers who, like most other participants in the Maidan and in the resistance to the aggression, viewed their Ukrainian identity not as linked to ethnic origin or language practice but rather as based on free choice.

My research, based on mass surveys and focus group discussions, demonstrates that recent changes in Ukrainian identity on the mass level are congruent with those asserted by activists and elites. By comparing the data of two nationwide surveys conducted in February 2012 and September 2014, I examine changes in popular views for the period encompassing the Euromaidan protests and an early stage of the war.² In order to assess different dynamics in different parts of the country, it is worth discussing changes not only for Ukraine as a whole but also for four macro-regions. Apart from the traditionally defined West and Center, I separate the Donbas and include the remaining eastern and southern oblasts in what, for want of a better name, I call the East/South. At the same, focus group discussions held in early 2015 in different parts of Ukraine reveal the motivations behind these changes.³ I focus on two main dimensions of Ukrainian national identity, namely its *salience* vis-à-vis other identities that people have, and its *content*, or the meaning people attach to their perceived belonging to the Ukrainian nation (Abdelal et al., 2007; Kulyk, 2011). My analysis shows that, on the one hand, national identity has become more salient vis-à-vis other territorial and non-territorial identities than it was before the Maidan and the war. On the other hand, the very meaning of being Ukrainian has changed, which is most vividly manifested in an increased sense

of alienation from Russia and the greater embrace of Ukrainian nationalism as a worldview and a historical narrative.

In regard to salience, both the 2012 and 2014 surveys included a question on the primary territorial identification of the respondents. In both cases national identification clearly prevailed over local, regional, post-Soviet, European and global identifications. In 2014, 61% of respondents in the nationwide sample preferred the identity of a citizen of Ukraine, in contrast to 21% who identified with their city or village and 9% with their region (other options scored lower than 5%). Moreover, between the two surveys national identification increased by a full 10% while the local one decreased by 7% and the regional remained virtually unchanged; that is, the gap between national identity and its sub- and supranational competitors widened considerably. Remarkably, national identity is the most salient not only of all territorially anchored identifications but also of any social identities, its only match being identity defined by gender. When asked which of a list of 20 words best characterized them and allowed to choose no more than three, 47% of respondents in the 2014 survey indicated 'Ukrainian', while 45% opted for 'man/woman', 28% for 'resident of my city or village', 26% for 'Orthodox', 16% for 'resident of my region', 11% for 'pensioner' and 7% for 'patriot' (other characteristics were mentioned by fewer than 5%). Although the specific meaning of the word 'Ukrainian' for a particular respondent is unclear, whether national/civic, ethnic or some combination thereof, the fact is that this self-perception is extremely salient in today's Ukraine. However, the preference for national identity is not evenly distributed across the country. As far as territorial identifications are concerned, national identity is clearly predominant in the West and Center and somewhat less prevalent, although still the most salient of all, in the East/South, but in the Donbas it is only the third most salient identity, after regional and local ones. When all kinds of identification are compared, Ukrainian identity is seen to be the most salient in the West and Center, second after gender identity in the East/South, and much weaker than the gender, regional, local and religious identifications in the Donbas. Moreover, while in the West and Center its salience increased between the two surveys, in the Donbas it significantly decreased, with a simultaneous gain in the salience of regional identification. This means that Donbas residents increasingly distinguished themselves from the rest of Ukraine, which is hardly surprising in view of the fact that in September 2014 about a half of them lived in the separatist-proclaimed 'republics', even if they did not necessarily support them (it was on the separatist-controlled territories that the identification with the Ukrainian state was particularly low).

The focus group discussions provide explanations of both why the salience of national identity has increased and why this identification remains (or has become) problematic for some people. As national identity can be related to both the nation and the state, those people who were discontented with the current policies of the state were less likely to develop or declare such identification than those who supported the authorities. Moreover, while the feeling of empowerment after the victory of the Maidan contributed to stronger national identity, the opposite feeling of powerlessness due to the severe economic crisis made it more problematic. At the same time, even some of those who bemoaned the severe economic crisis in war-stricken Ukraine argued that 'there is more patriotism, so one [should] respect one's country more, more strongly believe in changes

for the better, [believe] that it will win, that is, the war will end and the crisis will end' (Kirovohrad, 35 to 50 years, in Ukrainian). Many participants tried to reconcile their dissatisfaction with current policies and their national sentiment by declaring their preference for an identity as Ukrainians over an identity as citizens of Ukraine. For some people, a strong attachment to Russia virtually predetermined a negative attitude toward the supposedly anti-Russian protests on the Maidan and the policies of the post-Maidan authorities, but such an attitude was clearly exceptional.

