National Identity in Ukraine: History and Politics

Alexei I. Miller

Alexei I. Miller, Doctor of History
European University at Saint-Petersburg, Russia
Department of History
Professor;
Center for the Study of Cultural Memory and Symbolic Politics
Research Director;
Institute for Scientific Information in Humanities, (INION), Russian Academy of Sciences
Leading Research Fellow

ORCID: 0000-0001-8139-0976
ResearcherID: Z-1451-2019
Scopus AuthorID: 56321369000

E-mail: amiller@eu.spb.ru
Tel.: +7 (812) 386-7634
Address: 6/1A Gagarinskaya Str., St. Petersburg 191187, Russia

Abstract
This article studies the historical background that determined the formation of the specific features of Ukrainian, Little Russian, and Russian identities starting from the late 17th century to the present day. It traces the evolution of Ukrainian identity from the notion of "a single Slavic-Russian people" to the current radicalization and consolidation of anti-Russian sentiment as its dominant element. At different stages of nation-building, intellectual elites molded different constructs of this identity. At times these constructs existed in parallel and independently of each other, and at other times they confronted one another. The notion of a single people (or different peoples) constantly changed. The article highlights the key

distinctions of nation-building, which amid the current information war are in the shadows or deliberately ignored, but without which the understanding of the modern Ukrainian national identity will be incomplete. The current military-political crisis may result in the rejection of Ukrainians by Russian society as aliens, which can have a serious impact on Russian national identity.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, Little Russia, historical memory policy, national identity, anti-Russia sentiment, identity-making, othering.

I have discussed the formation of national identities in Eastern Europe, including in this journal, many times (Miller, 2008; 2017). But there are two reasons to do this again. Firstly, it is time to analyze in earnest how the events unfolding after February 24, 2022, may impact identity-building in Ukraine and Russia. There is no doubt that the impact will be quite significant. Secondly, it is time to rethink some of the theses regarding the previous stages of complex and long-term, one might say endless, processes. As is always the case with military conflicts, the ingoing information war destroys, or at least sharply reduces, the space for nuanced judgments and assessments. But it is such judgments and such space that must be defended at all costs.

THE IDEA OF "ONE PEOPLE"

In the 1670s, shortly after the left bank of the Dnieper came under the control of the Moscow Tsardom following Bohdan Khmelnitsky's uprising and the war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, *The Synopsis* was written in the Kiev Pechersk Lavra. For a century and a half, until the beginning of the 19th century, this book remained the main historical work for the Russian reading public. Its authors wrote about a single Slavic-Russian people, of which both Little Russians and Great Russians were part (Plokhy and Sysyn, 2005). The terms 'Little Russia' and 'Great Russia' denoted "small," meaning the "original," and "great," meaning the "extended," parts of a whole. In other words, if there was any hierarchy between these concepts, then 'little' meaning "original" was higher.

The thesis about "a single Slavic-Russian people" reflected, above all, the writers' own interests as both church hierarchs and the Cossack leaders had to fit into the corresponding structures of the Tsardom of Muscovy and later (from 1721) into Peter the Great's Russian Empire. It was much more convenient, of course, to do so as one people. The churchmen did this faster and in the middle of the 18th century they made up about half of the top hierarchs in the Moscow Patriarchate. The Cossack leaders needed more time. They remembered the liberties of the Cossack Hetmanate, but no one rebelled against its abolition by Catherine the Great. In both the 18th and 19th centuries, the traditionalist regional identity of the Cossack elite was very far from the future Ukrainian national identity and clearly did not harbor a feeling of "Ukrainian national solidarity" with buckwheat-growing peasants.

In the 17th century, the Tsardom of Muscovy used the narrative of Orthodox unity as a trump card in a big game that was beginning in the region. Naturally, not everyone liked the idea of "one people." If you are a church bishop in Moscow and forced to accept graduates from the Kiev-Mohyla Academy (as more educated), you will naturally resist. You will also remember who helped Peter the Great abolish the patriarchate, because Stefan Yavorsky, a native of Lvov, had served as the locum tenens of the patriarchal throne, and another prominent close associate of the Russian tsar, Theophan Prokopovych, was a graduate of the Kiev-Mohyla Academy. A Russian nobleman did not need extra men as members of their corporation. Moreover, from the point of view of the Russian nobleman (who was "recorded in the books"), Cossack leaders were not equal, because almost none of them had documents and had not been given the status of the Polish gentry in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Catherine the Great quite deliberately allowed the mass forgery of papers by Cossack *starshyna* so that more than twenty thousand Cossack officers could gain the status of aristocracy in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Looking at how Russia was smashing the Ottoman Empire and dividing the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, looking at the rights the nobility had received under *The Charter to the Gentry,* Cossack leaders sincerely

anathemized Mazepa in churches as a traitor and no longer had any doubts as to which of the big players they should be loyal to.

This was the beginning of a long discussion on whether Great and Little Russians were one people or not, and what this meant. This discussion going on for almost three and a half centuries has involved different forces with different interests, and the meaning they put into the notion of a single (or not a single) people changes all the time.

