

Ukrainian nationalism

Taras Kuzio

Introduction

Ukrainian lands were only united post World War Two after centuries of occupation by different powers. Independent Ukraine inherited a legacy of regional disparities and large areas with low national consciousness. These problems cannot be understood without taking into account Ukraine's long history of external domination and totalitarian subjugation (Motyl 1993). The lessons of Ukraine's previous failures to achieve independence also have a deep influence upon contemporary policy making.

Ukraine is attempting while establishing an independent state also to establish a democratic state and market economy. Yet, post-Soviet republics, such as Ukraine, lack the social building blocks necessary to ensure their early transformation into democratic systems and market economies (Shlomo 1992). It may be undoubtedly correct that, 'denouncing all nationalism as would-be fascism makes no more sense than denouncing all religion for ultimately leading to fanaticism' (Nodia 1992:17). Nevertheless, moderate and tolerant nationalism (which in Western Europe played a vital role in liberating society from monarchist absolutism and acted as the agent of liberation against communist totalitarianism in Central-Eastern Europe) is only possible in societies with stable democracies and economic prosperity.

All post-Soviet republics are only likely to experience this in the medium-long term. In the short term, nationalism in these republics is the only force capable of holding together an atomised society with no developed civil society and tradition of tolerance. Before we see an 'end to history' therefore, we are likely to see a 'return to history', which was interrupted by its frozen animation coupled with the revival of previously submerged rivalries and prejudices.

This essay will survey the sources of Ukrainian nationalism and the struggle to achieve independent statehood. It will cover the inherent weaknesses of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the lack of elites, regional divisions and fear of loss of territorial integrity. The survey will also deal with the impact of history on contemporary decision-making, the need to legitimise the newly

independent state with historical myths and symbols. Finally, the essay will survey the various historical drives to achieve independence, culminating in the establishment of an independent state in December 1991.

Regionalism

Ukraine inherited a large number of territories after World War Two from all of her Western neighbours as a consequence of the Yalta Agreement. Any border changes in Central and Eastern Europe therefore, would work to the disadvantage of Ukraine and open up a host of conflicting and contradictory claims. Ukraine has consequently been a strong proponent of maintaining the territorial integrity of states in Europe, and is unlikely to open up claims for lost 'ethnographic territories' or come to the military rescue of embattled Ukrainian national minorities beyond its borders (which exist in all of Ukraine's neighbours, except Hungary).

Ukraine contains a vast array of regions with different histories, cultural outlooks and levels of national consciousness. The lack of a separate state has prevented the creation of a uniform ethnos, united around a single idea where people are prepared to endure sacrifices in return for living in an independent state. Instead, many inhabitants of Eastern Ukraine look to independence only in terms of economic benefits (Tedstrom 1990). It is unlikely though, that economic gains (which, anyway, would be a long time in arriving) could provide the long term unity that is required to ensure loyalty to the newly independent state.

Prior to 1917-1918 Ukrainian territories were principally divided between the Austro-Hungarian and Tsarist Russian empires. Therefore, since the national revival of the late nineteenth century the Ukrainian national psyche was marked by a contradictory hierarchy of multiple loyalties traditionally found among subject peoples in multi-national empires. In the words of one author, 'In fact it is the persistence of a hierarchy of multiple loyalties among perhaps three-quarters of the Ukrainian population that has led to only a passive commitment on the part of Ukrainian society as a whole to the kinds of demands for national autonomy or independence that since the beginning of the Gorbachev era have been made with increasing frequency in the Baltic and Caucasian republics' (Magosci 1992:103). The hierarchy of multiple loyalties also served to moderate Ukrainian nationalism, making it less anti-Russian and unwilling (or unable) to attempt the creation of a narrowly ethnic state.

It is clear though that the newly independent Ukrainian state will only be successful in maintaining its control over its Eastern borderlands if the inhabitants of the region increasingly adopt a mutually exclusive identity associated with Ukraine. But this is not possible as long as the Ukrainian-

Russian border remains amorphous and Ukraine stays a member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The adoption of a mutually exclusive identity is likely in Eastern Ukraine in the medium-long term, where Russians have lived for centuries and have inter-married with Ukrainians.