As far as the content of national identity is concerned, the most obvious change has to do with attitudes toward Russia. According to respondents' declarations in September 2014, attitudes toward the Russian state had drastically deteriorated 'over the last year', meaning since before the Maidan and the war: 28% said that their attitude had worsened 'a lot' and a further 25% 'somewhat'. Once again, the change for the worse is to be found in all macro-regions but the Donbas, the latter differing sharply from the East/South. However, a negative attitude toward the state does not necessarily mean a sense of greater alienation from the people. When asked to express their opinion about the statement 'Whatever the authorities do, the Russian people will always be close to the Ukrainian one', 24% of respondents in the 2014 survey fully agreed and a further 40% 'rather agreed', while only 11% more or less firmly objected. Most participants in all focus groups stressed that their negative attitude toward the state does not extend to the Russian people, but some saw them as guilty of 'follow[ing] their leader obediently, like sheep' (Kharkiv, 20 to 35 years, in Ukrainian): that is, they are not only afraid to protest, but also prefer to believe state propaganda. At the same time, many participants doubted that the Russian people could still be considered 'brotherly' in relation to the Ukrainian people, as Soviet propaganda had taught them to believe, and some argued that other peoples, such as the Polish, Georgian or Lithuanian, were now worthier of the title of 'brothers' to the Ukrainians.

Another major aspect of the content of identity pertains to the perceptions of Ukrainian nationalism in the past and present. Although post-Soviet changes continue to be constrained by lingering Soviet stereotypes, ongoing Russian aggression facilitates the embrace of nationalist beliefs. Thus the attitude toward Stepan Bandera, a symbol of the Ukrainian nationalist resistance to Soviet and German rule during and after the Second World War, markedly improved between the surveys, even though somewhat more people still view him negatively than positively. At the same time, the attitude toward his perceived antagonist Joseph Stalin, who ultimately crushed the nationalist resistance of the Ukrainian and other peoples of the Soviet empire, further deteriorated. While in 2012 the attitude towards Bandera was roughly as negative as towards Stalin (53% of those with negative or rather negative attitude toward the former figure versus 56% for the latter), in 2014 it became much less negative (42% versus 62%). As with responses to the previous questions, it was only in the Donbas that the perception of Bandera became more critical than two years earlier, and the perception of Stalin less critical.

Although many participants in various focus groups persisted in the view that nationalism means national exclusivity or even Nazism, most argued that nationalism is nothing more than love for one's people and a desire to see one's country free. Several people clearly embraced the term as their own ideological self-designation, a stance

exemplified by the following statement: 'I am a Russian-speaking Ukrainian nationalist. This is because I believe that the state should develop based on national interests. And it is this emphasis that I view as my nationalism' (Kyiv, 20 to 35 years, in Ukrainian and Russian). Moreover, many people argued that nationalism plays an important and positive role in many societies, including those they view as models for Ukraine. Finally, widespread acceptance of Ukrainian nationalism was demonstrated in focus group responses to the question on who can be called Ukraine's national heroes: most participants referred to figures featured in the nationalist narrative of Ukrainian history rather than those favored by the Soviet propaganda. Although some of these figures, such as the poet Taras Shevchenko and the Cossack leader Bohdan Khmel'nyts'kyi, had also been praised by the Soviet regime, others were only rehabilitated after the proclamation of independence for which, according to the new interpretation, they had been devotedly fighting. The nationalist pantheon of the past was usually supplemented by contemporary heroes, particularly those who had died on the Maidan or were fighting Russian aggressors in the Donbas.