In the 19th century, the concept of "one people" began to be actively discussed at a time when the empire's elites came to the conclusion that the idea of the Nation, as formulated by Abbé Sieyès during the French Revolution, was too strong to be ignored. A series of events—from the Napoleonic Wars, when nationalist approaches were used for the first time to mobilize resistance against the invading enemy, to the Polish uprising of 1830-1831, when the Sejm, acting on behalf of the nation, deprived Nicholas I of the Polish crown—testified to this too convincingly. In the *Russkaya Pravda* constitutional project (written in 1823-1824 in the Second Army stationed in Ukraine), the Decembrists said that all the differences between the Russian people should be eliminated in language and in life: instead of Little Russians, Belarusians, and Great Russians there should only be Russians. "All Tribes Should Be Merged into One People" is the name of the relevant section in the Decembrists' program.

After the Polish uprising of 1830-1831, the empire no longer viewed the Polish gentry as a loyal partner for governing its western provinces. The Poles had lost the autonomy of the Kingdom of Poland, and so the empire stopped considering peasants in the Western Krai (Province) not only economic (this continued along with serfdom until the 1860s), but also cultural property of the Polish gentry. The questions of public education in the Western Krai were taken away from the Polish nobility. This raised the need to determine the language of teaching, which had been Polish before that by default. The Polish University of Vilna (Vilnius) was closed, and the University of Kiev was established in 1834 instead, with teaching conducted in Russian. It is there that the Cyril and Methodius Society, the first association of people who professed views that can be considered modern ethnic Ukrainian nationalism,

would emerge about a decade later. But it must be remembered that members of the society appeared in Kiev as "de-Polonizers."

Minister of Public Education Sergei Uvarov supported the narrative of Russian history that revised Nikolai Karamzin's views. After all, when Karamzin wrote his *History of the Russian State*, nation was secondary to him. When, in 1819, Karamzin objected to Emperor Alexander I's plans to incorporate Podolia and Volhynia into the Kingdom of Poland, he used all possible arguments to make his point, except one that would prevail twenty years later, namely that the peasants there were not Poles, but Little Russians (Karamzin, 2002). This is the central moment for historian Nikolai Ustryalov, who won the prize for the best scheme of Russian history for textbooks during Uvarov's term of office. He wrote that Russian history was more than the history of the state, that a significant part of the Russian people had lived under the oppression of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and that the present differences between different branches of the Russian people were caused primarily by that oppression. Work began at the same time, from archival research to archaeological excavations, to prove that Kiev and the lands along the Dnieper were Russian, not Polish. For some, the annals and documents published as part of those efforts, and the excavated foundation of the Church of the Tithes would later become a symbol indicating that these lands were Russian, for others it would be the proof that they were Ukrainian (Tolochko, 2012).

It should be noted that the concept of unity between different parts of one people was characteristic of all nationalist constructs of that time. When the Germans said that the differences between the Saxons, Hanoverians and Bavarians were secondary, when they argued that the Alsatians, in principle, were Germans, and if there was any difference between them at all, it was only because of the centuries-old French yoke, they did absolutely the same—they united the German tribes into a nation.

This is the scheme of Russian history that was shared by all major Russian historians in the second half of the 19th century: there are Russians who lived in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and

then came under Poland's rule after the Polish-Lithuanian union, and there are Russians who lived in Moscow, and those who lived in Veliky Novgorod, and all of them have their own political and cultural traditions, but their differences are less significant than their commonness. However, historian Nikolai Kostomarov, one of the members of the Cyril and Methodius Society, wrote about Southern and Northern Russia, arguing that the differences between them were so deep and significant that they gave reason to consider Southern Russia a separate nation.

The question the imperial authorities had to solve in the middle of the 19th century was which way to go. The French way—destroying all differences completely—is generally extremist: only the French used it once and succeeded, albeit partly (Weber, 1976). Another way was chartered by the Germans, with their different tribes and local dialects still existing as part of the common *Hochdeutsch*. As a matter of fact, the first phrase in the Weimar Constitution of 1919 speaks of "the German people, united in its tribes." The authorities of the Russian Empire did not make a choice, hesitating all the time between repressions and concessions to the elites in Little Russia.

Just as London invited the Scots to rule the British Empire together, which made the 19th-century Scots its loyal servants, St. Petersburg, too, called upon the Little Russians—Cossack leaders and church dignitaries—to rule the Russian Empire. After the 1917 revolution, prominent Eurasianist and linguist Nikolai Trubetskoy tried to convince (but without success) Ukrainian emigrants that it would be stupid for them to give up the heritage of the Russian Empire, because their contribution to its creation was even bigger than that of the Moscow elites (Trubetskoi, 1928). But the Bolsheviks' victory sent all disputes and disputers out of the country. We will get back to them later.