The ethnically Russian population of the Crimea (most of whom only arrived after 1945) poses a more complicated and intractable problem which will defy a quick solution where the local Russian population identifies closely with Russia. The high concentration of Russian and Ukrainian military units, unsolved problem of the Tartars, politicised population and officer corps together with outside manipulation provide a lethal potential cocktail for a future conflict, particularly after the election of a pro-Russian secessionist, Yury Meshkov, as Crimean president in January 1994 (Kuzio 1994).

Although differences remain between Eastern and Western Ukraine these can be best understood in terms of two groups of Ukrainian ethnos at different stages of historical development. Russian-language speakers in Eastern Ukraine should not be confused with ethnic Russian immigrants who populated the Crimea, the Baltic republics, and Dniester Republic after 1945. In Eastern and Southern Ukraine the local identity is often described in pre-national terms—as "Slavs", "Donbassites" or "Odessites". The majority of Eastern Ukrainians did not possess negative views of Russians (in marked contrast to Western Ukrainians).

Lack of ruling élite

A re-occurring feature of the former USSR was the reassertion of national communism during periods of liberalisation. This tug between the centre and republics was not only a feature of the Gorbachev era, but had occurred most noticeably in the 1920s, 1960s and late 1980s. Put simply, the republican elites had tended to look towards a confederal arrangement while the centre and Russia preferred a federal structure. During thaws and decentralisation national communism inevitably reappeared (as personified by Mykola Skrypnyk in the 1920s, Petro Shelest in the 1960s and Leonid Kravchuk in the early 1990s in Ukraine) (Bilinsky 1978; Pelenski 1975).

In the pre-Gorbachev era, when the centre believed that the republican elites had gone further than what was regarded as permissible, they were either dismissed ("retired") or repressed. In Ukraine this occurred in 1971-1972 when the first secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine (CPU), Petro Shelest, was removed, "exiled" to Moscow and a wide-encompassing purge of the CPU, state apparatus and dissident counter elites took place. The Soviet system then re-centralised, repression (and stagnation) returned under Vladimir Shcherbytskyi's rule for seventeen years until 1989 (Browne 1971;

Kravchenko 1983).

The greater autonomy of existing local elites forced them to pursue their own interests, focussing attention on the unit they administered (Motyl 1990, Chap. 6). In these situations national communists always become nationalists, promoting cadres, language, culture and local economic control. This was the situation reached in 1990-1991 in the former USSR, in particular after the republican elections in March 1990. Gorbachev and other Soviet leaders in late 1990 realised that the dilemma the Soviet state had always been faced with had reoccurred, and they therefore clumsily attempted to use old-style repression to halt the pace of events in Winter 1990-1991.

Ukrainian national communists during this period, as their forerunners had done in the 1920s and 1960s, promoted a confederal arrangement for the USSR (whilst the dissident counter elites promoted full independence). In the March 1991 referendum for Gorbachev's "renewed federation" and Union Treaty Kravchuk, then chairman of the Ukrainian parliament, added a second republican question, which received a higher popular endorsement, which clearly defined Ukraine's intention only to belong to the USSR on the basis of a confederation of equal states without a centre.

The systemic crisis which engulfed the former USSR in the Gorbachev era also led to a condition of dual sovereignty. The election of both the All-Union Congress of People's Deputies in 1989 and the republican parliaments the following year produced a conflict of power, particularly over whose laws obtained priority, between individual republics and the centre. It also divided and stretched the loyalties of local communists between their allegiance towards their republic and/or the former Soviet Union. Some opted for full independence (Lithuania), while others opted for loyalty to both the republic and a confederal Union (Ukraine).

At first, the regional Communist elites, both within and outside the USSR, looked aghast at the reforms initiated by Gorbachev, attempting to insulate their citizens from its pernicious influences. But the attack upon the ruling ideology, the collapse in the infallibility of the centre and growing economic crisis led to a gradual abandoning of the centre by the regional elites. In addition the collapse in ideological legitimacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and imperial rule produced an empty ideological void.

The area of autonomy of regional elites dramatically increased during this systemic crisis of the Gorbachev era and its de-centralising effects. After the implosion of the Union in August 1991 after the failed *coup d'état* they stepped into the power vacuum and took over the reins of power. Undoubted-

ly, some of the Communists who voted for Ukrainian independence on 24 August 1991 did so less out of patriotic conviction but in the belief that, in doing so, they would insulate their continued rule in the republic from the subversive influence of anti-communism and democratisation then emanating from Moscow.

