



The Aims and Means of Russian Influence Abroad Series

A Ghost in the Mirror: Russian Soft Power in Ukraine

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Summary points

- For Russia, maintaining influence over Ukraine is more than a foreign policy priority; it is an existential imperative. Many in Russia's political elite perceive Ukraine as part of their country's own identity.
- Russia's socio-economic model limits its capacity to act as a pole of attraction for Ukraine. As a result, Russia relies on its national myths to devise narratives and projects intended to bind Ukraine in a 'common future' with Russia and other post-Soviet states.
- These narratives are translated into influence in Ukraine through channels such as the Russian Orthodox Church, the mass media, formal and informal business networks, and non-governmental organizations.
- Russia also achieves influence in Ukraine by mobilizing constituencies around politically sensitive issues such as language policy and shared cultural and historical legacies. This depends heavily on symbolic resources and a deep but often clumsy engagement in local identity politics.
- Russia's soft power project with regard to Ukraine emphasizes cultural and linguistic boundaries over civic identities, which is ultimately a burden for both countries.

Introduction

Like any state, Russia would not invest significant effort into projecting power over another state were it not guided by a firm conviction that it had significant interests at stake. Russia's policy towards Ukraine is no exception. Russian interests in Ukraine are manifold, and they are all significant. In an overarching sense, they are also unique. Russia sees Ukraine as part of its own identity. The defining objective of Ukraine since the collapse of the Soviet Union to adopt a truly independent course from Russia and 'return to European civilization' can thus be seen as a threat to Russia's conception of itself. Should such a course come to fruition, it would have profound implications for Russia's internal development and its position in the world. This was reflected in 2009 when Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared that 'for Russia, Ukrainians since the dawn of time have been and remain not only neighbours, but a brotherly people'. Therefore he regarded it as an obligation on Ukraine's part to maintain 'tight economic cooperation' and 'solidly kindred, humanitarian ties' with Russia.¹

In more practical terms, Russia has not managed to construct a single coherent conception of how to bring its interests to bear on the reality that Russia and Ukraine are now two sovereign states. Russia's political elite has no wish to restore the USSR, and it clearly understands that this would be impossible, but there still is no agreement about what should replace it. This reflects the interplay of interests and forces not only in former Soviet republics, but in Russia itself. With respect to Ukraine, three lines of thought can be identified in Russia's approach, each of them invoking hard and soft dimensions of power: the debate over collective values, the competition for economic assets and the competition between political forces.

These debates express not only interests but sentiments. For these reasons, they are advanced not only by various forms of power but through distinctive modes of discourse. The interplay between interest and power, sentiment and discourse in relations between Russia and Ukraine is the subject of this paper.

The singularity of Russian–Ukrainian relations

According to Joseph Nye, 'some countries may be attracted to others with hard power by the myth of invincibility or inevitability', but a country that 'suffers economic decline' is likely to lose soft- as well as hard-power resources.² This paper argues that the capacity of a nation to project soft power depends in part on its perceptions by others as an expanding political or economic force. A country cannot project soft power over time unless it has a strong conception of itself and its future. The stronger and more universally accepted this conception, the greater the soft power it projects. The EU's soft power lies in the attractiveness of its way of life. But it also lies in its capacity to expand and therefore offer the perspective of this way of life to other nations. Thanks to events in recent years, the EU's soft power potential has diminished in Ukraine and further to the east. The source of American soft power lies not only in the strength of its democratic institutions but in its commitment to support democracy worldwide. The universalist concept of democracy remains essentially an American one. Yet the relative decline of US power and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have weakened the country's universalist impulse and diminished the legitimacy of American influence abroad.

This international context has a powerful, if often indirect, bearing on Ukraine's ability to give substance to its own national myths. As a newly independent state, Ukraine has relied on three key myths of the future: the ethno-national one – a state that embodies the historical aspirations of the Ukrainian people; the liberal-democratic one – a state that protects the liberty of all citizens, irrespective of nationality; and the European one – a state that is an inalienable part of European civilization. For a large part of the Ukrainian political spectrum, these ideas are complementary. They point to one of two political destinations – European or Euro-Atlantic integration – and for many they point to both.

For its part, Russia has relied on its own national myths to devise narratives and projects designed to link Ukraine's future with the 'common' future of other post-Soviet countries, particularly the East Slavic ones. The most recent of

¹ 'Poslanie Prezidentu Ukrainy Viktoru Yushchenko' [Message to President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko], 11 August 2009, <http://kremlin.ru/news/5158>.

² Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs: 2004).

these is technocratic, inspired by the renewed discourse of ‘modernization’: a trademark theme of President Dmitry Medvedev,³ associated with government-sponsored high-tech projects such as Russia’s projected ‘Silicon Valley’ at Skolkovo. Such projects complement the technocratic self-image of the current Ukrainian government under President Viktor Yanukovich, which is oblivious to the criticism that no modernization is possible without a transformation of the socio-political order in Ukraine and Russia. ‘Modernization’ has refurbished the Russian theory that Ukraine’s present is Russia’s past, and the governing elite in Kyiv appears to have adopted it. As a case in point, government experts are now expected to enter a paragraph on relevant ‘Russian experience’ while writing policy papers. The current administrative reform attempted by Yanukovich’s government has been modelled on the Russian administrative reform of 2003 despite the fact that the latter failed to meet its goals. A key element borrowed from these Russian reforms is the quadripartite structure of the executive (ministries, agencies, services and inspections).

The fact remains that Russia’s socio-economic model limits the country’s capacity to act as a pole of attraction for its neighbours. Soft power is typically based on projections of shared future prosperity and success. In Russia’s case, however, its soft power is strongly associated with discourses of a shared *past* and with the common values, culture and history that arise from it.

From this political perspective, Russia sees ‘Ukrainian nationalism’ as an existential threat. Evidence that Russian policy-makers perceive (non-Russian) nationalism as an extremist ideology is abundant. The 2009 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 contains four references to ‘nationalism’, and in each case ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationalist dispositions’ are equated with threats to the security of the Russian Federation. In late 2010, the Department for Combating Extremism of the Russian Ministry of Interior closed the Ukrainian Library in Moscow, so that books containing the word ‘nationalism’ could be examined by ‘experts’ for harmful content.⁴

Since Vladimir Putin came to power, Russia has developed a form of state nationalism incorporating neo-imperial discourses such as neo-Eurasianism and the concept of the ‘Russian World’ (*Russkii Mir*), whose boundaries are assumed to correspond, at the minimum, to the borders of the core territories of the Russian empire. Of late, a more aggressive, grass-roots nativist nationalism has risen to challenge the older imperial one. Yet the contrast between the two – which has direct implications for Muslims in Russia and the ‘near abroad’ – has far less significance for ‘brother Slavs’.

‘Although relations between Russians and Ukrainians may be closer and more amicable than between Russians and Georgians or Russians and Poles, the myths of the Russian and Ukrainian *nations* are far more deeply opposed’

Ukrainian and Russian national myths can be at cross-purposes even when they embody unassailable truths. Although relations between Russians and Ukrainians may be closer and more amicable than between Russians and Georgians or Russians and Poles, the myths of the Russian and Ukrainian *nations* are far more deeply opposed. This is because the very idea of a Ukrainian nation separate from the great Russian nation challenges core beliefs about Russia’s origin and identity. Ukraine hosts the most valuable symbols constituting the core of Russia’s national identity – the mythological birthplace of the Russian nation and the cradle of the Russian Orthodox Church along with its holiest places. It is the control of Kyiv that

³ Dmitry Medvedev, ‘Rossiya, vperiod!’ [Russia Forward!], *Gazeta.ru*, 10 September 2009, http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2009/09/10_a_3258568.shtml.

