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Roman Solchanyk

Ukraine has emerged from its international isolation and has begun to take practical steps to implement democratic and market reforms. Its success or failure as an independent state will be determined not only by whether it can sustain its reformist course, but by developments in neighboring Russia.

After two years of independence, many outside observers were highly pessimistic about Ukraine's future. Indeed, some thought that the combination of economic collapse and ethnic and regional cleavages would prove fatal, as the country ultimately disintegrated amid ethnic violence and Russian intervention. That scenario did not materialize. Instead, today Ukraine is widely seen as successfully implementing democratic and market reforms at home and, in the words of U.S. President Bill Clinton, serving as a new "anchor of stability" in Eastern Europe. Whereas the former perception was most certainly oversimplified and exaggerated, the current judgment may be somewhat overrated.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that Ukraine has made significant strides in its transformation from a former Soviet republic to an independent state. Its relations with the West, specifically with the United States, have improved dramatically, largely because of Kiev's decision to abandon its huge nuclear arsenal and commit itself to non-nuclear status. Washington, for its part, has come to realize that Ukraine plays an important geopolitical and geostrategic role in Europe, one that transcends the issue of denuclearization, especially as Russia's domestic politics and foreign policies remain open to question.

Ukraine's relations with Russia are no less important than its relations with the West, but they are considerably more complex. For several centuries, the greater part of present-day Ukraine was ruled from the Russian capital, and this historical legacy has proven difficult to overcome.

On the domestic front, Ukraine's voters went to the polls in the spring and summer of 1994 and chose a new parliament and president, clearly registering their dissatisfaction with the previous political leadership. The elections seemed to confirm the ethnic and regional

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divide along an east–west axis. The result, however, has not been increased discord and fragmentation, but rather greater political and national consolidation. In October 1994, the newly elected president, Leonid Kuchma, announced a program of radical, market-oriented economic reform approved by Western financial institutions and governments, which won the support of a parliament dominated by conservative communists and socialists. The executive and legislative branches of power, although at odds over the proper distribution of their respective powers, also managed to find common ground on other crucial issues affecting the country’s stability and security. Against the background of the bloody events in Moscow in October 1993 and the fiasco in Chechnya, some observers, including some in Moscow, have come to the conclusion that perhaps the “younger brother” (Ukraine) has reached a higher level of political development and maturity than the “older brother” (Russia).

Economic reforms have made little real progress.

Clearly, Ukraine is by no means out of the woods. Economic reforms, as Kuchma himself acknowledges, have made little real progress, and the overwhelming majority of Ukraine’s 52 million people cannot point to an improvement in their social and economic conditions. Regionalism remains a fact of life that will continue to have an impact on Ukraine’s domestic and foreign policies for some time to come. (Crimea is the

most obvious example.) The government must be overhauled and the patched-up Soviet-era constitution replaced by a new fundamental law.

Finally, relations with Russia remain difficult, and it would be unrealistic to assume that Moscow and Kiev will fully resolve all of their differences in either the short or medium term. In sum, Ukraine continues to face the daunting task of simultaneously building a nation and a state.

Regionalism and the Elections

The parliamentary and presidential elections in 1994 highlighted what to many observers appeared to be a serious threat to Ukraine’s stability and, indeed, to its continued existence as an independent state—namely, the growing polarization between, roughly speaking, the eastern and western parts of the country. The east–west paradigm is actually a gross oversimplification of Ukraine’s regional structure, which is more variegated, but the two regions are separated by a number of specific features. The urbanized and industrial East is heavily populated by Russians and predominantly Russian-speaking, uncertain about the inherent value of Ukraine’s independence, drawn to Russia and favorably disposed to some form of regrouping of the former Soviet republics into a more integrated economic and political construct, and largely conservative on social and economic issues. The western region is predominantly Ukrainian-speaking, strongly committed to Ukrainian statehood, suspicious of Russia and wary of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which it views as a vehicle for Russian domination, and more favorably disposed to the West and to democratic and economic reforms. All of these characteristics came into full view during the parliamentary elections, in which the left-wing parties (Communists, Socialists, and Agrarians) scored an undisputed success. (See Table 1.) The left received an overwhelming mandate from voters in the eastern oblasts, who seated approximately 80 percent of the Communist deputies; in the western region the Communists fared poorly. Conversely, the national democrats (or “nationalists”) dominated in western Ukraine but were soundly rebuffed in the East. It appeared, therefore, that in addition to the existing ethnic and linguistic differences the two regions also had very different views on Ukraine’s political and economic future, with the eastern region inclined toward Russia and “communism” and the western part supporting democracy and “capitalism.”