Therefore, it is highly doubtful if Ukraine could have declared independence and consolidated her independence in 1991-1992 in such a peaceful manner without the defection of a substantial section of the ruling class of the *ancien régime* in the republic—national communists. After the failed August 1991 *coup d'état* the interests of national communists and nationalists coincided and led to the declaration of independence (Motyl 1992:32-33, 39).

This process was similar to that which occurred in Africa: 'when the colonial rulers had run out of indigenous collaborators they either chose to leave or were compelled to go. Their nationalist opponents ... sooner or later succeeded in detaching the indigenous political elements from the colonial regime until they eventually formed a united front of collaboration against it' (Beissinger 1992:157). Where there is greatest popular mobilisation (in the case of the former USSR this was in the Baltic republics and the Trans-Caucasus) there was greatest detachment of the elites from the centre. Central Asia had no tradition of dissident counter elites (former political prisoners played a crucial role in the early Gorbachev years in organising counter elites and mobilising the population, which was lacking in Central Asia). Central Asia also lacked mass mobilisation and therefore, the native elites were not detached, remaining pro-Russian. Ukraine lay between these two extreme poles (Baltic republics/ Trans-Caucasus, on the one hand, and Central Asia, on the other,) of elite detachment.

Ukrainian independence was therefore, by definition forced to become the work of two elite groups in an, at times, uneasy alliance. The initial stages in the early Gorbachev era involved a revolt from below led by the cultural intelligentsia and the dissidents of the pre-Gorbachev era. But this was insufficient to achieve power and independence in Ukraine. Nationalist action covering the entire republic proved to be impossible, was late in appearance and never encompassed a majority of the population (unlike in the Baltic republics and the Trans-Caucasus). All opinion polls conducted in 1990-1994, together with the December 1991 presidential elections in Ukraine, have consistently shown that nationalist and democratic groups command only a maximum of one third of the electorate.

Only nationalism could provide an alternative set of myths and symbols to establish a successor to the now discredited Soviet and Marxist-Leninist legacy

and hold together an atomised society, although because of the hierarchy of multiple loyalties found in Ukraine this nationalism was inevitably moderate. After all, there could no longer be any Soviet Union if there was no longer any 'Soviet people'. Nationalism is tailor-made for regional elites to legitimise their own aspirations to sovereignty at a time of the disintegration of an empire. In addition, since Ukraine's secession from the former USSR president Kravchuk has been relatively successful in institutionalising many of his former opponents (now contemporary allies) within the growing apparatus of the newly independent state. The majority of former Communists, and one time opponents of independence, have been channelled into new business structures and the institutions of the newly independent state (for example, the presidential apparatus and diplomatic service).

Back to the future

No other colonial power, other than the former USSR, ever attempted to exercise such comprehensive control over the historical ideas of its subject peoples (Tillet 1964 & 1969). Historical memory is the most important element in social identity, and since the Stalin era the Soviet authorities launched a wide-ranging attempt to destroy the collective memories of its peoples. By regulating the flow of information from the past, and depriving a nationality of a political, cultural and economic separate identity in the present, the Soviet authorities hoped to ensure the inability of its subject peoples to independently steer themselves in the future.

This preoccupation of successive Russian and Soviet governments, in particular with regard to its two East Slav neighbours, Ukraine and Belarus, relates to a major issue in Russian politics—national identity, relations of the state to society and Russian history. Moreover, Ukraine has, and continues to play, a pivotal role in Russia's confrontation with itself (Solchanyk 1992a, 1992b). The former Congress of Russian People's Deputies called the declaration of Ukrainian independence the 'severance of blood relations and unity' and a 'national catastrophe'.

The great power status of Tsarist Russia or the former Soviet Union was only possible with Ukrainian dependence. Ukraine, after all, provided the former Soviet Union with its European identity as a great Eurasian power. The Ukrainian and Belorussian lands were regarded not as conquered territory under the Tsars, but as part of their patrimony, inherited as the rightful heirs to the mediaeval East Slavic state of Kiev Rus'. Russian political thought therefore, until the present day, has been singly unable to accept Ukrainian claims to separate statehood, a factor which distinguishes Russian and Soviet perceptions of Ukraine from those towards other republics of the former USSR (apart from Belarus).