⁴ Aleksandr Artem’ev, ‘Biblioteku zakryli “chuzhi lyude” [sic]. Biblioteka ukrainskoi literatury zakryta posle obyska po delu ob ekstremizme’ [‘Outsiders’ closed the library. The library of Ukrainian literature has been closed after a search on suspicion of extremism], *Gazeta.ru*, 27 December 2010, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2010/12/27_a_3478978.shtml.

helped solidify Russia's claim to imperial status. In time, these myths of common national origin were complemented by the myth that Russian language and culture are a legacy shared by all Eastern Slavs, and the myth of the perpetual incremental growth of the Russian state, otherwise known as 'the gathering of Russian lands'.

These predispositions were refurbished when the monarchy set out to reconstitute Russia as a nation-state in the 19th century. In the aftermath of the Polish Rebellion of 1863, the ideology of the tripartite Russian people became the basis of official government policy.⁵ This ideology proved to be so effective that it outlasted the monarchy and carried on with variations through the Soviet period.

From this perspective, the collective goods that bring the majority of Ukrainians together as a nation (e.g. Taras Shevchenko's legacy, Ukrainian language, and the Ukrainian 'national idea' of the last two centuries) appear to be meaningless, second-rate or blasphemous to a large number of Russians. Generations of Russian intellectuals⁶ have turned belittling of the Ukrainian language and culture into a part of the Russian belief system alongside anti-Tatar and anti-Muslim stereotypes. But whereas the latter are built around national differences, what makes Ukraine stand out in this list is a dismissive attitude to any assertion that national differences exist.

This coexistence between friendship for a 'kindred *people*' and hostility to the Ukrainian *nation* is what gives relations between Ukraine and Russia their distinctive quality. More than 18 years after Russia officially recognized Ukraine as an independent state, Putin underscored the point when he quoted the words of General Anton Denikin, who referred to Ukraine as 'Russia Minor'⁷ and said that attempts to separate Ukraine from Russia were a 'crime'.⁸

Russia, Ukraine and Europe

Together, Europe and the West, both as normative constructs and as competing sources of influence and attraction, play an important role in the dynamics of Ukraine's relations with Russia. From the time of Mikhail Gorbachev, Russia has steered a course towards qualified reintegration with the West. While the discourse of common values espoused during Boris Yeltsin's presidency has gone, and Moscow has adopted a far more confrontational posture, the current elite continues to identify with the West.⁹ As a prominent centrist politician, Konstantin Kosachev, Chairman of the State Duma Commission on Foreign Affairs, said in 2010:

Having proved that Russia, while being one of the geopolitical 'power centres' of the modern world, does not constitute an ideological pole of it, we may reach a principled, different form of interaction with the West, putting the final dot on the Cold War and finally formulate the political conclusion of the 20th century.¹⁰

The possibility that Ukraine could pre-empt Russia in joining the West is anathema to the Russian leadership. Ukraine's accession to NATO or the EU would mean the breaking of an established historical sequence whereby Ukraine has always been second to Russia. The tone of commentary in Russia on the New START Treaty with the United States was quite revealing in terms of the importance attached to the issues of status in international relations compared with those of substance. By the same token, Ukraine's putative accession to NATO has been less of a threat to Russia's security than to its status. Indeed, the 2009 National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation to 2020 does not cite NATO as a security threat but, paradoxically, presents Ukraine's and Georgia's membership in

5 Andreas Kappeler, 'Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukraintsy v Etnicheskoi Ierarkhii Rossiiskoi Imperii' [Mazepintsy, Malorossy, Khokhly: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire], in B. N. Floria, A. I. Miller, *Rossia—Ukraina: Istoriia Vzaimootnoshenii* [Russia Ukraine: A History of Bilateral Relations (Moscow: Iazyki Russkoi Kultury [Languages of Russian Culture], 2001).

6 See, for example, Vissarion Belinsky's review of Nikolai Markevich's 'Istoriia Malorossii' (History of Russia Minor); Vladimir Nabokov's essays on Nikolai Gogol; or Joseph Brodsky's poem 'Na niezavisimost' Ukrainy' ('On Ukraine's Independence').

7 'Malorossia' or 'Malaya Rus', an obsolete historical geographic name for Ukraine's core lands that was used officially in the title of the Russian emperors.

8 'Putin vychital, chto Rossiya sama razberetsya s Malorossiyei' [Putin warns that Russia will deal with Little Russia itself], *Ukrainskaya Pravda*, 24 May 2009, <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2009/05/24/4486483>.

9 Dmitri Trenin, *Integration and Identity: Russia as the 'New West'* (Moscow: Europe Publishing House, 2006), p. 472.

10 Konstantin Kosachev, 'Values for the Sake of Unification', *Russia in Global Affairs*, 9 April 2010, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Values_for_the_Sake_of_Unification-14790.

these terms. Similarly, the 2010 Russian military doctrine cites NATO enlargement as well as the movement of military infrastructure closer to Russia as the first of eleven ‘main military dangers’, while NATO as such is presented as a partner with which it is worth ‘developing relations’.¹¹

The issue is not confined to status. Ukraine’s WTO accession process was seriously hindered and prolonged by interference that came in several forms: the Russian mass media, political agents such as the Communist Party of Ukraine and direct pressure upon the Ukrainian leadership (including the threat to impose new import duties).¹² Even greater pressure has been applied since Ukraine entered the final phase of its negotiations on an Association Agreement and Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area with the EU. On a number of official visits to Ukraine Putin aggressively called for its accession to the Customs Union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus, and so did a host of Russian-sponsored media.¹³

Russian political culture so resists the idea that Ukraine might wish to go it alone that a school of thought has arisen in Moscow which maintains that the real aim of Ukraine is to resurrect Kyiv as the capital of the Eastern Slavs. In other words, Ukraine is struggling for primacy just as Russia is! This thesis emerged at a time when Russian society was trying to come to grips with the challenges presented by the Orange Revolution. Recently, it was resurrected by the Russian Consul in Lviv, Evgenii Guzeev:

Maybe, after some time, – perhaps, in a century – the centre will come back again here, and Kyiv will again be the centre

of our culture. Now no one can know it. The main thing is to preserve our single civilizational space, the Orthodox Church space, the single Russian world.¹⁴

The salience of the concept of ‘centre’ in relation to the value-charged concept of ‘civilization’ points to a frame that is very characteristic for the modern Russian political discourse: ‘civilization’ stands for whatever positive could once be said of ‘empire’. The Russian ambassador to Ukraine, Mikhail Zurabov, has stated that ‘Ukrainians and Russians are a single nation’.¹⁵ Such comments present a marked contrast to the declared priorities of the Ukrainian leadership, which strongly sets its sights on an economic relationship with the EU. But whatever its priorities and aspirations, the leadership is constrained by its dependency on Russia, which is as much intellectual as material. The political imagination of the nation remains parochial rather than global, and its political class is not integrated with the wider political elite of Europe.