Table 1

Party Affiliation of Ukraine's People's Deputies (December 4, 1994)

Party	Number of Seats
Communist Party of Ukraine	90
Rukh	20
Agrarian Party of Ukraine	19
Socialist Party of Ukraine	14
Congress of Ukrainian Nationalist	5
Ukrainian Republican Party	11
Labor Party	5
Party of the Democratic Rebirth of Ukraine	4
Others	9
Registered as Non-Party	228
Total	405

Source: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Elections in Ukraine 1994* (Kiev-Washington: IFES, 1994), p. 27. It should be pointed out that the extraordinarily large number of deputies who claimed no party affiliation (56.3 percent) is a reflection of the inadequacy of the electoral law, which discriminated against candidates nominated by political parties. As a result, many deputies with clear political affiliations chose to run as "independents."

The presidential elections in July seemed to provide even more graphic evidence of Ukraine's east-west split. Kuchma, a former prime minister who made his career in the eastern, Russified city of Dnipropetrovs'k, narrowly edged out the incumbent, Leonid Kravchuk, in runoff elections. Kuchma ran on a platform that emphasized change through economic reforms, normalization of relations with Russia, and closer integration within the CIS. Popular perceptions cast the contender in the "pro-Russian" role and the incumbent as solidly "pro-Ukrainian." Kuchma carried the entire East, gaining between 79 percent and 88 percent of the vote in the easternmost Donbas region, while failing to gain even 4 percent in the westernmost Galician oblasts. Kravchuk, in contrast, won handily in western Ukraine but was flatly rejected in the East. (See Table 2.)

Eastern Ukraine does not share western Ukraine's enthusiasm for independent statehood

One of the most salient features of the country's regional divide is that eastern Ukraine does not share western Ukraine's enthusiasm for the complex of values associated with independent statehood, a reality that has been documented in various surveys of public opinion. One such poll, conducted in May-June 1994 in eight eastern oblasts and in the autonomous republic of Cri-

Table 2

Presidential Runoff Elections (July 10, 1994)

Oblasts	Kuchma (%)	Kravchuk (%)
Autonomous Republic of Crimea	89.70	8.88
Eastern		
Luhans'k	88.00	10.11
Donets'k	79.00	18.49
Kharkiv	71.01	25.95
Zaporizhzhia	70.70	26.83
Dnipropetrovs'k	67.81	29.72
Sumy	67.75	28.92
Western		
Ternopil'	3.75	94.80
Ivano-Frankivs'k	3.86	94.46
L'viv	3.90	93.77
Rivne	11.04	87.25
Volyn'	13.96	83.93
Zakarattia	25.21	70.52

Source: *Elections in Ukraine 1994*, p. 133.

mea, revealed that only 24 percent of the respondents would vote for independence, while 47 percent would vote against it. This is in contrast to the results of the 1991 referendum on Ukraine's declaration of independence, when all of the eastern oblasts and Crimea delivered majorities in favor of independence. A more recent survey, held nationwide at the end of 1994, showed that only 17 percent of respondents favored the transformation of the CIS into a union state with common organs of state power, while 64 percent continued to support independence. The overall conclusion is that, regional differences notwithstanding, the process of nation building and state building is moving forward. The policies of President Kuchma and Ukraine's new parliament have contributed significantly to this undertaking, and in the process both have served to legitimize Ukrainian statehood in areas that have traditionally been hostile to independence.

Parliament and President

The current Ukrainian parliament was elected in six rounds, seating 405 of the 450 deputies mandated by law; further elections have been scheduled for December 1995. The political forces represented in the legislature can be divided into three main blocs: left, center, and national democratic. The ultranationalists, represented by three or four deputies, play an insignificant role.

The left consists of the Communists, the Socialists, and the Agrarians. Together they form the largest voting

bloc, accounting for about 41 percent of the seats. The Communist Party of Ukraine, officially registered in October 1993 after having been banned following the abortive Soviet putsch in 1991, was the most successful political party in the elections. Generally speaking, the left opposes market reforms, particularly the private ownership of land; supports "social guarantees" for the population; favors close ties with Russia and CIS integration; and is hostile to "nationalists." Oleksandr Moroz, the speaker of parliament, is head of the Socialist Party of Ukraine. His first deputy, Oleksandr Tkachenko, is a member of the Agrarian Party of Ukraine. There are important distinctions among the three major left parties, which are reflected in the fact that each has formed its own parliamentary faction. On the whole, however, the left forms a coalition that can be expected to vote as a bloc. Recently, twenty members of the agrarian faction defected and together with seven other deputies formed a new group called "Agrarians for Reform," which has declared its support for strengthening statehood and economic reforms.