Perceptions of language roles and values

Because the perceived relation of language to identity can be viewed as one aspect of identity content, we can examine changes in this relation based on the same data as those used above with regard to other aspects. Survey responses and focus group discussions reveal that attitudes toward languages, while also somewhat contradictory, differ markedly from other changes in identity content in that they accept the continued legitimacy of a situation molded by Soviet rule. In terms of self-reported changes in attitudes 'over the last year', in the wake of the Maidan and the beginning of Russian aggression, Ukrainians felt much better about the titular language, with 30% of respondents reporting a greater or lesser change for the better and only 7% a change for the worse. Here, again, changes in the Donbas ran contrary to those in all other regions. Remarkably, the attitude toward the Ukrainian language has improved roughly as much as attitudes toward the national anthem and flag, which indicates that Ukrainian citizens perceive the state language not only in legal terms, as the language of the state apparatus, but also in symbolic terms, as a national attribute. This perception is also evident in responses to the question in the 2012 and 2014 surveys on the reasons why the Ukrainian language is important for Ukraine's citizens.⁴ Given a list of seven reasons (those that are most frequently mentioned in public discourse) and asked to indicate no more than three, around three-quarters of respondents in both surveys referred to the status of Ukrainian as the state language which, of course, could mean both the language of the state apparatus and the language of the nation. However, the time between the two surveys brought about a significant increase in the perceived importance of Ukrainian precisely as the national language, a role referred to in the formulae 'the language which constitutes the foundation of Ukraine's independence' (20% in 2012 and 27% in 2014) and 'the language that unites Ukrainian society' (14% and 23%, respectively). Finally, the perception of Ukrainian as the national language was noticeable in focus group statements that presented its apparently increased use as a manifestation of national consolidation:

Perhaps we have come to feel ourselves stronger as a nation, as Ukrainians. At least, most people have recalled that we have a nation, that we are Ukrainians. It even seems to me that we have come to speak Ukrainian more due to this. (Kirovohrad, 35 to 50 years, in Ukrainian)

In contrast, the Russian language came to be viewed somewhat more negatively, as 19% of respondents reported that their attitude toward Russian had changed for the worse to a greater or lesser extent. The change was particularly perceptible in the predominantly Ukrainian-speaking West and Center. At the same time, the bulk of the population did not change their mind about this, whatever their previous attitude. While many focus group participants mentioned their greater attachment to and/or more frequent use of Ukrainian due to the Maidan and war, nobody viewed these developments as a reason to change their attitude toward Russian, let alone abandon their accustomed use of it (primarily or in addition to Ukrainian) in their everyday life. The following exchange in predominantly Russian-speaking Kharkiv (20 to 35 years, in Ukrainian and Russian) revealed various arguments used to justify this position:

- Moderator:* Some people believe that this is now the enemy's language and, therefore, they cannot perceive it the same way as earlier. What do you think about this?
- Speaker 2:* Well, we have communicated in Russian since childhood.
- Speaker 6:* Have grown accustomed since childhood, yes.
- Speaker 4:* We do not associate it with Russia.
- Speaker 5:* It is not the language we are at war with.
- Speaker 4:* Yes.
- Speaker 1:* In any case, both our Ukrainian language and the Russian language is primarily a means of communication.
- Speaker 4:* Yes.
- Speaker 1:* And whether we like it, love it, scold it, it's [not that important].
- Speaker 4:* It is convenient for us to speak [Russian], that is all.
- Speaker 8:* We cannot all instantly switch to Ukrainian.

While the view of Ukrainian as purely a means of communication may be at odds with the above findings on its symbolic valorization, the emphasis on the communicative role of Russian is congruent with responses to the question on the reasons for the importance of that language. In both surveys, the role of Russian most frequently cited was 'a language almost everybody in Ukraine understands', with its international function as 'the language of communication among citizens of the [post-Soviet] countries' being a distant second (in 2014, the former role was selected by 59% of respondents and the latter by 34%). One role that many respondents found appropriate, 'the language of the majority of people in the eastern oblasts' (31%), implied a relation between the language and the identity of its speakers – but this identity was regional, rather than national, while the nationwide role of 'a language traditionally spoken in Ukraine' turned out to be much less appreciated (15%). Moreover, in the time between the two surveys the perceived regional anchoring of Russian grew considerably stronger, while its perception as part of a national tradition became much weaker, meaning that its nationwide legitimacy is now predominantly based on its communicative function.