The current Ukrainian administration has sought to resolve this contradiction between European aspirations and dependency on Russia through metaphors such as forming a ‘bridge’ between the EU and Russia. While the Ukrainian versions of texts suggest that Ukraine could be integrating with the EU while serving as a bridge to Russia, there are Russians who propose that it might be the other way round: that by integrating with Russia, Ukraine could serve as Russia’s bridge to the EU.¹⁶ In another variant, Ukraine’s ‘Finlandization’ is proposed. Its proponents argue that Finland’s traditional neutrality and conciliatory policies towards Russia provided economic benefits and helped to preserve its sovereignty.¹⁷ Yet

11 *Voyennaya doktrina Rossiiskoi Federatsii* [The 2010 Military Doctrine of the Russia Federation], The Office of the Russian President, 5 February 2010, http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461.

12 ‘Ukraina vyryshyla pogovoryty z Rosieiu pro SOT. Rosia vazhaie prychynoi svii flot’ [Ukraine decided to talk to Russia about the WTO. Russia considers the rationale for its fleet], 22 May 2008, <http://www.newsr.u.ua/finance/22may2008/vto.html>.

13 Winfried Shneider-Deters, “Rossiiskii faktor” v nemetskoj politike otnositel’no Ukrainy’ [The ‘Russia factor’ in German policy towards Ukraine], *Zerkalo Nedeli* 39, 8 October 2011, http://zn.ua/POLITICS/rossiyskiy_faktor_v_nemetskoy_politike_otnositelno_ukrainy-90491.html.

14 ‘Rossiiskii konsul vo L’vove zhaluetsya na ugrozy ubiistva i predrekaet vozvrashcheniye tsentra ‘Russkogo Mira’ v Kyiv’ [Russian consul in Lviv complains of death threats and predicts the return of the ‘Russian World’ to Kyiv], *Novy Region* 2, 23 December 2010, <http://www.nr2.ru/kyiv/314326.html>.

15 ‘Zurabov: Russkiye i Ukraintsy – eto edinyi narod’ [Zurabov: Russians and Ukrainians are a single people], *ForUm*, 15 June 2010, <http://www.for-ua.com/politics/2010/06/15/113250.html>.

16 See ‘Yanukovych: Ukraina mozhe buty “nadiinym mostom” mizh Yevropoiu i Rosieiu’ [Ukraine could be a reliable bridge between Europe and Russia] *ForUm*, 15 December 2010, <http://ua.for-ua.com/politics/2010/12/15/140435.html> for a recent attempt by Yanukovych to sell Ukraine as a ‘reliable bridge’ uniting the ‘three great and powerful economically developed centers of the world, such as Europe, Russia and the United States’. For the older version of the bridge idea see Galyna Yavorska and Alexander Bogomolov, *Nepevnyy ob’ekt bazhannia. Yevropa v ukrainskomu politychnomu diskursi* [Uncertain Object of Desire. Europe in Ukraine’s Political Discourse] (Kyiv: Vydavnychjy dim Dmitra Buraho, 2010), p. 78.

17 Vladimir Pastukhov, ‘Ukraina dolzhna kak mozhno bystree preodolet’ epokhu identifikatsii sebya “ot obratnogo” [Ukraine needs to move beyond defining itself in relation to ‘the other’ as quickly as possible], *Polit.ua* <http://polit.ua/articles/2010/11/26/pastoukhov.html>.

this construct and others examined here avoid choices and soft-pedal Ukraine's independence. At best, they limit damage in relations with a stronger power. At worst, they view the 'usefulness' of Ukraine's European integration through a Russian prism, rather than from the standpoint of Ukrainian national interests. They also accommodate rather than challenge Russian discourse.

The overarching themes of Russia's discourse – common identity, common destiny, and Russian political and intellectual primacy – illustrate the role that linguistic manipulation plays in policy. But they also illustrate confusion and contradiction. Terms such as 'country', 'nation' and 'state' acquire different meanings depending on the purposes and limitations of the interlocutor. Consistency is rarely the goal. James Sherr's point is worth restating: 'To the Russian mind, contradiction is part of life itself, not a sign of intellectual failure. It is something to be utilized, not overcome.'¹⁸

Over the years, some more contingent but equally double-edged narratives have emerged, designed to promote Russian foreign policy objectives and also help the Russian public and policy-makers make sense of Russian–Ukrainian political reality. These frameworks represent basic assumptions as to what Ukraine 'is', suggesting various types of action that do not always pull in the same direction. Out of this stock of useful but also contradictory ideas, a single, sustainable strategy has yet to emerge.

One of the most common of these narratives is that the West sees Ukraine as a *cordon sanitaire* between Europe and Russia. For example, the 2009 Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation states that were Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO this would lead to 'the rise of new dividing lines in Europe'.¹⁹ This is consistent with the widespread perception that the West has hidden agendas and an 'anti-Russian bias'. It is also consistent with the tendency to regard Ukraine as a dependent variable in Russia's future rather than as an independent

variable in international relations. On the other hand, some suggest it is Russia that might use Ukraine (as well as Moldova and Belarus) as a *cordon sanitaire* or buffer against the West.²⁰ If other countries in Europe accepted the geopolitical prism as the only interpretative model for international relations, then this position might make sense. As it is, other motivations behind Western policy – ideational, civilizational, economic – are underestimated or discounted in these assessments.

These ideas, stemming from a fear of being culturally and economically diminished by Western competitors, have resonance within a large part of the Ukrainian business and political elite, who are apprehensive about Western influence. This current of thinking extends well beyond Yanukovich's Party of Regions and helps explain Russian economic expansion (e.g. in finance and port infrastructure) during Yushchenko's presidency. These apprehensions are rooted in the working culture and uncompetitive practices prevalent in Ukrainian business. They also reflect the closely networked interests in sectors that are still not fully separated, primarily energy and gas, which provide the most lucrative opportunities for corruption. But such networks are also influential in the financial sector, telecommunications, sea ports, mass media, advertising and public relations. They form an important domain of 'network diplomacy' and afford Russia a considerable amount of soft power in Ukraine.²¹

A third and particularly tenacious theme concerns Western interference in post-Soviet countries. The view of the Orange Revolution as an elaborate Western plot, orchestrated between Western intelligence services, Western-financed NGOs and leading 'independent' figures, is not only axiomatic in Russia but widespread in Ukraine. A prominent Party of Regions MP, Oleksandr Efremov, claimed in April 2011 that George Soros was actively preparing a North African scenario for Ukraine.²² Whatever its merits, the narrative serves the dual purpose

18 James Sherr, 'Russia: Managing Contradictions', in Robin Niblett, ed., *America and a Changed World* (London: Chatham House/Wiley Blackwell, 2010) p. 162.

19 *Kontseptsija vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi federatsii* [The 2008 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation], 15 July 2008, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/785>.

20 Dmitri Trenin, 'Russia and the new Eastern Europe', public lecture at Dom Uchenykh, Kyiv, 31 March 2010, <http://carnegie.ru/publications/?fa=40669>.

21 S. V. Lavrov, 'Rossiiskaya Diplomatiya v Menyayushemysya Mire' [Russian Diplomacy in a Changing World], *Federal'nyi Spravochnik*, Vol. 23, April 2010, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/120AA79468FE6685C325771500288220.