Ukraine's lawmakers have demonstrated a remarkable degree of consensus on major national issues.

The center—composed of the Center, Unity, Interregional Deputies' Group (MDH), and the Independents—does not lend itself to simple or precise definition. It is an amorphous and largely noncommittal grouping whose voting behavior varies significantly depending upon the specific issues. Overall, it may be characterized as liberal democratic in orientation, although the factions and even individual members within the factions differ among themselves in the degree to which they support economic reforms and favor integration with Russia, as well as how they view the "nationalists." The center bloc is crucial because it represents about 30 percent of the votes, but it remains fractured, unstable, and largely unpredictable in its voting behavior.

The national-democratic bloc consists of the Rukh, Statehood, and Reforms factions and accounts for approximately 23 percent of the deputies. The national democrats, whose main support comes from the western and central oblasts and Kiev, favor economic reforms but strongly oppose closer ties with either Russia or the CIS. The Reforms faction is the most disparate in composition and the most progressive in its political and

Table 3

Parliamentary Blocs and Factions (April 1995)

Leftists	165	(40.74 percent)
Communists	89	
Socialists	28	
Agrarians	48	
Centrists	122	(30.12 percent)
Center	33	
Unity	31	
MDH	30	
Independents	28	
National Democrats	94	(23.20 percent)
Reforms	36	
Rukh	29	
Statehood	29	

Source: *Kievskie vedomosti*, April 15, 1995.

economic orientation, favoring reforms over "nationalist" concerns. (See Table 3.)

Parliament has shown itself to be a national body rather than a collection of regional lobbyists. Although the Communists remain steadfast in their opposition to the policies of President Kuchma, Ukraine's lawmakers as a whole have demonstrated a remarkable degree of consensus on major national issues such as economic reform, ratification of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and Crimean separatism. In June 1995, parliament and the president averted a political crisis over the delineation of powers by signing a constitutional agreement that gave Kuchma broader powers to implement his economic and political reforms.

Kuchma's image as "pro-Russian and anti-nationalist" enjoyed a rather brief life span, a fact that has been sadly registered in Moscow. In his inaugural address, the new president promised to introduce legislation giving Russian the status of an "official language" while retaining the "state status" of Ukrainian, a pledge that has been quietly forgotten. At the time, Kuchma also maintained that Ukraine belonged to the "Eurasian world." In a July 3, 1995, interview in *Der Spiegel*, however, he characterized "Ukraine's return to Europe as a completely natural process." While Kuchma supports closer economic cooperation with Russia, there is little evidence of real economic integration with Ukraine's northern neighbor. Political and security links to Moscow and within the CIS remain, as before, out of the question. Nonetheless, Kuchma has made it clear that Ukraine's nonaligned status is untenable, and official Kiev has been increasingly more amenable to the eastward expansion of NATO. As early as October 1994, Kuchma laid to rest any lingering doubts about

For Further Reading

The *RFE/RL Research Report* (Munich), which ceased publication in mid-1994, and *The Ukrainian Weekly* (Jersey City, NJ) have provided a steady source of analysis and reliable information on contemporary Ukrainian affairs for more than a decade. Nation building and state building in Ukraine (and Russia) and Russian-Ukrainian relations have been the focus of Roman Szporluk's attention in his recent articles, which include: "Reflections on Ukraine after 1994: The Dilemmas of Nationhood," *The Harriman Review*, vol. 7, nos. 7-9

(March-May 1994); "After Empire: What?" *Daedalus*, vol. 123, no. 3 (Summer 1994): 21-39; and "Nation Building in Ukraine: Problems and Prospects," in John W. Blaney, ed., *The Successor States to the USSR* (Washington: Congressional Quarterly, 1995): 173-83. On various aspects of contemporary Ukraine, see also, among others, the recent publications of Dominique Arel, Marko Bojczun, Sherman Garnett, John Jaworsky, Adrian Karatnycky, Taras Kuzio, Jeremy Lester, David Marples, Alexander Motyl, and Andrew Wilson.

his intentions, telling a journalist from *Nezavisimaia gazeta* that he did not become Ukraine's president "in order to become a vassal of Russia." The president enjoys an unusually high popularity rating, registered at 58 percent at the beginning of 1995, and in a reversal of the pre-election situation he now has more supporters in the western than in the eastern region. The most recent nationwide poll showed that 61 percent of respondents felt that Kuchma had made progress in keeping his election promises and should be allowed more time to pursue his reform agenda.