There is no doubt that the German, and until a certain point Polish, nobles played an outstanding role in governing the empire, but as mobilized communities, which for many reasons could not easily fit into the emerging Russian nation. However Little Russians were recognized as Russian by default, unless they insisted otherwise. And even if they did, their claims were rejected as illegitimate. The attitude towards Little

Russians was fundamentally different from the way some other groups were treated, whose otherness was recognized without hesitation. The latter were discriminated against at the individual level. (The Germans experienced certain infringements upon their rights when a dangerous united Germany had emerged on the western borders of the Russian state, and the Poles after two uprisings were no longer allowed to hold positions giving access to important control centers and infrastructure from the railway to the General Staff.) Little Russians were never discriminated against on the grounds of origin. Little Russians were always invited to be members of the Russian nation, but their right to claim the status of a separate nation was denied. So, regional features and language or dialect were accepted but for some local purposes, not as a teaching language or high culture. Just as Friedrich Engels considered František Palacký a "crazy German," Russian nationalists viewed Ukrainian nationalists, who did not want to be considered Russian, just as "crazy" for rejecting their true Russian nature under the influence of harmful ideas filled with hostility towards Russia.

There were enough debates over ethnicity, involving not only Little Russians and Great Russians, but also Poles. But Poles had (and still have) their own scheme of things, in which the Russians and the Poles are Slavs, but Muscovites (Moskals in Polish) do not belong among Slavs. Moskals are Turanians, a mixture of Finno-Ugrians and Turkic people who only pretend to be Slavs and who stole the name of Rus. These arguments formulated by the Poles after the uprising of 1830 had a significant influence on anthropologists in Europe until World War I (Górny, 2021). Today they are repeated almost unchanged in the Ukrainian discourse on ethnic exclusivity (Nakonechnii, 2001). Likewise, many in Russia argue about the ethnic commonness of the Great Russians and Little Russians, claiming that the differences between them were invented by Polish intriguers.

Both in Ukraine and Russia historians have said many reasonable words that the described schemes of ethnic kinship and mutual alienation have little to do with the critical historical view. Different strategies for building collective identities tend to be highly tendentious and one-sided, and serve only as an illustration of how the same reality

can be described in mutually exclusive ways. But a critical approach has no utilitarian value for identity builders, and for this reason it is always discarded when it comes to ideological indoctrination.

Let us get back to the historical course of events. After the abolition of serfdom, the question of schools for peasants, the language of teaching in primary schools and the identity that such schools would imbue gradually assumed a practical character. We can talk about a competition between two projects: one called for building an all-Russian identity among peasants, and the other one envisaged a special identity, which had yet to be named. The most common term 'Little Russian' dominated almost until the end of the 19th century. It was only then that the activists of the Ukrainian movement began to call themselves Ukrainians. The father of the Ukrainian national historical narrative, Mikhail Grushevsky, used the name "Ukraine-Rus" for the country they dreamed of. In 1863 and 1876, the imperial authorities issued instructions and decrees that severely limited the use of what they called the "Little Russian dialect" of the Russian language. How these decisions were made and what their consequences were is described in my book published twenty years ago (Miller, 2000, 2003) and reprinted in Kiev in 2013. It seems this book could hardly have been published there just a year later; in any case, its Polish translation, prepared at the same time, never saw the light of day. The criteria for permissible deviations from the official narrative were gradually tightened.

Galician Ruthenians, who lived under the Habsburgs, created a range of national identity concepts in the 19th century. Some called for unification with the Poles, others said they were part of the people living upon the Dnieper, still others insisted that the Ruthenians were Russians. Historian John-Paul Himka called the search for national identity among the Galician Ruthenians "Icarian flights in almost all directions" (Himka, 1999). Let us say that at the beginning of the last century, Ukrainian activists in the Dnieper area and Galicia were so strikingly different from each other that Grushevsky seriously spoke about the possibility of a Croatian-Serbian scenario envisaging the emergence of two different and even hostile nations, especially since

their different faiths (Uniate and Orthodox) and linguistic differences (western Ukrainians can easily be distinguished from eastern Ukrainians by dialect) resembled the situation of the Croats and the Serbs.

Russia supported Galician Russophiles, but in the early 1880s, Vienna, which had formed an anti-Russian alliance with Germany, subjected the Russophiles in Galicia to severe repressions, accusing their leaders of high treason. After the start of World War I, it created two internment camps in Thalerhof and Terezin, where thirty thousand people were held. In fact, these were the first concentration camps in Europe, actually invented at the beginning of the century by the British during their struggle against the Boers. (This now Czech town has a kind of karma: during the Second World War, Terezin became a Nazi concentration camp for Jews, called Theresienstadt). So, the big game around the identity and loyalty of Little Russians—Ruthenians—Ukrainians was soon joined by new powerful players with imperial resources, namely Germany and Austria-Hungary.

Until the beginning of the 20th century, the processes of formulating and promoting various national identity projects remained the subject matter of disputes and clashes among the educated circles and imperial government officials, involving thousands of people.