The future interpretation of history is selectively retraced, a part is appropriated whilst another is rejected. In the words of one author, 'By and large, the historian will get the kind of facts he wants. History means interpretation' and the, 'historian is engaged on a continuous process of moulding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts' (Carr 1973:23,29). Ukraine's *de facto* rebellion against the Tsarist and Soviet view of history and Ukrainian-Russian relations could not but disturb the false and comfortable prism through which Russians and Ukrainians had come to look upon one another. Historians in Ukraine are both concentrating on the most tragic periods of history (the so-called "blank spots"), as well as adopting and republishing emigre historians (the majority of whom are Western Ukrainian and anti-Russian). Both of these factors will colour Ukrainian perceptions of their neighbours and, in particular, their Tsarist Russian and Soviet past.

A good example of this restructuring of history to suit current Ukrainian nation and state-building processes can be related to the Zaporozhian Cossacks who have become the focus for national self identification, the study of which was prevented for the majority of the Soviet period. Petro Shelest, the national communist and former first secretary of the CPU, was accused, among other things, of glorifying the Zaporozhian Cossacks when he was deposed by Moscow in 1971.

The Zaporozhian Cossacks are portrayed, in contrast to Polish Oligarchy and Muscovite Autocracy, as standing for egalitarianism, social grievances, populism, democratic brotherhood and Ukrainian national rights. The Ukrainian media has even debated changing the title of head of state from President to 'Hetman' (the traditional title of head of the Cossacks) (Sysyn 1991). The Cossack historical myth has also been utilised to lay earlier claims to territories in Southern and Eastern Ukraine, which they inhabited from the sixteenth centuries, but which are now Russified and the subject of renewed Russian territorial claims .

The impact of the failure to establish an independent state in 1917-1921 is reflected in the influence of history upon contemporary Ukrainian policy making. The mistakes of the independent Ukrainian government in 1918 (its failure to build armed forces and its neglect of domestic stability and unity) play a significant role in independent Ukraine's contemporary security thinking. In the words of Ukraine's Foreign Minister, Anatoly Zlenko, 'The decision to set up Ukrainian armed forces springs not from any aggressive intent but from our tragic history... At the beginning of this century, Ukraine lost her independence because she had declined to maintain her own army. Bitter experience has taught us not to repeat that mistake' (Zlenko 1992:39).

In addition, the widespread feeling of being surrounded by 'hostile forces' who harbour territorial claims has left an indelible mark upon the Ukrainian national psyche which has created mistrust, suspicion and an exaggerated threat perception. However, this heightened fear of losing territory to a foreign predator is likely to ensure strong Ukrainian support for the maintenance of the territorial integrity of states. Ukrainian authors often argued that Ukraine is the only country in the World where all of its neighbours harbour pretensions against its territory. Of all European states Ukraine gained the most in terms of territory in 1945; hanging on to these therefore, remains a primary task of any Kiev government.

Struggle for independence

The repression of Ukrainian national revivals in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries prevented the conclusion of the nation-building processes successfully completed in Western Europe centuries before. Hence, the processes afoot today in Ukraine are akin to those in many post-colonial countries where the state is playing a primary role in completing the unfinished process of nation-building.

Ukrainians trace their roots to three separate periods of independence or drives for independence. Between the eighth and the thirteenth centuries Kiev ruled a large territory called Rus' (not to be confused with "Russia", an eighteenth century term introduced by Peter the Great) which encompassed most of what was later the European USSR. In the sixteenth-eighteenth centuries the Zaporozhian Cossacks established a number of independent and autonomous states within Central and Eastern Ukraine. But by the early twentieth century predominantly Ukrainian territories were divided between Tsarist Russia (Central and Eastern Ukraine), Austria (Galicia, Northern Bukovina) and Hungary (Trans-Carpathia).

After the collapse of the Tsarist Russian and Austrian-Hungarian empires in 1917-1918 various governments attempted to establish an independent state in Western and Eastern Ukraine combining the different regions which had been occupied by foreign powers. During the inter-war period though, Ukrainian territories remained divided between Soviet Russia, Poland, Romania and Czechoslovakia. After the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1938 the short-lived Trans-Carpathian-Ukrainian state was formed, but then occupied by Hungarian forces between 1939-1944.

After the conclusion of World War Two the USSR incorporated the bulk of Ukrainian territories within the Ukrainian SSR, apart from small enclaves in Poland, Slovakia and Romania. This was the first time since the Middle Ages that the bulk of Ukrainian territories were included within one state (albeit still

within the larger Soviet empire). Western Ukrainian territories came under Soviet Russian control for the first time in its history.