Ukraine and Russia

The major problem impeding the normalization of Ukrainian-Russian relations is not Crimea, the disposition of the Black Sea Fleet, or the question of dual citizenship. Rather, it is Russia's continued inability to come fully to terms with the idea that Ukraine is an independent state, separate from Russia. This problem is deeply rooted in the historical relationship between Ukraine and Russia. Moscow's perspective on that relationship reflects its conviction that Ukraine, with the possible exception of its western regions, is historically an integral part of Russia—not only in the territorial sense, but culturally, linguistically, and spiritually.

Many Russian politicians and intellectuals find it difficult to imagine Ukraine outside Russia's embrace.

Although Moscow was one of the first world capitals officially to recognize Ukraine's independence, there is a pervasive conviction among Russia's political and cultural elites and within the general population that an independent Ukrainian state is an "historical absurdity." Such views are by no means confined to the extremes of the political spectrum. Many Russian politicians and

intellectuals who fully qualify as democrats and champions of market reforms find it inordinately difficult to imagine Ukraine outside Russia's embrace. A case in point is Boris Fedorov, President Yeltsin's former deputy prime minister and minister of finance, who is widely respected in the West as a principled reformer and democrat. In October 1994, Fedorov promised the readers of *Izvestiia* that, should he become prime minister, he would seek to amend the constitution in order to facilitate Russia's determination to "reunite with Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan." Sergei Shakhrai, leader of the centrist Russian Party of Unity and Accord (PRES) and a deputy prime minister in the current government, has formulated the concept of "temporarily separated peoples" of the former Soviet Union, which he would like to see adopted by Moscow in its relations with the newly independent states. One of Russia's most influential spokesmen on Russian-Ukrainian relations is Konstantin Zatulin, a leader of PRES and chair of the State Duma's Committee on CIS Affairs and Ties with Compatriots as well as its Committee on the Black Sea Fleet. Zatulin, who describes himself as an "admirer of empire," told *Nezavisimaia gazeta* on March 24, 1995, that he is skeptical about the need to recognize "the historically nonexistent borders of a historically nonexistent state," namely, Ukraine. Such attitudes are not likely to change radically in the near future, although progress is being made. At the end of 1994, *The Economist* reported that Russians are now becoming accustomed to the idea that the entire territory of the former Soviet Union is not "Russia," but that over 80 percent still considered Ukraine, Belarus, and northern Kazakhstan to be part of their "homeland."

There has also been visible progress in Ukrainian-Russian relations in several areas. Indeed, it might be argued that the very process of bilateral negotiations between Kiev and Moscow, which has been marked by constant shuffling between the two capitals throughout

the last year, plays a very important role in the normalization of relations by emphasizing that the two countries are, quite simply, different. In February 1995, the first deputy prime ministers of Russia and Ukraine initialed a long-awaited and controversial treaty on friendship, cooperation, and partnership after Moscow dropped its insistence on a clause providing for dual citizenship and compromised on Kiev's interpretation of what constitutes the inviolability of existing borders. At the same time, an agreement was reached on the principles of a declaration concerning the Black Sea Fleet and its basing in Crimea, an agreement made possible by Russia finally abandoning its demand that it, in effect, assume ownership of the port of Sevastopol. Still, the treaty has yet to be signed by both presidents and, more importantly, ratified by the respective parliaments. Ratification by the Russian side is highly unlikely. In the spring, the Russian and Ukrainian governments negotiated a restructuring of Ukraine's huge debt, estimated at over \$4 billion, on terms considered advantageous for Kiev. In fact, the deal

was facilitated by pressure exerted on Russia by Western creditors. Yeltsin and Kuchma met in Sochi in June and announced, once again, that the Black Sea Fleet question had finally been resolved. In essence, however, the agreement contains no fundamental departures from previous arrangements dating back to 1992, and the longstanding differences are subject to more talks.

"Some things remain immutable, namely, the psychological layer that we are unable to surmount," is how Dmitrii Riurikov, Yeltsin's foreign policy adviser, recently characterized the main problem in Russian-Ukrainian relations. That "psychological layer" manifests itself when Russian politicians cannot understand why their Ukrainian counterparts refuse to conduct relations with Moscow on the basis of a "special relationship and a special history." Instead, as Riurikov complained, they insist on proceeding from their own laws and from international legal norms. Presumably, time will facilitate the bridging of what remains a wide gap in mutual understanding.

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