22 The statement was made on LOT TV Channel, Luhansk, see <http://minprom.ua/news/65825.html>: 'Soros gotovit v Ukraine arabskii stsenerii' [Soros is preparing an Arab scenario in Ukraine], MinProm, 13 April 2011.

of distracting attention from domestic pressures for change as well as Russia's infringements on its neighbours' sovereignty. Against this backdrop, Russia's economic expansion in Ukraine assumes a noble purpose.

All three of these narratives illustrate the role that conspiracy theories play in accounting for reverses and the diminution of Russian influence. The more conscious, official and conspicuous part of Russian soft power in Ukraine in many ways represents a response to these alleged conspiracies and tries to mimic their style. Study of the activities of NGOs prior to the 'coloured revolutions' led to the formation after 2004 of what could be called counter-conspiracy government-organized NGOs (GONGOs), sponsored by the Russian government although often based in Ukraine – many of them appropriating the rights-based language of their Western equivalents. The effectiveness of these GONGOs is debatable, but they add to the difficulty of knowing 'who is who' in the non-transparent political environments of the former Soviet Union. Sowing such confusion is part of the intention.

Two further themes of Russian discourse are less rooted in ideology and ostensibly more pragmatic. The first emphasizes the generosity of Russia, as opposed to the selfishness and ingratitude of others. Many Russians feel that they have invested heavily in Ukraine without receiving a proper return.²³ This accounts for much residual bitterness about the way the Soviet Union collapsed: by becoming independent, other former republics escaped footing the bill for it. This widespread conviction, regularly refuelled by fresh disputes (e.g. the 2006 and 2009 gas wars), is not confined to the 'ideologists of Russian 'great power' but shared by some of Russia's most liberal politicians and experts.²⁴ Like many potent and populist arguments, this conviction contains more than a kernel of truth – Russians as well as Ukrainians have been penalized by the corruption of Ukraine's political and financial elites – but it is

not supported by reasonable and pragmatic arguments. It comes with emotional and historical baggage. Moral and material investment in dependent territories, in civilizing, feeding or protecting them, is of course a well-known theme in colonial discourse. On the other hand, the sense of special mission towards other nations is a deep tradition in Russia's intellectual history. The rejection of such a mission by dependencies and former dependencies is usually seen by Russians as an insult.

The second theme is that Russia needs Ukraine as a vital extension of its domestic market. In this line of reasoning, regaining dominance over Ukraine is an important *defensive* measure, because if it is detached from Russia, it will merely become the extension of another (potentially anti-Russian) geo-economic and geopolitical entity. For example, Sergei Glazyev has produced economic calculations designed to show that Russia remains incomplete without Ukraine.²⁵ Such an analysis presents Ukraine as an object rather than a subject of international relations. It is also backward-looking and fatalistic about Russia. It not only ignores economically successful countries with far smaller populations and territories than Russia's, but completely disregards the experience of post-communist countries that have overcome inherited dependencies and reformed their economies. Distorted as it is, such a perspective is attractive to those who seek profit as well as influence. It offers an antidote to the historical syndrome of 'generosity' and 'ingratitude'. It also serves as an adjunct to the 'modernization' ideology prevalent in Russia and Ukraine (where business practices are sometimes even more Sovietized than in Russia). Hence it appeals not only to Russian conservative figures but also to some regarded by the West as liberal and forward-looking.

These complementary and contradictory themes form the context for Russian influence and soft power in Ukraine, and they provide an impetus to both. They reflect

23 See, for example, Alexander Lebedev's comments in response to local administrative pressure on his investments in Crimea. ('Rossiyskii oligarkh Lebedev: shest' let gostinitsu "Ukraina" u menya otbiral Yushchenko, teper' tozhe samoye' [Russian Oligarch Lebedev: Yushchenko spent six years trying to take the hotel "Ukraine" from me, and now the same thing is happening again], *Kraina*, 11 December 2010, <http://kraina.name/2/1161>).

24 See Pastukhov, 'Ukraina dolzhna kak mozhno bystree preodolet' epokhu identifikatsii sebya "ot obratnogo"; and an article by the Russian liberal analyst Alexander Golts: 'Russia gets duped again', *Moscow Times*, 27 April 2010, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/russia-gets-duped-again/404838.html>.

25 See 'Tamozhennomu soyuzu nuzhna Ukraina' [The Customs Union needs Ukraine], Sergei Glazyev's official website http://glazev.ru/sodr_eep/265/.

Russia's efforts to come to terms with itself and its post-imperial surroundings. They also influence Ukrainian debates and have resonance within different elements of Ukrainian society – not only Sovietized conservatives but some of the country's modernizers. Many of the ideological constructs in use today have evolved over a long time. That evolution – organic and not merely contrived – has enabled them to accommodate to change, and to explain failure as well as success.

But how exactly are they translated into influence? How much influence have they actually achieved? For how much longer will this influence be maintained? Are Ukraine and Russia coming together or growing further apart? Ukraine has its own history as well as a 'common' history. It has its own attributes, infirmities, debates and disputes – many, perhaps an increasing proportion of them, without a reference point to Russia.

Dimensions of power

Culture

Russian high culture is usually contrasted with the rural, parochial and marginal – terms that encapsulate Ukrainian culture as seen through Russian eyes. For both of these reasons, it is not surprising that Russian culture is used as an instrument of soft power in Ukraine. Since Putin came to power, the state – and, encouraged by the state, the business establishment – has taken noteworthy steps to promote Russia's cultural tradition abroad. These efforts reflect a synergy between state bodies, semi-official foundations such as Russian World, favoured television companies and film producers, state-dominated business and much genuinely independent activity. In the wider Europe, there are three aims of such activity, which includes broadcasting and marketing of films, sponsorship of performing artists, publications, 'dialogues on civilization', seminars and conferences. One aim is to strengthen the sense of belonging among Russia's European and North American diaspora. The second is to reinforce the message that Russian culture is indispensable to Western civilization, and that the distinction between Russia and the West merely damages the West. A third aim is to instil

the perception that in cultural and not only legal terms, Russia is the successor to the Soviet Union. On all three levels, Russian cultural diplomacy is designed to reinforce the perception that Russia is a world power.

The irony is that Russia's *intellectual* culture has traditionally defined itself in opposition to power. For Ukrainians there is a double irony: Russia's intelligentsia are not Ukraine's natural allies, because where Ukraine's history and culture are concerned, they tend to share the perspectives of Russian elites.

Ukraine has no effort analogous to Russian cultural soft power. No group of Ukrainian oligarchs has stepped forward to expand knowledge of Ukrainian history, artists, writers or intellectuals, let alone promote Ukrainian talent, support Ukrainian-language publishers or finance the production of films for the export market. For Russian (and Russian-language) publishing houses, theatres and cinema, funding and marketing are available. Sometimes Ukraine has resisted these efforts, but punitive measures have tended to predominate over positive ones. Even Ukrainian pop music and show business remain largely a subset of the Russian entertainment industry. There is also no analogy with Russian cultural influence in Western countries, whose cultural identity, inheritance and dynamism are in no way threatened by Russia. In Ukraine, the reality is different, and it will remain so as long as Russians regard Ukrainian identity as an artificial construct.