In any case, for most people a stronger Ukrainian identity does not mean a worse attitude toward the Russian language; that is, speaking and/or liking that language has not become generally perceived as incompatible with being Ukrainian, even among those who speak mainly Ukrainian themselves. Such an attitude indicates the ethno-cultural inclusiveness of the new Ukrainian identity born in the crucible of the Maidan and war. However, the inclusion of and respect for *people* speaking different languages do not amount to a recognition of equal legitimacy of the languages themselves; in other words, Ukraine is not perceived as a nation with two languages. While Russian is respected as the language of a large part of the population and recognized as an accustomed communicative means within the country and beyond, Ukrainian is valued not only for its communicative functions but also for its symbolic role as the national language. Accordingly, it is Ukrainian that people want the state primarily to promote: in the 2014 survey, such was the opinion of fully 56% of respondents, while only 5% opted for the promotion of Russian. 17% preferred the promotion of all languages equally and a further 14% wanted the state in each part of the country to promote the language of the respective majority. State support first and foremost for Ukrainian turned out to be the most popular option in all macro-regions but the Donbas, where most people wanted the state primarily to support the local majority language. In contrast to the Donbasites' preference for the preservation of the linguistic status quo, residents of the East/South are willing to let the state gradually make the symbolically important national language the main language of communicative practice.

The popular view of a special role of the Ukrainian language in society has also been evident in public opinion on the appropriate statuses of the two widespread languages, an issue that has been a subject of public controversy for the entire period of independence (Kulyk, 2009, 2013b). Immediately after the victory of the Euromaidan, this issue once again became the focus of public discussion due to an attempt by parliamentary factions supporting the preferential treatment of Ukrainian to revoke a 2012 law that had elevated the legal status of Russian (together with a number of other minority languages). Although the move was blocked by the then acting president in order to prevent the use of allegations of discrimination against Russian to escalate the language conflict, it was nevertheless used by Russia as an excuse for the annexation of the Crimea and the separatist fight in the Donbas. Increased awareness of the conflictual potential of the language issue resulted in widespread support, on the one hand, for the status of Ukrainian as the sole state language and, on the other, for the retention of the official status of Russian on territories of its wide currency, which was seen as a sign of recognition of the social legitimacy of its speakers (Kulyk, 2014c; Nedashkivska, 2015). Accordingly, the long-term numerical balance between supporters and opponents of the status of Russian as a state language on an equal footing with Ukrainian was broken, as a majority of Ukrainian citizens came to support the exclusive status of Ukrainian as the state language with provision for the local official use of Russian (and other major languages) in those regions where it is widely spoken. For example, in a KIIS survey of February 2015 this middle-ground arrangement was supported by 52% of respondents, with only 19% insisting on the status of Russian as a second state language (down from 27% two years earlier) and 21% preferring that Russian be removed from official use altogether (Pyrohova, 2015).

State policy and public discourse

In the months following the victory of the Maidan and the beginning of the Russian aggression, the new Ukrainian leadership repeatedly assured the population that they would infringe neither the status of Ukrainian as the sole state language nor the right freely to use Russian and other minority languages on territories of their wide currency (e.g. Iatseniuk khoche, 2014; Ukraïns'ka maie, 2014). As far as the former aspect was concerned, the current exclusive status was to be retained in a new constitution which was primarily intended to decentralize the government but could not avoid having an article on languages. The status of Russian and other languages could be determined either in the same article of the Constitution or in a detailed law on languages, with the Constitution merely proclaiming an unspecified right to use minority languages. The latter version would be easier to implement, as it would only require a simple majority of parliamentary votes, rather than a qualified one. When the move to annul the 2012 law was vetoed, it was announced that a new law would soon be drafted by a working group and then adopted by the parliament as a replacement of the inadequate act of the Yanukovich regime ('Movnyi' zakon, 2014). The working group did not produce a draft, however, nor was a new group established to do the job, which was soon all but forgotten by major policy-makers. Moreover, the constitutional process halted in 2015 due to irreconcilable differences between major parties' views on how to combine decentralization of the entire country with the special status of the Donbas that would help return it to Ukrainian control. Although a group of deputies supportive of the primary use of Ukrainian appealed to the Constitutional Court to annul the 2012 law, which had arguably been adopted with flagrant violation of parliamentary procedure, the judges decided not to return any verdict, arguing that the parliament and the president should find a solution themselves (Konstytutsiyni sud, 2015). As a result, both the article of the Constitution which mandates Ukrainian as the sole state language and the 2012 language law recognizing the regional status of Russian and several other languages on certain territories are there to stay, a fact that key players in Ukrainian post-Maidan politics have tacitly accepted. Within months of the new leaders' ascent to power in the wake of Yanukovich's demise, language matters lost the prominent place that they had occupied in their legislative initiatives and public statements.