The Western Ukrainian region's ten million population, 5.4 million of whom live in Galicia, plays a disproportionate role to its small size within the republic. By the onset of World War One Galician Ukrainians living in the Austrian-Hungarian empire had enjoyed education in their mother tongue for over 150 years, the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic (Uniate) Church was legalised, Ukrainian newspapers, and co-operative and cultural societies flourished. Ukrainians participated in Austrian politics after 1848 with their own political parties, and charitable, sports, women's and mutual assistance organisations evolved. During World War One they formed their own separate armed formations within the Austrian-Hungarian army. Galicians Ukrainians therefore, remained the Austro-Hungarians 'loyal Tyroleans in the East' until 1918 (Rudnytsky 1967).

After the 1921 Treaty of Riga the majority of Ukrainian territories were divided between Poland and Soviet Russia. The largest minority in inter-war Poland were the seven million Ukrainians who, although suffering various types of relatively mild discrimination, nevertheless, organised their communities on a high level, maintaining the majority of the advances made by them during Austrian rule (Lewandowski 1982). The initial occupation by Soviet forces of Western Ukraine in 1939-1941 led to mass deportations and wide-scale massacres of political prisoners, which, at first, warned the local population to the German invaders as well as turning the bulk of the population against Soviet rule (Gross 1988; Sword 1991). From 1942 Western Ukraine experienced a fierce partisan struggle by the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) until the early 1950s against Soviet power, similar to those waged by nationalist partisans in the three Baltic republics (Armstrong 1980).

The near total destruction of the Jewish community and fleeing of Germans during and after World War Two, as well as the subsequent deportation of most Poles in 1945-1947, led to the domination of the Ukrainian ethnic element in urban centres in Western Ukraine. This was in marked contrast to urban centres in the Eastern regions of the republic which were Russian-speaking.

The Tsarist Russian army destroyed the Ukrainian Catholic Church in Galicia in 1915, a feat duly repeated by the Soviet army three decades later. Although the Ukrainian Catholic Church was again dissolved in 1946 it continued to operate clandestinely and quickly reasserted itself in the Gorbachev era as a focal point for nationalist revival in Western Ukraine,

similar to the role it played in Lithuania and Poland.

In the Gorbachev and post-Soviet eras the combination of these nationalist historical myths and symbols, together with widespread and publicised accounts of, and physical evidence of, Stalinist repression have all served to cement the already high degree of national consciousness in Western Ukraine (Marples 1992). But the historical myths and traditions of the Ukrainian Sich Sharpshooters (a Ukrainian unit in the Austrian-Hungarian army), OUN-UPA and especially the Galician Waffen SS division (a Ukrainian infantry unit which fought against the Soviet army on the German side) are not necessarily appealing to Eastern Ukrainians, many of whom fought in the Soviet armed forces.

In contrast, Ukrainians living in the Tsarist Russian empire had no publications of their own until 1905, the Ukrainian language was banned in two separate edicts in 1863 and 1876. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church was absorbed into the Russian Orthodox Church in the late seventeenth century, only reemerging briefly in the 1920s and then again in the Gorbachev era (Rudnytsky 1977).

Therefore, the Orthodox Church in Central and Eastern Ukraine has never played a role equivalent to that of the Catholic Church in Western Ukraine. In independent Ukraine it is deeply divided between two factions, one of which still retains its loyalty to the Moscow Patriarchate. The unification of the pro-Ukrainian branches of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine in June 1992 (which undoubtedly occurred with the active support of the authorities) ended three centuries of Russian control over Ukrainian religious affairs.

The significance of historical myths and symbols to the newly independent state could be ascertained from the change in title of the head of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) at the October 1993 Synod. Henceforth the head of the Church would be called Patriarch of Kiev and All Rus-Ukraine, thereby claiming a direct lineage from the mediaeval state of Kiev Rus' (thus denying Moscow any lineage and making the Ukrainian Church the 'elder brother')¹. Nearly 50 per cent of religious believers in Ukraine identify with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kiev Patriarchate) whereas only 16 per cent identify with the Russian Orthodox Church and its Ukrainian ally, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

In 1918 the Central Rada in Kiev declared independence from the disintegrating Russian empire, and later that year united with Western Ukrainian territories which became stateless as a result of the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian empire. A short Ukrainian-Polish war ensued for control of

Eastern Galicia. Ukrainian central control over these territories was never certain and depended on the government in power. The Hetmanate monarchy which ruled Ukraine for a short period in 1918 was supported by the Central Powers after the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. On the whole, Ukrainian territories were the subject of contest and armed struggle from all sides—White Russians, Bolsheviks, Romanians (in Bessarabia and Bukovina), Poles (in Galicia and Volyn) and Hungary (in Trans-Carpathia).