Mass media

In the service of its ends, the most effective Russian cultural product is the mass media, especially television, which is broadcast over cable networks across most of Ukraine. While the media do promote Russian high culture, they are most effective at disseminating Russian mass culture, most of which would be regarded as '*poshlost*' (kitsch) by Russia's cultural elite. In Russian-speaking regions, where mass cultural values are similar to those in Russia, much of the content – serials, soap operas and iconic Soviet films – is both unedifying and congenial. War (especially the Great Patriotic War) as well as Soviet-era and contemporary crime, police and spy dramas account for much of this content and reinforce nostalgia and stereotypes. Russian TV

news programmes are also influential. These programmes 'are strongly political in emphasis, concrete and detailed in their terms of reference and intellectually serious. They are also full of misstatements, distortions and half-truths.'²⁶ With the help of the state's *de facto* monopoly over TV broadcasting in Russia, the Russian mass media have managed to create a hermetic, virtual world of mass culture that effectively blocks public communication on a set of important policy areas and promotes cognitive frameworks that help sustain the current political set-up.

Ukraine has been largely ineffective in righting the imbalance. From 1990 until 2010, its most characteristic reaction to Russia's television dominance and significant print media presence has come under the heading of 'information security'. But most measures have been negative, punitive and counter-productive. Thus Yushchenko's presidency produced a series of erratic and prohibitive measures, such as a ban on the *Russia TV* and *TV Centre* channels from the cable networks. In 2009 a Doctrine of Information Security was adopted. Ironically, this underlined Russian soft power, as the key concepts and underlying ideology were largely inspired by the analogous Russian document of 2000.

A bias in Ukrainian information security discourse arises from the tendency to define national security not primarily as that of a state or a community of citizens, but as that of a cultural community defined by Ukrainian heritage and language. Unfortunately, in a country with diverse historical experiences and linguistic traditions, this plays into Russia's policy of acting as if the geographical sphere where the Russian language continues to be a dominant medium of communication defines Russia's true political borders. For the governments of both countries, language serves as a virtual political boundary and symbol of loyalty. This greatly hampers Ukraine's information policy in the south and east of the country, where Russian speakers are dominant. It needlessly alienates the large number of Russian-speaking citizens who are not instinctively pro-Russian in their political views. Finally, it takes little account of the evolution of language patterns, which are now distinctly different from what most Ukrainian and Russian policy-makers imagine (see below).

The problem is compounded by the weak cultural identification of part of Ukraine's governing establishment, notably the current Yanukovich administration. Although they see merit in Ukraine's independence and are prepared to defend it on several fronts, they also continue to see themselves as part of a Russian cultural community. This ambivalence constrains their ability to mobilize internal support when defending the country's interests. It is difficult to mount an effective defence of Ukraine's economic sovereignty on the one hand while fighting Ukrainian nationalism on the other.

As a case in point, a host of new jointly produced TV shows have appeared on Ukrainian channels with the acquiescence of the authorities. They are mainly programmes that seem designed to celebrate Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood, with Russian participants often dominating the scene both numerically and linguistically. The number of Russian feature films shown in Ukraine has also increased significantly.

If there is an effective counter to Russian information policy today, it is not Ukrainian information policy but the internet. The Russian authorities have reacted to this in several ways, including state sponsorship of bloggers, websites designed to promote ideas critical of liberal democracy, and cyber warfare (targeted spamming, denial-of-service attacks). Most effective are the web-based news agencies *Regnum* and *Novy Region*, which are formally privately owned, but have close links with the Kremlin. Ukrainian journalists sympathetic to Russian positions often rely upon these two resources, while journalists who would describe themselves as 'pro-Ukrainian' consider references to them inappropriate. On balance, the web is an area in which Russia suffers more losses than gains. Even its most prominent websites (e.g. mail.ru) have become ideological battlefields between Russian and Ukrainian subscribers, with the latter dedicating much of their time to countering Russian official propaganda.

What is the overall impact of Russia's cultural and media presence on the political orientation of Ukrainian citizens? For example, did Russian media coverage of the

²⁶ James Sherr, *Russia and the West: A Reassessment*, Shrivensham Papers No. 6, Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, January 2008, p. 17.

Kosovo conflict cause or complement the strongly negative Ukrainian reaction to NATO intervention? Ukraine's government supported Georgia in its conflict with Russia in 2008, but a large section of Ukrainian public opinion supported Russia's position (23.5% tended to see the use of force by Russia as justified, and 60.5% perceived Georgia's use of force as illegal).²⁷ Pro-Russian sentiments are strongest in Ukrainian regions where Russia's media presence is strongest, but there are other linguistic and historical factors that also explain this. What is undeniable is the scale of the official Russian effort and presence, and the ineffectiveness of the Ukrainian authorities in countering it. The fact that Russia's impact is difficult to measure does not make it unimportant.

The Russian language in Ukraine

There are two key features of the language situation in Ukraine. First, the country is still divided into two major linguistic communities – Ukrainian and Russian – alongside several linguistic minorities. Second, there is an imperfect correspondence between ethnicity and language. For Ukrainian speakers, the Soviet educational system was not an avenue of social mobility. It was the Russian language alone that proved the passport of access to higher education, science, economic management and administration. For historical reasons, linguistic preference has tended to correlate more closely with region than ethnicity. Both of these factors indicate that language has been an imperfect guide to political orientation and loyalty.

According to the most recent 2001 census, ethnic Ukrainians in the country numbered 37.5 million, ethnic Russians 8.3 million and other ethnic groups just under two million. Yet in the 20 years since independence the linguistic borders between the communities have changed, as have civic identities. The functional range covered by the Ukrainian language has been expanding.

In part this reflects official policy, which in law and practice has been distinctly more liberal than the Russian state portrays it. The constitution enshrines Ukrainian as the state language, but it also guarantees 'the free development, use and *protection* of Russian and other languages'. Although the state is enjoined to ensure 'the comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life', in practice its efforts have been uneven. The 'state' language requirement has produced a linguistic about-turn in the civil service, the courts and higher administration, with Russian persisting primarily in Donbass and Crimea.

As the Ukrainian language has expanded in public life, the asymmetry in bilingualism (whereby in the Soviet era all Ukrainian speakers spoke Russian, while only a few native Russian speakers also spoke Ukrainian) has become more balanced, with growing numbers of Russophones accepting Ukrainian not only as their second language but as a part of their cultural identity.²⁸ By 2001, as many as 85% of ethnic Ukrainians declared Ukrainian their native tongue, but in some urban areas where the preponderance of the Ukrainian ethnic majority population is nominally huge (such as Kyiv and Dnipropetrovsk) Russian is still spoken far more widely than Ukrainian – reflecting the fact that declared loyalty to the Ukrainian language is higher than the actual practice. While constituencies still exist in eastern and southern Ukraine for giving Russian the status of a second official language (with up to 67% support in Crimea and Donbass), support at the national level is only 30%.²⁹ The Party of Regions campaigned on the issue in the last elections, but Yanukovich dropped the issue as soon as he came to power, just as Leonid Kuchma did after his election in 1994.

However, language remains a subject of tension. It has official significance for the Russian Federation, as reflected in the 2008 Foreign Policy Concept.³⁰ In his 'appeal' to

27 Poll conducted by Razumkov Centre, http://www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/socpolls.php?cat_id=105.