Apart from confirming the formal status of Russian as a regional language in the East and South, the preservation of the 2012 law meant the continued validity of its provisions on the unrestricted freedom of language choice in various non-state practices, which primarily benefited Russian as a language most often preferred by the market. Most conspicuously, the 2012 law abolished earlier regulations on the minimum share of the state language in broadcasting, thereby paving the way for its gradual replacement with Russian, which most producers considered more profitable. Not only could products in that language be bought and sold on both the Ukrainian and Russian markets, but also within Ukraine they had the advantage of being preferred by the more affluent urban audiences and, therefore, by advertisers catering primarily to these audiences. In fact, the substantial presence of media products made in Russia (or made in Ukraine for both the Ukrainian and the Russian markets) meant not only the dominance of the Russian language, but also the dominance of an ideology positing, at best, an inherent commonality

of the two peoples and, at worst, denying the existence of a separate Ukrainian people. While such products occasionally provoked public scandals, forcing the managers of the respective outlets to apologize and make some changes in programming, most continued their routine ideological work unopposed (Kulyk, 2010: chs. 4, 7; 2013c).

In the wake of Russia's intervention in the Crimea and Donbas, when many Ukrainians came to view the Russian state or even the Russian people as an enemy, it was the overtly ideological part of such content that became the first target of popular indignation and, therefore, punitive action by the authorities. A practice that had been acceptable or at least bearable in peaceful times came to be seen as outrageous with the advent of war, all the more so because very soon it became clear that propaganda was an integral part of warfare. Through Facebook posts, petitions and street protests, numerous activists resolutely demanded that the producers and/or the state put an end to the dissemination of products containing misinformation about Ukrainians, or fomenting hatred or a pretense of 'brotherly' love toward them. Just a few weeks after the annexation of Crimea, the court suspended broadcasting by four Russian television channels for flagrantly distorting the situation in Ukraine in their programming, a measure that was later transformed into a complete ban and expanded to dozens of other channels from the country which was officially recognized as an aggressor (Sud rozporiadyvsiya, 2014; Ukraïna zaboronyla, 2014).

At the same time, pressure mounted to ban such Russian or Russian-oriented products broadcast on Ukrainian channels as movies, series and songs that glorified present or past deeds of the Russian military or police, and other manifestations of the enemy's aggressive might. No less resented were products featuring actors or singers who supported Russia's policy with regard to the Crimea and Donbas, either in public statements or by performing in the occupied territories. As most producers did not want to give up profitable content, the authorities at first banned certain conspicuous categories of such offending material, and then all movies and series that were produced in post-Soviet Russia or presented its military or security forces in a positive light (Naboka, 2014; Rada zaboronyla, 2015).

Finally, the heavy presence even of apparently non-ideological Russian series, shows and songs came under attack as a substitution, supposedly dangerous for national identity and security, of foreign products for national content. Because of strong public pressure and, more importantly, the drastic shrinkage of the market for advertising at a time of economic crisis, television channels reduced considerably their purchase of Russian products, although they still could not imagine giving up this popular content altogether (Mandryk, 2015; Rukovoditel' 'Intera', 2015). The obvious marginalization of Ukrainian songs on most radio stations seemed to be impossible to overcome without interference by the state, so the Ministry of Culture initiated in 2015 a law introducing a 50% quota of national content, of which three-quarters was to be in Ukrainian. Although many media professionals, politicians and intellectuals argued that such interference was unacceptable in a democratic state and there was not enough quality Ukrainian (-language) music of various genres to fill the proposed quota, the law was supported by a majority of deputies and duly signed by the president in the summer of 2016 (Marchenko, 2015; Bahalika and Stukanov, 2016; Poroshenko pidpysav, 2016).