At the end of the 19th century, education intensified in rural schools. It was only then that mass migration of peasants began, with some of them moving to cities (where Russian was spoken in the Western Krai and Polish in Galicia) and others heading to Siberia and the Far East by the Trans-Siberian Railway. After 1906, more people became involved in political life through the elections to the State and City Dumas. All these processes engaged the masses of peasants and urban lower classes in building national identities. The outcome was far from predetermined, especially since these processes among mostly illiterate villagers developed differently than among people who were no longer illiterate and were engaged in political life. But at the beginning of the 20th century, the supporters of the Ukrainian national project viewed it as opposing the onslaught of Russifying modernization. One of the key figures of the Ukrainian movement in Kiev, Evhen Chykalenko, wrote in his diary in 1909: "Our cities are so Moscovized that a very, very small

percentage of the population shows any interest in Ukrainness at all... All cities and towns in Ukraine are awfully Russified" (Chykalenko, 2004). He also wrote to his colleague Pyotr Stebnytsky in St. Petersburg: "What can now be done by the thousands of rubles, cannot be done by the millions later, when people are Russified" (Chikalenko and Stebnits'kii, 2008). How many Little Russians would become Ukrainians and what the territory of Ukraine would look like if such a state became a reality—these were open questions.

After 1905, Russian nationalism as a political movement developed most actively in the Southwestern Krai. The idea of an all-Russian nation resonated with many Little Russians. The struggle for identity in the region unfolded between Little Russian nationalists and Ukrainians, who supported the idea of a separate Ukrainian nation (Kappeler, 1997; Kotenko et al., 2012). The authorities actively backed Russian nationalists, especially during the premiership of Pyotr Stolypin. The Union of the Russian People in Volhynia had more than a hundred thousand members on the eve of the war, mainly due to the influence the Orthodox clergy had among the peasants. Big Russian nationalist organizations uniting the upper classes flourished in Kiev and Odessa. The Kiev Club of Russian Nationalists (KKRN), created in 1908, was already quite influential by 1910, with its members winning elections to the City and State Dumas. On the monument to Stolypin in Kiev, unveiled in 1913 in front of the opera house, where he was killed in 1911, his words were engraved: "I firmly believe that the light of the Russian national idea that has dawned in the West of Russia will not go out and will soon illuminate all of Russia."

KKRN leader Anatoly Savenko said at the State Duma in 1914 that the Ukrainian movement posed "a great and real danger to the unity of Russia." On the question of recognizing Ukrainians as a separate nation different from Russia, Savenko said: "As soon as a people is recognized as separate, it should, according to the basic idea of the century, enjoy the right to self-determination; it should lead its own cultural, national and political existence." Savenko cautioned the lawmakers against interfering in the government's struggle against the Ukrainian movement and insisted on the correctness of the Little

Russian version of identity, condemning the Ukrainian movement as schismatic for "one single hundred-million-strong people." Further, Savenko stressed, quite in line with the idea of an all-Russian nation, that the loss of non-Orthodox foreign outskirts of the empire was not as dangerous for Russia as a split of the Russian nation would be (State Duma, 1914). Thus, before World War I, the western borderlands of the empire were in a state of unstable equilibrium. The authorities could no longer hope for the "eradication" of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalists and talked about the danger of a split. However, the supporters of a Ukrainian nation believed that the all-Russian identity was on the offensive.

THE DECISIVE 20TH CENTURY

Researchers note several important factors that led to the mobilization of ethnicity during World War I: mass forced displacement of the population, support for separatist movements in the enemy camp by the opposing powers, occupation policy, propaganda work with the prisoners of war in POW camps, and mobilization of nationalists across Eastern Europe, which was to become an arena of competition between new state projects after the war regardless of its outcome (Miller, 2014). All these factors affected Ukraine. For example, the administration of the German and Austrian POW camps paid special attention to the soldiers from Ukraine and created several special camps for them, with much better conditions than in other camps. German camps for Ukrainian prisoners of war were located in Rastatt and Salzwedel, and the Austrian camp was set up in Freistadt (Archive, n.d.). Up to four hundred thousand people were held in these camps. Functionaries from Ukrainian nationalist organizations, primarily the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, held propaganda events, taught the Ukrainian language, and prepared Ukrainian publications. Berlin and Vienna allocated significant administrative and financial resources for developing the organizational structure of the Ukrainian movement.

Russian military failures, the army's retreat in 1915, and measures taken by the German and Austrian occupation authorities undermined Russia's prestige in the eyes of the non-politicized part of the local

population, primarily peasants. Active supporters of Russian nationalism left the territories occupied by the enemy. In 1918, a World war on the former western outskirts of the collapsed Romanov Empire gradually transformed into a series of civil wars that differed in their class or ethnic focus. Some of them were conflicts between various paramilitary groups over territories they considered their ethnic fiefdom (Lwów/Lviv, Wilno/Vilnius). The same is true of Kiev, which changed hands fourteen times during World War I and the ensuing revolutionary wars. In 1918-1919, the city was often controlled by various Ukrainian military leaders.