28 Galyna Yavorska, 'Movni konflikti: shtuchni chy real'ni?' [Language conflicts: real or imagined?], presentation in Zaporizhia, 16 October 2010, <http://www.slideshare.net/sergeAmes/ss-5564384>.

29 According to the Public Opinion on the Status of Main Languages in Ukraine, a poll conducted by Demokratichni Initsiatyvy Foundation and the Ukrainian Sociology Service on 30 December 2007, <http://dif.org.ua/ua/poll/#2006>.

30 The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 12 July 2008, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml>.

Viktor Yushchenko, Medvedev reproached him for the ‘displacement of the Russian language from social life, science, education, culture, mass media and jurisprudence’ in Ukraine.³¹ Language is also linked with Russian efforts to correct what are perceived as distortions of history.

When appointed in 2010, Ukraine’s Minister of Education and Science, Dmitrii Tabachnyk, issued decrees obliging secondary schools to reinstate Russian as the language of instruction (upon parental application) and to re-establish the Russian language and literature courses. Within a week of Tabachnyk’s appointment the administration of the Ukrainian Catholic University denounced him for ‘humiliating the Ukrainian intelligentsia, as well as Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture, kindling hostility among the various regions of Ukraine, vindicating the human-hating Stalinist regime’.³²

Whether as a result of such denunciations, the mass student protests that erupted in Lviv and Kyiv, or the firm warning reportedly issued to him by Yanukovych, at the time of writing the key innovation by the minister has been the removal of the Orange Revolution and Yushchenko presidency from history textbooks.

Ukraine’s Russian-language policy is not only an internal and bilateral issue. It has broader implications for Ukraine’s global standing and its ability to communicate with the world. The English language has advanced in step with globalization. It is not only the most widespread medium of international communication, but for most nations it is also the most effective means of access to Western and global culture. In Ukraine, however, this function is still mainly performed by Russian. In the words of Ukraine’s draft law on language: ‘Knowledge of the Russian language ensures for the citizens of Ukraine broad access to the accomplishments of global science and culture.’³³

Why this should be axiomatic to the government and to parliamentary deputies is anything but obvious. English-language websites outnumber those in the Russian language by a factor of ten to one.³⁴ At the same time, the reality for Ukraine is that Russian is far more common than Ukrainian as a language of translation. Yet instead of replicating international practice by promoting knowledge of English, public institutions merely preserve the old Soviet pattern of interaction with the global environment through the Russian language.

Ukraine’s journalists are not exempt. Most still rely upon Russian-based sources for world news. Several Russian-based websites, such as *inosmi.ru* and *inopressa.ru*, are specifically designed to fill information gaps for Russian speakers.³⁵ Those who rely upon them are hostage to what their translators and editors choose to include or omit. Significant nuances can be lost or added. Where EU and NATO information is concerned, considerable deviations from the original text have been known to occur. The most characteristic case in point is references to ‘NATO operations in Iraq’, which further diminished support in Ukraine for NATO membership, despite the fact that, unlike in Kosovo or Libya, the military operation in Iraq was in fact conducted outside the NATO framework.

The Russian Orthodox Church

In contrast to Russia, Ukraine is home to three denominations of Orthodox Christianity: the independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarchate (UOC-KP) (14.9% of the population, according to polls), unrecognized by the Moscow Patriarchate from which it separated in 1992; the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Moscow Patriarchate (UOC-MP) (10.9%), which was granted administrative, but not ecclesiastical, autonomy from the Russian Orthodox Church in 1990; and the

31 ‘Poslanie Prezidentu Ukrainy Viktoru Yushchenko’ [Message to President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko] (see note 1 above).

32 ‘An Appeal by the Ukrainian Catholic University to the Education Community of Ukraine’, *Kyiv Post*, 17 March 2010, http://www.kyivpost.com/news/opinion/op_ed/detail/61912/print.

33 Draft Law ‘On Languages in Ukraine’, Article 7, <http://oda-radio.com/news/media/o-yazykakh-v-ukraine-zakon-ukrainy>.

34 According to Google Research, the ratio of Russian to English websites is 1:10 – see <http://googleresearch.blogspot.com/2011/07/languages-of-world-wide-web.html>. The Internet World Stats shows almost the same correlation by the number of users: respectively 3.0% and 26.8% of total internet users – see <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats7.htm>. Far more indicative is the fact that, according to Google Research, while 42% of indexed sites are English, 79% of all links from sites in other languages go to the English-language sites.

35 The two sites are designed to provide Russian-language versions of foreign publications.

Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (1%), established in 1921. Other Christian denominations include the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (12%), established in the 16th century, the Roman Catholic Church (2%) and a number of Protestant churches (0.9%).³⁶

The Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) has grown exponentially in the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet period. It is now determined to renew and strengthen its status in Ukraine by diminishing the autonomy of the UOC-MP and returning the UOC-KP to its jurisdiction. The close relationship between the Church and the Russian government both in Tsarist times and today makes this a political project by implication if not by definition. Russian Orthodox bishops are increasingly integrated into Russia's ruling elites. The new Patriarch, Kirill I, has become one of the most influential political figures in the country. He has officially supported the Russian World ideology and assumed the role of its principal promoter. In 2009 he proclaimed that its key tenet was the essential cultural and spiritual unity of the Eastern Slavic peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, and of any Russian-speaking nation and group. As expressed by Kirill himself:

The core of the Russian World today is Russia, Ukraine and Belorussia, and ... regardless of state divisions, of certain discords in politics, we spiritually, and I would like to emphasize again, *spiritually* continue to be one people, and the majority of us are children of the Russian Orthodox Church.³⁷

Such spiritual claims complement the 'civilizational' and political values of the Russian World ideology, as set out by the movement's principal *secular* exponents, Vyacheslav Nikonov, Modest Kolerov, the pro-Kremlin owner of *Regnum* and *Novy Region*, and Vladislav Surkov. They are meant to emphasize the role of the ROC as a key stakeholder or even the key element of the proposed community. Following such a line of argument, one could

expect to arrive at an idea of the Russian World as a sort of theocratic union of nations or a modern analogue of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. The concept of the Russian World therefore appears to be a structural twin of that of the Arab World. The latter too is conceived as a community of sovereign countries but also a single nation united on the basis of shared linguistic and religious identities.

Unlike his predecessor, Patriarch Kirill demonstrates ambitions to act as a political figure:

In order for the Russian World to become a consolidated reality, and not an amorphous entity, we need to operate on several levels. Primarily, we should rely on the collaboration of the civil societies of the Russian World countries. But of no less importance is the standpoint of the elites of the newly independent states created in the space of the historic *Rus*. ... It is, therefore, important to establish durable systemic relations among the elites of the Russian World countries. ... Individually, even the largest countries of the Russian World would not be able to safeguard their spiritual, cultural and civilizational interests in the globalized world. I am confident that only a consolidated Russian World may become a powerful subject in global international politics, stronger than all political alliances.³⁸

Since 2010, the ROC has tried to mobilize the support of the Ukrainian government in order to pressure priests and bishops of the UOC-KP to 'return' under its jurisdiction. A key instrument is the registration of parishes. In 2010, several cases were reported of parishes being re-registered as belonging to the Moscow Patriarchate without prior consent of the parishioners. A further instrument is the lay Orthodox associations, a number of new ones with a clearly pro-Russian political agenda having appeared on the local political scene, most visibly, since 2004. The affiliated lay groups of the UOC-MP represent an extension

³⁶ Razumkov Centre Poll, 'As a believer, what church or religious confession do you consider yourself to be?', Ukrainian Centre for Economic and Political Studies, 2006, www.razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=300.