It remains to be seen whether further moves are made in the near future to promote the use of Ukrainian in various domains.

While Russian and Russian-oriented media products were increasingly seen as incompatible with the new Ukrainian identity, few people held similar views concerning all or most products using the Russian language. Post-Maidan political and public leaders were keenly aware of the divisive potential of public statements emphasizing the special position of the titular language in Ukrainian society, let alone of policy measures intended to secure that position by curtailing the use of Russian and other languages. Both the preference for an inclusive democratic Ukraine and the recognition of the crucial contribution of Russian speakers to the country's transformation and defence led many speakers and supporters of Ukrainian to refrain from raising the issue of the heavy or even predominant use of Russian in those domains where they would like to see primarily Ukrainian. For their part, many Russian speakers interpreted post-Maidan inclusivity as confirmation of their right to use their preferred language in all domains without much regard for the law or the sentiments of those for whom the Maidan had meant a struggle not only for democracy, but also for the nation and national language. As a result, Russian could frequently be heard even in government meetings and in the public speeches of high-ranking officials, some of whom (including several newly naturalized foreigners) simply had not mastered the formally required Ukrainian, a fact that did not prevent them from assuming those posts (Kulyk, 2014c). At the same time, the focus on the ideological message of media products somewhat diverted attention from their linguistic medium, so that the continued or even increased predominance of Russian on most television and radio stations did not evoke much protest in the first months of the war.

After a while, however, champions of Ukrainian started protesting against the perceived disregard for the state language in various domains. In 2014 a Lviv activist who had long fought for his language rights won a court case against the state migration service which had refused to issue him a passport in Ukrainian only, without the Russian translation that the service continued to include even though this was no longer mandated by law. The following year, the same activist sued interior minister Arsen Avakov, demanding at least a Ukrainian translation of the public speeches that Avakov always made in Russian, in obvious violation of the law (Lipich, 2016). Although the minister at first scorned the demand as unwarranted, upon losing the case he started occasionally using Ukrainian in public speeches and on his very popular Facebook page. At the same time, a Kyivan writer won a battle with her son's school to allow him to learn another foreign language instead of Russian, which she considered both useless and ideologically inappropriate at a time of war with Russia (Eminova, 2015). Such protests were publicized in social networks and some of the more traditional media, but most mainstream outlets ignored this divisive topic. No more appealing to them were surveys of the language situation in Ukrainian society which showed the shrinking use of the titular language in some important domains, particularly the media, with the share of Ukrainian-language products being as low as 10% for journals and 5% for songs on radio stations (V Ukraïni, 2015). Although handfuls of activists attended street protests against what they viewed as a new Russification of Ukraine, even for activist Ukrainians ready to raise their voices against perceived injustice this seemed to be a rather marginal issue.

Social networks have been the main forum for expressing concerns about the limited use of the Ukrainian language and discussing its relation to national identity. Having lately become the primary site for the articulation and discussion of beliefs by both elites and masses, social networks give the user (and, by the same token, the researcher) an unparalleled opportunity to hear a great variety of voices, even if these are unavoidably filtered by the choice of friends, groups and pages to be followed. Discussions on sensitive topics are often spoiled by paid trolls, the Russian government in particular being known to employ them in its information war against Ukraine and the West (Nimmo, 2015). At the same time, most participants seem frankly, albeit often impolitely, to express their views and react to those articulated by others. Even in my Facebook newsfeed, filtered in accordance with my long-term interest in language, these matters do not belong to the most popular topics, which reflects their low priority among Ukrainian users in general and their intellectual and activist segments in particular.