The history of weak and unstable Ukrainian states in the western and central parts of the country (from Skoropadsky's Hetmanate and Petliura's Directory of the Ukrainian People's Republic to the West Ukrainian People's Republic) shows that the mobilization potential and organizational capabilities of Ukrainian nationalism were limited. It is noteworthy that Nestor Makhno was able to garner significant support among peasants without using the Ukrainian question as the main ideological concept. This usually happens in a situation where an empire abandons its peripheral territories as a result of the collapse of the center rather than due to strong anti-imperial movements on the outskirts. The Soviet-Polish war of 1920 was a struggle for control over Eastern Europe between two new large players, which were still building their muscles; in this conflict, Ukrainian forces played a strictly subordinate role. The interwar period in the history of the region can be described as a kind of Cold War. Piłsudski's Promethean action, aimed at supporting anti-Soviet forces in Ukraine and the Caucasus, and the Soviet principle of the "Ukrainian Piedmont," designed to win the loyalty of those Ukrainians and Byelorussians who were under Polish rule at that time to the prosperous Ukrainian and Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republics, viewed Ukraine as an object in geostrategic struggle (Martin, 2001).

In 1939, the struggle between large empires for control over Eastern Europe, in which special importance was attached to Ukraine politics, resumed in full. Germany's strategy in 1941-1942 provided, among other things, for attracting Ukrainians to its side (Grelka, 2005). It

can be said that in the post-war period of the Cold War era, Ukraine was one of its key topics, and in the post-Soviet period, the rivalry for Ukraine between Russia and the West kept intensifying to become one of the main reasons for the current acute international crisis.

After the Bolsheviks had gained control of Ukraine in 1918, they unleashed terror against Russian nationalists. All members of the KKRN, whom the Bolsheviks had captured in Kiev, were executed. The Bolsheviks considered Russian nationalism and the social forces behind it their main enemy until the end of the 1920s (Vujacic, 2007). Indigenization in the 1920s was accompanied by the struggle with "Great Russian chauvinism." The notion of Little Russian, and along with it, the variant of identity that can be called all-Russian, was declared a shameful legacy of the imperial past. Many achievements of the Russification policy in the border regions were destroyed in accordance with the new Soviet idea of indigenization and territorialization of ethnicity (Kaiser, 1994; Martin, 2011). So, the Ukrainian SSR obtained its borders, and state and cultural institutions that gradually gained legitimacy. But the terror of the 1930s in Ukraine took a heavy toll on those who planned to determine the pace and limits of indigenization in Kharkov and Kiev, without waiting for instructions from Moscow.

The Bolsheviks' policy in Ukraine, which was ruining the all-Russian project, worried Russian emigrants. They even created a publishing house called, not quite accidentally, "Edinstvo" (Unity). Brochures published in Prague in the 1920s and authored by former professors of history and philology from Moscow and St. Petersburg universities, more or less exquisitely presented ideas that a century later were used in the historical part of Vladimir Putin's article written in the summer of 2021(Putin, 2021). Pyotr Bitsilli, who lived in Sofia, far from the main centers of Russian emigration and was an intellectual of a different scale, was able to jump out of the groove and wrote an essay titled *The Problem of Russian-Ukrainian Relations in Light of History*, published by Edinstvo in 1930 (See: Bitsilli, 1930). It stunned the publishers so much that they emphasized in the introduction: "It all seems very strange, but we will publish it." Bitsilli

reasoned as follows: historical arguments that there was neither the name "Ukrainian" in its modern national meaning, nor Ukraine as a state entity are insignificant. If there is the desire, political will and resources to create a Ukrainian nation and Ukraine as a quasi-state (Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic), it can be done. Bitsilli further talked about how much Ukrainian culture would lose if it rejected Russian culture, but these were details. A year later, the essay was published in English as an article in the prestigious Chicago-based *The Journal of Modern History*. And there is a suspicion that those who later developed nationalism studies, such as Ernest Gellner and Benedict Anderson, could and should have read this article. Bitsilli predated constructivists and modernists' reasoning on these matters by fifty years.

The importance of the policy of indigenization and the subsequent existence of the Ukrainian SSR for the formation of Ukrainian identity is borne out by the following fact: the overwhelming majority of Little Russians (or Khokhols, as they often called themselves before indigenization) in the territories that were not incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR—the south of the Voronezh Region, Kuban, the Taganrog area, and so on—consider themselves Russian today, sometimes speaking of themselves as "Russian Khokhols" (Boeck, 2004-2005).

In the first half of the 20th century, the future of a particular person very much depended on the political decisions that were made by other people, not him/her. The gray zone—you can become Russian or you can become Ukrainian—survived for a long time in the Soviet period as well. When Leonid Brezhnev lived in Dnepropetrovsk, his ethnicity in the passport was recorded as "Ukrainian." When he moved to Moscow, it was changed to "Russian." After 1991, many people reversed their ethnic identity. For example, according to the last Soviet census of 1989, there were 11.3 million Russians in Ukraine. According to the only Ukrainian census, which took place in 2001, there were 8.3 million of them. Three million had simply disappeared. Most of them did not move to Russia but changed their ethnicity in the passport. The Soviet model implied three fraternal peoples: Russians, Ukrainians, and Byelorussians. So, speaking of one people, Vladimir Putin goes back

to the pre-revolutionary, pre-Bolshevik discourse. It is no coincidence that on February 21, 2022, on the eve of the start of a special military operation, he spoke of "decommunization" (Putin, 2022).