The Ukrainian struggle for independence between 1918-1921 and the hostility that the Bolsheviks encountered in the rural areas of Ukraine forced Moscow to allow some degree of autonomy during the 1920s. This produced a national revival in culture, rapid Ukrainianisation of urban areas and the working classes, the growth of a national communist elite and the revival of the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (Krawchenko 1980; Liber 1992).

By the early 1930s, with the consolidation of Joseph Stalin's rule in the USSR, these processes were abruptly halted. The Great Terror and artificial famine in the 1930s in Eastern Ukraine, which claimed an estimated seven million lives, inflicted additional damage to the Eastern Ukrainian ethnos. Cities and towns in Eastern Ukraine became bastions of a Russian-speaking population². The artificial famine has evolved into Ukraine's claim to its own holocaust, making it on a par with that experienced by Jews and Armenians. Although the authorities have treaded cautiously in identifying the guilty party for the Ukrainian holocaust-famine, most notably in the sixtieth anniversary in September 1993, nevertheless in the medium term it will undoubtedly negatively influence relations with Russia.

From Soviet to Independent Ukraine

Although Mikhail Gorbachev became leader of the former USSR in 1985 the Brezhnevite protégé and conservative, Volodymyr Shcherbytskyi, continued to rule Ukraine as CPU first secretary for an additional four years. This relatively long Brezhnev era in Ukraine (1972-1989) had a number of profound and long term effects upon the republic. Firstly, the depth of democratisation did not penetrate the mass media (particularly state television and radio). Civil society is largely absent (except in Western Ukraine) and a multi-party system only began to gradually evolve in 1990-1991 after parliamentary politics developed in the republic.

Secondly, the conservatism of the Brezhnev era deeply entrenched the Communist Party apparatus in Ukraine. Leonid Brezhnev maintained control in the Soviet republics by allowing a measure of local autonomy and the indigenisation of local Communist Parties, which, by the 1980's, had

become formidable machines, especially in large republics such as Ukraine and Uzbekistan. This produced wide-scale corruption, clannish ties and nepotism. By the eve of the Gorbachev era the main motive for joining the CPU was no longer ideological and it had become an umbrella organisation uniting a wide range of views and ambitions.

Thirdly, the campaign in the Brezhnev era to create one East Slavic bloc, in response to the threat posed to Russian hegemony by the high Central Asian birth rates, led to a more wide scale programme of russification and denationalisation in Ukraine and Belarus (Solchanyk 1983). This both sharply decreased the level of national consciousness and made both republics deeply unprepared to take full advantage of the Gorbachev thaw. In the Belarusian case this produced a republic which, like Central Asia, feels uneasy about independence while for the Ukrainian political elite this led to an insecurity complex vis-à-vis Russia and a mixture of fear and mistrust of the ultimate loyalty of their non-Ukrainian population. As one author has pointed out, 'Politically weak states will be particularly vulnerable to, and therefore particularly sensitive to, political threats, regardless of their military strength' (Buzan 1986:14).

The late 'retirement' of the Brezhnevite protégé, Vladimir Shcherbytskyi, in September 1989 ensured that the Gorbachev thaw lasted, in effect, only two years in Ukraine. Hence, the policies of glasnost, perestroika and democratisation merely skimmed the surface of public life in the republic. Democratisation of the state apparatus and media only took place in the three oblasts of Galician Western Ukraine and the city of Kiev, where democrats won resounding victories in the March 1990 republican elections. The Democratic Bloc won a quarter of the seats in parliament, although their influence has been greater than this figure suggests (Szporluk 1990). All of these factors have contributed to the slow pace in political and economic reform in independent Ukraine.

The period 1988-1991 experienced a wide mobilisation of ecological, religious, democratic, historical, language and nationalist groups and movements in their common hostility towards the CPU and Moscow's domination of the republic³. Most mainstream groups, such as the Ukrainian Popular Movement (Rukh) and the Ukrainian Helsinki Union, initially adopted a cautious approach towards independence because of their recognition of Eastern Ukraine's low national consciousness. They therefore, originally only pushed for 'sovereignty' or the transformation of the USSR into a loose 'confederation of sovereign republics'. Only in Western Ukraine did overtly nationalistic, maximalist groups emerge in late 1989 to champion the pro-independence course. All Ukrainian opposition groups championed national

minority rights (except the extreme right), rejecting the nationalist slogan of 'Ukraine for the Ukrainians!'