³⁷ Patriarch Kirill, speech at the opening of the 3rd Assembly of the Russian World, 3 November 2009, <http://www.patriarchia.ru/db/text/928446.html>.

³⁸ Ibid.

of Russia-based lay organizations that form a consistent movement categorized by Russian researchers under the heading of 'political Orthodoxy'.³⁹

‘ The election campaigns of 2004, 2006 and 2007 have demonstrated that churches do have some capacity to affect electoral choices. In recent years economic hardship and disillusionment have enhanced the appeal of organized religion ’

In Ukraine, as in Russia, the demise of Soviet state-sponsored atheism has produced a religious revival. Still, as recently as 2006, 62.5% of citizens characterized themselves as unaffiliated to any religious denomination.⁴⁰ After the demise of a rigorously atheistic political ideology, the post-Soviet societies quite paradoxically re-emerged as superficially more religious than most of Europe. Whereas some members of the Ukrainian elite are known to be truly religious, many others in one way or another support the consensus that treats religion as an important collective value. The election campaigns of 2004, 2006 and 2007 have demonstrated that churches do have some capacity to affect electoral choices.⁴¹ In recent years economic hardship and disillusionment have enhanced the appeal of organized religion. Voices that oppose creeping clericalism in the public sphere appear to be rather weak. The wider public response to the phenomenon of politicized religion

should not be taken as passive or automatic, however. The pro-Russian position of the ROC clergy in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution of 2004 has prompted many parishioners to reaffiliate to the Kyiv Patriarchate. The rise of sizeable Protestant, Mormon and New Age communities, as well as a host of others, may to some extent be interpreted as a sign of popular mistrust or rejection of the overtly politicized Orthodox denominations in Ukraine.

The Russian Orthodox Church must be acknowledged as an important and increasingly effective resource of Russian soft power in Ukraine. Both Russian policy-makers and Church leaders try their best to exploit the window of opportunity created by Yanukovych's presidency in order to make its role even more influential.⁴² The Ukrainian president has persistently demonstrated his loyalty to the Russian Patriarchate in public, and Patriarch Kirill awarded him the highest Church Order – 1st Degree St Vladimir's – in 2010.

Taming business elites

In the age of business globalization, an influential section of Ukraine's business elites remains composed of people whose mental horizons are firmly situated in Russia. For many of them Moscow remains the preferred, although not necessarily the only destination for business and leisure, a source of inspiration for new ideas and practices and, in difficult times, a sanctuary. At various times Moscow accepted a host of Ukrainian political exiles.

For a second group, Russia is not necessarily a trustworthy partner, but it still appears to be a safer one than the West, for the simple reason that it is more comprehensible. Even the Western localities favoured by this group are connected to Russia. They reflect choices made by Russian colleagues, friends and role models. Western culture is perceived through a Russian prism. As Ukraine does not possess a

39 See Alexandr Verkhovskiy, *Politicheskoye pravoslavie: russkie pravoslavnye natsionalisty i fundamentalisty, 1995–2001* [Political orthodoxy: Russian orthodox nationalists and fundamentalists] (Moscow: SOVA Center for Information and Analysis, October 2003), <http://www.sova-center.ru/files/books/ort03-text.pdf>.

40 Razumkov Centre poll, 'As a believer, what church or religious confession do you consider yourself to be?'

41 Andriy Yurash, 'Ukrains'ki tserkvi i prezidents'ki vybory: shliuby z liubovi i za rozrakhunkom' [The Ukrainian church and presidential elections: marriage for love or convenience], *Religijno-Informatsijna Agentura Ukrainy*, 24 March 2005, http://risu.org.ua/ua/index/expert_thought/analytic/8917/.

42 See, for example, 'U Krymu vidbulasia zustrich Prezidenta Ukrainy Viktora Yanukovycha z Patriarkhom Moskovskim i Vsiieii Rusi, Predstoiatelem Rosiiskoi Pravoslavnoi Tserkvy Kirilom' [Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovych met in Crimea with Kirill I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Rus, Primate of the Russian Orthodox Church], www.president.gov.ua/news/17660.html.

globally integrated elite, the scope of the nation's political imagination remains essentially parochial, and native preferences are unevenly developed.

There is, to be sure, a third and highly influential group: those who, in their own interest and that of the country, see no alternative to integration with Europe. But this group will find alternatives to a European perspective if it is not forthcoming. Russian policy on the Customs Union (and latterly, the Eurasian Union) is sensitive to this reality and makes use of it.

Crimea: soft power in Jurassic Park

From the perspective of Russian policy-makers Ukraine has never been a monolith. Indeed, there are some Russian analysts who believe that their country's major problem with Ukraine is the difficulty of treating it as a political unit.⁴³ The uneven attention to different regions can be easily accounted for by a widely shared belief that Ukraine is an incoherent entity, if not, in Putin's words to George W. Bush, an 'artificial' one.⁴⁴ In this view some parts of Ukraine are more Russian and some less. The Crimean Autonomy and, even more so, Sevastopol, are almost universally regarded as Russian lands, booty of Russia's late 18th-century military victories, a fortress that had stood fast in the face of Turkish, Western and finally Nazi interlopers that, through a whim of Nikita Khrushchev in 1954, accidentally became part of Ukraine. Ukraine does not shy away from these realities. Whereas the rest of the country comprises 24 regions (*oblasti*), Article 133 of Ukraine's constitution designates Crimea an Autonomous Republic.

At various times dozens of pro-Russian organizations have operated in Ukraine, but no region has hosted so many of them as Crimea. These include political activist groups and parties, groups of parishioners of the Russian

Orthodox Church, neo-Cossacks, Russian cultural clubs, naval and military associations, and think tanks. The list of pro-Russian media in Crimea is extensive.⁴⁵ The political agenda of these groups has invariably coincided with Russian priorities towards Ukraine. During Yuschenko's presidency, groups of this kind were mobilized against NATO accession, against joint Ukraine–NATO military exercises such as Sea Breeze, against recognition of the 1932–33 Ukrainian Famine as a genocide, and in support of granting official status to the Russian language, along with various measures to provide political and financial support to Russian communities. Moscow supported pro-Russian groups standing for public office in the local and national elections of 2006 and 2007, either as independent parties (e.g. Natalia Vitrenko's Progressive Socialist Party) or through the formation of blocs with the Party of Regions. The Russian Community of Crimea, for instance, joined the 'For Yanukovych' bloc in the Crimean regional parliament.