CIVIL WAR OF IDENTITIES

Ukrainian nation-building after 1991 was inspired mainly by the idea of making Ukrainian identity irreversible. For example, in the summer of 2021, when Ukraine celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of its independence, its former President Leonid Kuchma said that the main achievement was that most Ukrainians would not want to re-unite with Russia again (Regnum, 2021). This was, of course, the prevalent thought in the long-term identity policy of the Ukrainian diaspora, which was a significant actor in the Ukrainian political process after the disintegration of the USSR. One prominent historian from the Ukrainian diaspora, Omeljan Prytsak, told me in the early 1990s that Ukraine had received independence "the wrong way": it fell on Ukraine, it did not fight for it. The "right" way to get independence is through war. Prytsak also said that it would be good to exchange the population (quite in the Stalinist spirit), just as Soviet Ukraine and Poland did in the past: seven million Ukrainians live in Russia. Give them back (he forgot, though, to ask them if they want it), and take your Russians back home.

Thus, until the middle of the 19th century, the debate over the variants of identity and different interpretations of closeness/alienation between Great Russians and Little Russians took place in a narrow circle of educated elites. In the second half of the 19th century, there appeared the first, extremely limited in size, Ukrainian nationalist associations such as the Cyril and Methodius Society of the 1840s or the Kiev Community (Hromada) of the 1860s. It was then that the empire began to pursue—inconsistently and rather ineptly—a policy of building an all-Russian nation in the imperial core. At the beginning of the 20th century, a struggle began in Ukraine's Dnieper area between Little Russians, who were supporters of all-Russian identity, and Ukrainian activists of the Ukrainian movement.

The explosive mobilization of ethnicity took place during the Great War and revolutions. At the same time, Little Russians advocating all-

Russian unity were eliminated from the game, first through evacuation from the occupied territories during the war, and then through physical extermination, emigration and political suppression in the 1920s. In the interwar period, a new structure of identity dualism starts taking shape in Ukraine. In western regions ruled by Poland, ethnically exclusive, radical nationalism emerges, spawning Stepan Bandera, the OUN, and the UPA. This kind of nationalism considered Poles, Jews, and Moskals (Russians) enemies. After World War II, Russians and their eastern Ukrainian "henchmen" invariably held the top position in this hierarchy of the enemies among Ukrainian nationalists. In Soviet Ukraine, a different kind of Ukrainian identity developed, with a lower level of mobilization, which did not view the Russians as an enemy.

These two identities were inherited by independent Ukraine. Western Ukrainian nationalism, enjoying the support of a powerful diaspora, looked at eastern Ukrainians with their Russian language as an object of social engineering, which had yet to be transformed into full-fledged Ukrainians. Plus, there appeared a Russian super-minority of over eight million, or more than 17 percent of the total population, living mainly in the southeast of the country. This situation and the gradual expansion of the "Western Ukrainian" identity into the central regions created the electoral seesaw characteristic of the first quarter of Ukraine's independent existence. Victor Yushchenko's policies contributed to the escalation of tensions between the supporters of eastern and western identities and sharply increased the discomfort of the Russian population.

The events of 2014 changed identity-building processes in Ukraine dramatically. After the reincorporation of Crimea into Russia and the creation of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the Ukrainian political process lost about six million people, who adhered either to Russian, or Eastern Ukrainian, or even internationalist post-Soviet identity (Voronovici, 2020). The Russians ceased to be a "super-minority," which paved the way for vigorous efforts to oust the Russian language from the public sphere and for an active memory policy relying on the Western Ukrainian set of symbols and narratives. The active de-Sovietization campaign in symbolic politics had a slightly

camouflaged character of de-Russification. All this was accompanied by daily warnings that the country was at war with Russia, which has become a generally recognized fact in Ukraine after the Maidan protests. Any attempts to describe the confrontation with the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics as an internal Ukrainian civil conflict were severely suppressed. In 2014, Ukrainian nation-builders received, at least at the rhetorical level, what Prytsak and like-minded people had lacked so much—a war with Russia. Moreover, it cost Kiev almost nothing as low-intensity hostilities could be carried out using the remaining Soviet weapons and without sustaining large personnel losses. Moscow's expectations that the unrecognized republics in Donbass would become a kind of hook with which it could curb Ukraine's drift towards NATO proved wrong. Over time, it became clear that Russia was on the hook because Kiev could now decide when it could put a difficult choice before Moscow by intensifying the fighting in Donbass. After all, Moscow could not allow the scenario implemented by the Croats in Serbian Krajina in 1995.

Until 2022, the war did not look quite convincing, and many Ukrainians who had a liking for Russia continued to treat it the same way. But big changes have taken place in the education of the younger generation at school and in the summer scout camps. Children who were ten to twelve years old in 2014 and who grew up in this atmosphere are now fighting in the Ukrainian army and the nationalist battalions under the command of older guys, whose identity took shape among football fans and other informal right-wing groups of the 1990s.