By early 1990 though, all opposition groups had become radicalised to such an extent that their programmes had changed from being in 'support of perestroika' and 'sovereignty' to complete secession from the USSR. Public pressure in the form of strikes, demonstrations and pickets, coupled with an active Democratic Bloc in the newly elected parliament, forced through a radical Declaration of Sovereignty in July 1990. The growth of a multi-party system after April 1990 also served to increase and broaden the numbers in favour of secession.

It is at this stage that Leonid Kravchuk became chairman of the Ukrainian parliament. His predecessor, Volodymyr Ivashko, who had combined both the posts of parliamentary chairman and first secretary of the CPU, made a poor career move by leaving Kiev for a new post in Moscow as Mikhail Gorbachev's deputy in the central committee of the CPSU.

Between the August Declaration of Independence and the December 1991 presidential elections and independence referendum both Gorbachev and Yeltsin continued to try and maintain Ukraine within the former USSR. But the referendum produced an overwhelming majority of 90 per cent in favour of independence, even in regions with large concentrations of Russians, such as Eastern Ukraine. Predictably, the lowest support for independence was in the Crimea with 54 per cent, and the highest in Western Ukraine (nearly 100 per cent). The majority of ethnic minorities voted for independence.

But this high vote for independence has to be treated with caution. Firstly, it was only obtained by coopting the *ancien régime* to the independence cause at the price of 'business as usual' (no changes in cadres and no reform). Secondly, a large number of independence votes were for socioeconomic, and not patriotic, motives.

Of the six presidential candidates only one represented the *ancien régime*, Leonid Kravchuk, who obtained over sixty per cent of the vote. The election of Kravchuk reflected both Ukraine's overall low level of national consciousness, the conservatism and cautiousness of the electorate and the entrenchment of the *ancien régime* (including control of the media). The other five presidential candidates were divided among non-communist groups and only Viacheslav Chornovil, the Rukh candidate and former political prisoner, was able to achieve a relatively high vote of over twenty per cent, coming second place and representing the only really serious challenge to Kravchuk.

At the Minsk summit of Belarus, Ukraine and Russia on 7-8 December 1991 Yeltsin brought a proposal from Gorbachev where he finally accepted that the only way of keeping Ukraine within the Soviet Union was by its conversion into a confederation of sovereign states. Although this may have been appealing to Kravchuk prior to the August *coup d'état* (but not to the nationalists) it was a non-starter after the ninety per cent independence referendum results. Instead of a confederation Kravchuk proposed the creation of a Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the annulment of the 1922 Union Treaty establishing the USSR.

Thus the combination of the failure of the August *coup d'état* at the hands of Boris Yeltsin and the Ukrainian vote for independence led to the disintegration of the former USSR and its replacement by the CIS. Both Russia and Ukraine had different objectives in establishing the CIS, although both were interested in removing the Soviet centre and Gorbachev. These differing objectives were to create confusion and conflict among CIS members, in particular between Russia and Ukraine, its two largest and most important members.

Independent Ukraine has remained a member of the CIS due to the deepening economic crisis, but has refused to join its political-military structures (unlike its northern neighbour, Belarus). Yet, in 1992 the Ukrainian leaders only regarded the CIS as a transitional structure to help facilitate the peaceful disintegration of the former USSR. Ukraine will continue to be tugged in different directions by those who oppose greater CIS integration and those who favour a reorientation to the West and Central Europe.

Ukraine, together with the Baltic republics, has been in the forefront to establish the symbols of statehood, including armed forces and diplomatic representation abroad. Independence, despite the severity of the economic crisis, retains majority support in Kiev and Western-Central Ukraine. But support for Ukrainian independence in the Crimea and Eastern Ukrainian oblasts, such as Donetsk, is slipping and has probably dropped below the 50 per cent mark. It is in these areas that Ukraine is again threatened by regional separatism and being sucked back under CIS/Russian domination.