Of the posts of the two post-Maidan years that did deal with language, most seemed to be concerned, on the one hand, with the perceived marginalization of Ukrainian and, on the other, with alleged infringements on the right to use Russian. While champions of Ukrainian complained about the dominance of Russian and often pointed to the example of its use by many popular users of Facebook and its post-Soviet alternatives, many of those who relied primarily on Russian resented any intrusion into their private lives where, they argued, they should be able to choose whichever language they liked. The former overlooked the fact that private practices such as communication in social networks cannot be subject to the same legal regulations or even moral pressures as public ones, where the state language is usually required or expected; the latter did not realize how sensitive the matter was and how apparently harmless individual choices could contribute to dangerous social processes. Both parties referred to the Maidan and the war and thus to the new Ukrainian identity born in these trials: the supporters of Ukrainian could not bear the dominance of Russian in a Ukraine fighting for its independence from Russia; the defenders of Russian considered it unacceptable that in democratic Ukraine one could be ostracized for speaking one's native language. The latter believed that the Russian speakers' significant contribution to the democratic revolution and defence of Ukraine entitled them to the free use of their language; the former retorted that good deeds cannot justify bad ones, and still less could good deeds of some members of a group justify the bad deeds of others.

Most of the discussions provoked by the articulation of such beliefs did not seem to lead to any changes in the participants' views of the matter. This made discussions on this and other divisive topics notorious as futile exercises, a reputation that did not, however, prevent them from occurring again and again. Yet some popular users did announce that they would change their usual language of Facebook communication from Russian to Ukrainian as a result of online and offline discussions that allegedly had helped them recognize the vulnerable position of the national language. While such announcements were welcomed by many readers who left comments or 'liked' the relevant posts, most Russian speakers seemed to adhere to their accustomed language, thereby manifesting their belief in its full compatibility with Ukrainian identity.

Conclusion

The Euromaidan and Russian aggression led, on the one hand, to a greater salience of national identity vis-à-vis other territorial and non-territorial identifications and, on the other, to a change in the meaning of belonging to the Ukrainian nation, most vividly manifested in increased alienation from Russia and a greater embrace of Ukrainian nationalism as a worldview and an historical narrative. Although by no means uniformly distributed across the country, this dramatic change encompassed the bulk of Ukrainian territory, with the notable exception of the war-stricken Donbas. One of the changes in the content of national identity involved greater appreciation of Ukrainian as the national language, alongside other attributes of nationhood such as the anthem and flag. However, this symbolic appreciation was not accompanied by any large-scale transition to the use of Ukrainian in everyday life or even the addition of it as an active part of the communicative repertoire. Most Russian speakers saw no reason to switch to the titular language, since they viewed their belonging to the Ukrainian nation as based on free choice rather than any ethnocultural characteristics. While seemingly appropriate for the inclusive democratic society that today's Ukraine aspires to be, the uninhibited use of the former imperial language preserves its inherited advantage and thus contributes to the marginalization of the national language which most members of the nation would want to be widely used and actively promoted by the state. Fearful of alienating Russian speakers, the post-Maidan leadership mostly refrained from such promotion, but this laissez-faire approach exacerbated the disadvantaged position of Ukrainian in various domains, thus causing discontent among those who view it as a crucial element of national identity.

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Notes

1. This section is based on Kulyk (2016).
2. Two nationwide representative surveys were conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) in February 2012 (2029 respondents) and September 2014 (2035 respondents). Since the 2014 survey did not include Crimea, which had been annexed by Russia earlier that year, Crimean respondents had to be excluded from the 2012 data as well in order to make the responses comparable. Although by September 2014 the Donbas was affected by an intense military conflict in which Ukrainian troops fought separatist and Russian forces, the survey encompassed both Ukrainian- and separatist-controlled territories.
3. Eight focus group discussions were conducted by the KIIS in February and March 2015 in different parts of Ukraine: in the capital, Kyiv; the eastern metropolis, Kharkiv; and two medium-sized provincial capitals, namely Kirovohrad in the centre of the country and Chernivtsi in the south-west. In each city, one group included people aged 20 to 35 who had

participated in the Maidan or supported it, while the other included people aged 35 to 50 who reported a negative or 'rather negative' attitude toward the Maidan.

4. For a discussion of 2012 responses see Kulyk (2013a).

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