Now that hostilities in Ukraine have increased to a terrifying degree in both intensity and scale, with heavy casualties among both the military and the civilians, and with entire towns razed to the ground, the radicalization of anti-Russian sentiments as a consolidating element of Ukrainian identity is becoming widespread.[1] Killed relatives and friends and, which is very important for Ukrainian mentality, destroyed

---

[1]   The Kiev International Institute of Sociology has published data from a survey conducted on May 13-18, 2022. They indicate that today only 2 percent of Ukrainians think well of Russia, while 92 percent perceive it negatively. According to KIIS, in early February 2022, 34 percent of Ukrainians had a good opinion of Russia. (See: Dynamics, 2022.)

or abandoned houses are a powerful factor. Of course, there are people in the eastern and southern regions of the country who welcome the Russian army, but there are obviously fewer of them than those who planned the special operation expected.

Here is what a thoughtful contemplator, and concurrently the commander of the Vostok Battalion, Alexander Khodakovsky, wrote in his Telegram channel on May 23, 2022: "I am beginning to observe a split personality syndrome in myself: the inertia of thinking of Ukrainians as our brothers, albeit misguided, has come across a counter-stream of current doings on their part... Their soul has become completely different, alien to us, even though they express their thoughts using the same sounds as we do. And if we accept this, if we let in the thought that we are alien to each other, a lot will change in how we see reality. Even relatives are no longer relatives when they stop being close, but this..." (Khodakovsky, 2022).

If Vladimir Putin's argument that Vladimir Lenin made an important contribution to the formation of the Ukrainian nation is true, then the future historian's argument that Putin himself has made an important contribution to these processes by solidifying anti-Russian feelings as the dominant element of Ukrainian national identity, will also be true.

We do not know when or how the fighting will end. It is very likely that the already noticeable squabbles and conflicts within Ukrainian society will come to the fore either as a reaction to the terms of a peace agreement, or due to military failures on the battlefields. Yet the mutual alienation between western and eastern Ukrainians can still be seen in these squabbles, even though both share the same negative attitude towards Russia. The history of national identity-building in Ukraine has entered a new stage, but it is not over, because there is no "end of history" in these processes.

Meanwhile, there is no doubt that sabotage and subversive activities will take place in the territories occupied by the Russian army. They are already happening there. Recent reports say that Russian computer firms are beginning to fire Ukrainians from jobs that are directly related to critical infrastructure (RBC, 2022). The Russian Ministry

for Digital Technology, Communication and Mass Media has strongly urged companies to stop this, but the very fact that such an idea can be possible is quite noteworthy. People familiar with the history of the Russian Empire will immediately recall the situation with the Poles after 19th century uprisings. If these trends persist, we will see the end of the practice, very stable and important for the Russian identity, when Little Russians and then Ukrainians were not rejected in Russian society as aliens. Millions of people with Ukrainian surnames, Ukrainian roots and even Ukrainian identity live in Russia. So the events of recent years and months can have a significant impact on identity-building processes not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia.

References:

Archive, n.d. Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Empire. *AVPRI*, F. 135, Op. 474, L. 26.

Bitsilli, P., 1930. *Problema russko-ukrainskikh otnosheniy v svete istorii.* [The Problem of Russian-Ukrainian Relations in Historical Perspective]. Prague: Edinstvo. Available at: vtoraya-literatura.com/pdf/bitsilli_problema_russko-ukrainskikh_otnosheny_v_svete_istorii_1930.pdf [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Boeck, B. J., 2004-2005. What's in a Name? Semantic Separation and the Rise of the Ukrainian National Name. *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, 27(1/4), pp. 33-65.

Chykalenko, E., 2004. *Stchodennik* [Diaries], Vol. 1. 1907–1917. Tempora. pp. 47-48, 281-282.

Chykalenko, E., and Stebnyts'kii, P., 2008. *Listuvannya: 1901–1922 roki* [Correspondence: 1901–1922]. Tempora, 72.

Dynamics, 2022. Dynamics of the Population's Attitude to Russia and the Emotional Background due to the War: The Results of a Telephone Survey Conducted on May 1318, 2002. *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology,* 26 May [online]. Available at: https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=1112&page=1 [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Grelka, F., 2005. *Die Ukrainische Nationalbewegung unter deutscher Besatzungsherrschaft 1918 und 1941/42.* Otto Harrasowitz Verlag.

Górny, M., 2021. Velikaya voina professorov. Gumanitarnye nauki. 1912–1923 [The Great War of Professors. Humanities. 1912-1923]. Transl. from: Górny Maciej, *Wielka wojna profesorów. Nauki o człowieku (1912–1923)*, Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2014.

Himka, J-P., 1999. The Construction of Nationality in Galician Rus': Icarian Flights in Almost All Directions. In: Suny, R.D. and M. D. Kennedy, M.D. (eds.) *Intellectuals and the Articulation of the Nation.* Ann Arbor, pp. 109-164.

Kaiser, R., 1994. *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR.* Princeton University Press.

Kappeler, A., 1997. Mazepintsy, malorossy, khokhly: ukraintsy v ehtnicheskoi ierarkhii Rossijskoi imperii [Mazepins, Little Russians, Khokhli: Ukrainians in the Ethnic Hierarchy of the Russian Empire]. In: Miller, A., Reprintsev, V., and Flori, B. (eds.) *Rossiya—Ukraina: istoriya vzaimootnoshenii* [Russia and Ukraine: History of Relations], pp. 125-144.