Factors such as high population density, lack of alternative political structures, the relative inactivity of voters and a friendly media environment have enabled Russian-sponsored groups to control much of the local political agenda and to consolidate an image of Crimea as a Russian stronghold, even though these groups fail to address the core needs of the populations that they claim to represent.⁴⁶

Sevastopol (dubbed the 'city of Russian glory' for its role as a naval base in 19th- and 20th-century wars) attracts even more attention on the part of the Russian politicians than the Crimean Autonomy. While the latter has received funds for commemorating Russian National Day and the annual festival of the 'Great Russian Word' (*Velikoye russkoye slovo*), as well as for protest rallies and the support of pro-Russian political forces in local elections, in Sevastopol additional funds have been allocated

43 Authors' personal communication with Andrey Ryabov of Carnegie Moscow Center, April 2011.

44 Olga Allenova, 'Blok NATO razoshelsya na blokpakety' [The NATO bloc separated into blocking shares], *Kommersant*, 7 April 2008, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/877224>.

45 It includes the only regional daily *Krymskaya Pravda*, the leading weeklies *Krymskoye Vremia*, *Krymskie Izvestia*, *Krymskaya Gazeta*, *Vestnik Tavridy*, *Krymskii Telegraf*, the clerically-oriented newspaper *Rusichi*, the news agency 'Novyi Region – Crimea', the web resource novoross.info; local TV channels, with the exception of three – state-owned Krym, the Crimean Tatar private ATR and the popular private Chernomorka. *Krymskaya Pravda* has formulated its mission as a newspaper 'not only for Russians, but for those who feel themselves to be part of the Russian World, its history and culture, who speak and think Russian', *Krymskaya Pravda*, 1 November 2007, http://www.kp.crimea.ua/news_details.php?news_type_id=&news_id=2606.

46 See an interview with Andrei Nikiforov, "Prorossiiskaya probirka", "Makeyevskii chipy", *Medzhlis i fiasko krymskoi elity*, *Bol'shaya Yalta*, 6 January 2011 [A pro-Russian test-tube', 'Makeyevka elements', the Mejlis and the fiasco of the Crimean elite], <http://www.bigyalta.com.ua/story/22688>.

for housing Russian naval and military veterans, who are also encouraged to remain resident in Ukraine. Russian Navy Day is celebrated in Sevastopol with far more pomp than the Russian National Day in the Crimean Autonomy's capital, Simferopol.

Since Kuchma's presidency, which for all its failings did robustly address security challenges in Crimea, Ukrainian policy-makers have endeavoured to strengthen national coherence by promoting the idea of a 'political nation': a community united by common citizenship rather than ethnicity. This ideology – advantageous as it might be for both Russia and Ukraine – remains underdeveloped in both cases. Ukraine has made some progress along this line, as attested by a once powerful discourse on the 'political nation' in the country's media. The Orange Revolution was hailed as a major success in forging a common civic identity across ethnic lines. This process has not only stalled, it is unravelling. In recent years Ukraine has witnessed a greater prominence of ethno-nationalist discourse, the growing popularity of radically nationalist parties such as Svoboda (whose national rating of 5% disguises its pronounced influence in western Ukraine), and the strengthening of an alarmist discourse on Crimean 'separatism'. This mainland, or rather western, Ukrainian alarmism contradicts the actual political reality of Crimea, where the Party of Regions has now effectively sidelined the peninsula's most prominent pro-Russian groups. The current authorities have even deported to Russia the notoriously xenophobic pro-Russian *ataman* Vitaliy Khramov, leader of the neo-Cossack group Sobol, and they also prevented the erection of an Orthodox cross in a Muslim-populated area in Feodosia.

Conclusion: a burden for both Ukraine and Russia

One serious structural limitation of Russia's policy and its soft power abroad is the absence of a well-articulated idea of partnership. Russian strategists fail to appreciate that most American and European global soft power comes from the West's capacity to forge productive partnerships and create new opportunities. Instead, Russian policy-makers have concentrated on mobilizing loyal constituencies that see no opportunities for themselves

in a Ukrainian national state. If soft power is to be understood as 'getting others to want what you want', then Russian practitioners have been doing that in the most economical way – by trying to locate and mobilize those who already *want* it. These connections are then developed as patron–client networks on the Russian economic and socio-political pattern. At the top of these networks is a narrow circle of individuals who have access to funds and may also extract rent for their services. They operate as middlemen between the Kremlin and the grassroots in Ukraine. In Ukraine as well as Russia, networks of this type discourage feedback from bottom to top and limit local initiative.

An enormous focus on symbolic resources, a deep engagement in local identity politics, and promoting one national discourse and combating another, have become endemic to Russian policy in Ukraine. Yet this is also a vulnerability for Russia, as it provides an insecure basis for the country's own identity in the 21st century. It reduces Russian foreign policy to what it was in the Soviet era – a largely ideological enterprise.

To a great extent, both Russian and Ukrainian policy-makers continue to rely on the underlying belief that linguistic and cultural boundaries should coincide with political ones. This ideal is out of kilter with identity as currently understood in the European Union and the West as a whole. The failure of policy-makers in Ukraine and Russia to appreciate the fact that language boundaries are not and could never be as clear-cut as territorial borders translates into conflicting assumptions regarding the loyalties of various populations and serves as a source of contentious policies. Far from strengthening either country, their policies perpetuate backwardness and weakness.

The civic nation in both Russia and Ukraine remains underdeveloped. Ukraine has made more progress in this direction, as attested by a powerful discourse on the 'political nation' in the 2000s. The disappointments of the Orange Revolution, initially hailed as a major step towards a common civic identity bridging ethnic divides, have fuelled an opposing trend. This process of forming a civic nation is now in crisis, as evidenced by the greater prominence of the ethno-nationalist discourse and the

growing popularity of ultra-nationalist parties. This has come about in part because of the perceived strengthening of Russian influence over Ukraine. Yet this enhanced influence has also strengthened retrograde, nativist traditions in Ukraine. In Russia, linguistic and cultural identity are seen as the basis of nation, a view that leads effectively to the inclusion of large groups of aliens (so-called ‘compatriots’) and the exclusion of scores of citizens (such as Caucasians) who are routinely subjected to ethnic profiling and other discriminatory practices. In this respect, the strength of the Russian soft-power project in Ukraine rebounds on Russia and harms it. The more Russia succeeds in projecting this outmoded form of influence, the further it is from resolving its own internal contradictions.

Russia’s supposed ‘imperialist threat’, so readily perceived by many post-Soviet nations, has come to represent an instrument of its soft power even more than an instrument of policy. Russia has little desire and even less possibility of resurrecting the former empire. If there is a Russian ‘imperialist threat’, it lies in the desire to play a dominant role and extract benefits from Ukraine’s political and economic assets, while leaving the liabilities to the supposedly sovereign Ukrainian government. The impression that Ukraine *is* already occupied by Russia or that the key decisions regarding Ukraine are taken in the Kremlin represent tactical victories of Russian soft power.⁴⁷ But they damage both countries.

Russia’s policies continue to be based on the assumption that however Ukraine evolves, the two nations are destined to a form of integration, shaped by elements rooted in the common Soviet past. So long as this premise is accepted, the political game will be defined by Moscow’s rules. Ukraine will only consolidate its position *vis-à-vis* Russia – and its own internal integration – if it rejects these rules and adopts new ones. In 2004, it had such an opportunity, but the moment was lost. The question that remains is whether Ukraine will have to re-live failure in all its former dimensions before learning from its discouraging experience and building a modern, civic nation.

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47 ‘Mykola Riabchuk: kinets’ druhoi respubliki [Mikola Riabchuk, ‘The end of the second republic’], *Za Zbruchem*, 24 December 2010, <http://zz.te.ua/?p=11805>.