Conclusion

This essay has surveyed the sources, strengths and weaknesses of Ukrainian nationalism. Although Ukraine lacks the high degree of national consciousness which exists in the Baltic and Trans-Caucasian republics nevertheless it has a strong record (unlike Belarus) of striving to achieve independent statehood. The failure to achieve statehood on numerous, previous occasions has left a profound mark on the current elite who are sensitive to the charge

that they may again sign away Ukraine's independence⁴. In addition, Ukrainian nationalism is permeated by a deep feeling of historical injustice accorded by foreign powers to a potentially large and important country. The chance to achieve Ukrainian 'greatness' as a large and strategically important country, which was prevented in the past from becoming reality, cannot therefore be allowed to be lost again (possibly for the last time).

Although the Ukrainian nationalist movement ensured a high degree of dissent during the Soviet era (Ukrainians were the largest proportion of prisoner's of conscience in the Gulag) it possessed some fundamental weaknesses. National communism has a long tradition in Ukraine and therefore its reappearance in 1990-1991 is not surprising. The drive to independence during the second half of 1991 proved to be unstoppable precisely because of the alliance of these national communists with nationalists. But this alliance is both a strength and weakness of Ukrainian nationalism. Its weakness lies in the "price" that independent Ukraine is forced to pay in order to bring on board the *ancien régime* (corruption, nepotism, slow or lack of reform, lip-service to democratisation and market economic reform).

The other weakness of Ukrainian nationalism is regionalism. Independent Ukraine will continue to have a problem with its Eastern *oblasts* and the Crimea that will have to be balanced very carefully by any Ukrainian leadership. Movement too far in either direction (reintegration with Russia or secession from the CIS) could inflame passions among mutually antagonistic groups that could have far reaching ramifications for independent Ukraine.

The future direction of Ukrainian nationalism is also likely to be influenced by domestic developments within Russia where nationalism is reasserting itself. Russia finds it difficult, if not impossible at this early stage, to accept the 'loss' of Ukraine (Solchanyk 1993). Territorial pretensions, particularly towards the Crimea, have been harboured by the entire political spectrum within Russia. Therefore, independent Ukraine will be firmly within the sights of any future Russian nationalist leadership. If that were to happen it would undoubtedly provoke a counter reaction in Ukraine which could have far reaching regional consequences.

The March-April 1994 parliamentary elections reflected the lingering strength of communism, particularly in regions with large Russian minorities, such as the Donbas and Crimean republic. In those regions, nostalgia for reunification with Russia in a new Union is seen as a way out of the current crisis and a return to happier times. In both of these areas 'opinion polls' (which do not have legal ramifications as would have been the case if referenda had been allowed by Kiev) were held simultaneously on election

day. These 'opinion polls' produced large support for federalism, dual state languages (Russian-Ukrainian) and full integration within Russia in the CIS along lines undertaken by Belarus.

These regionalistic strains, which will undoubtedly be given sustenance by an increasingly hegemonic Russian neighbour as the Yeltsin-era draws to a close, are likely to add great strains on the coherence of the Ukrainian state, its ability to introduce lasting and effective reforms as well as its geopolitical orientation. Ultimately, these domestic and foreign pressures will place additional pressure on the very *raison d'être* of the Ukrainian national idea itself and Ukrainian nationalism.

Notes

¹ Ironically, the anti-communist Russian Orthodox Church in exile, founded after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, also argues that the centre of the Russian Orthodox Church should be in Kiev. See Jaroslaw Martyniuk, 'The State of the Orthodox Church in Ukraine', *RFE/RL Research Report*, vol.3, no.7 (18 February 1994).

² See various essays on the role of cities in Ukrainian history in Ivan L. Rudnytsky (ed.), *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1981.

³ On the Gorbachev period see Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine. Perestroika to Independence*, London, The Macmillan Press, 1994; and two articles by David Marples, 'The Prospects for an Independent Ukraine', RL 173/90, *Report on the USSR*, 13 April 1990 and 'The Case for Ukrainian Sovereignty', RL 465/90, *Report on the USSR*, 9 November 1990.

⁴ In 1654 Ukraine signed the Treaty of Periaslav with Muscovy (Russia) which guaranteed Ukrainian autonomy. This was slowly disbanded and by the second half of the eighteenth century Ukraine was reduced to a handful of Tsarist *gubernia* (provinces). On the 'Periaslav' complex see John Morrison, 'Pereyaslav and after: the Russian-Ukrainian relationship', *International Affairs*, vol.69, no.4 (October 1993), pp. 677-704.

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