Karamzin, N. 2002. Mnenie russkogo grazhdanina [Opinion of a Russian Citizen]. In: Karamzin, N.M. *O drevnei i novoi Rossii. Izbrannaya proza i publitsistika* [On Ancient and Modern Russia. Selected Prose and Political Essays (1st Edition —1811)].

Khodakovsky, A., 2022. Nachinayu nablyudat' v sebe sindrom ravoeniya lichnosti [I"m Beginning to Develop a Split Personality Syndrome]. *Телеграм @ aleksandr_skif*, 23 May. Available at: t.me/aleksandr_skif/2208 [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Kotenko, A., Martynyuk, O., and Miller, A., 2012. Maloross [The Little Russian]. In: Miller, A., Sdvizhkov, D. and Shirle, I. (eds.) *"Ponyatiya o Rossii": k istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda v 2kh tomakh* ["Notions about Russia": On the Historical Semantics of the Imperial Period. Two-Volume Edition]. Novoye literaturnoye obozrenie, Vol. 2, pp. 392-443.

Martin, T., 2001. *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939.* Cornell University Press.

Martin, T., 2011. *Imperiya "polozhitelnoi deyatelnosti". Natsii i natsionalizm v SSSR, 1923–1939* [The Empire of "Positive Activity". Nations and Nationalism in the USSR, 1923-1939]. ROSSPEN.

Miller, A., 2000. *Ukrainskiuy vopros v politike vlastei i russkom obstchestvennom mnenii* [The Ukrainian Issue in Russian Official Policy and Public Opinion]. St. Petersburg: Alteya. Reprinted 2013: *Ukrainsky vopros v Rossiiskoi imperii* [Ukrainian Question in the Russian Empire]. Kiev: Laurus.

Miller, A., 2003. *The Ukrainian Question. The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century.* NY-Budapest: CEU Press.

Miller, A., 2008. Nation-State or a State-Nation? *Russia in Global Affairs*, 6(4). Available at: eng.globalaffairs.ru/articles/a-nation-state-or-a-state-nation [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Miller, A., 2014. The Role of the First World War in the Competition between Ukrainian and All-Russian Nationalism. In: E. Lohr, V. Tolz, A. Semyonov, and Mark von Hagen (eds). *The Empire and Nationalism at War.* Bloomington, Indiana, pp. 73-90.

Miller, A., 2017. Irredentizm i krizis natsionalnoi identichnosti [Irredentism and the Crisis of National Identity]. *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, 15(5). Available at: globalaffairs. ru/articles/irredentizm-i-krizis-naczionalnoj-identichnosti/ [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Nakonechnii, E., 2001. *Ukradene im'ya: chomu rusyny stali ukraintsyami* [Stolen Name: Why Rusynes became Ukrainians]. 3rd Edition. Stefanyk National Science Library, Ukraine.

Plokhy, S. and Sysyn, F. (eds.), 2005. *Synopsis: A Collection of Essays in Honour of Zenon E. Kohut.* Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies.

Putin, V., 2021. On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians. *Kremlin.ru* [online] 12 July. Available at: en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181 [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Putin., 2022. Address by the President of the Russian Federation. *Kremlin.ru* [online] 21 February. Available at: en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828 [Accessed 8 June 2022].

RBC, 2022. Rossiiskie kompanii nachali uvolnyat' ukrainskikh IT-spetsialistov [Russian companies began to fire Ukrainian IT specialists]. *RBC*, 24 May [online]. Available at: www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/24/05/2022/628ba6cb9a7947ec9b30946f?from=from_main_1 [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Regnum, 2021. Kuchma o krakhe SSSR: lyudyam lgali, kogda govorili, chto Ukraina kormit Rossiyu [Kuchma about the Collapse of the USSR: People Were Lied to When They Said that Ukraine Was Feeding Russia]. *REGNUM*, 13 July [online]. Available at: regnum.ru/news/3320489.html [Accessed 8 June 2022].

State Duma, 1914. Gosudarstvennaya Duma, IV sozyv, Sessiya 2, Ch. 2. [State Duma, Convocation 4, Session 2, Part 2], Para 901-915, 927-933.

Tolochko, A., 2012. *Kievskaya Rus' and Malorossiya v XIX veke* [Kievan Rus and Little Russia in the 19th century]. Laurus.

Trubetskoy, N, 1928. Otvet D.I. Doroshenko [The answer to D.I. Doroshenko]. *Pavlo hai-nyzhnyk* [online]. Available at: hai-nyzhnyk.in.ua/doc2/1928.trubeckoi_otvet.php [Accessed 8 June 2022].

Voronovici, A., 2020. Internationalist Separatism and the Political Use of 'Historical Statehood' in the Unrecognized Republics of Transnistria and Donbass. *Problems of Post-Communism*, 67(3), pp. 288-302. DOI:10.1080/10758216.2019.1594918.

Vujacic, V., 2007. Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization. *Post-Soviet Affairs,* 23(2), pp. 156-183.

Weber, E., 1976. *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914.* Stanford University Press.