

Subnational identities in the context of the changing internal geopolitics. The case of post-revolutionary Ukraine

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How to cite:

Mihaylov, V. and Sala, S. (2018). Subnational identities in the context of the changing internal geopolitics. The case of post-revolutionary Ukraine. *Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series*, 39(39), 79-96. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.2478/bog-2018-0006>.

Abstract. The main changes in the development of identity of Ukrainians after the Euromaidan revolution and their influence on internal geopolitics of the state are presented in the paper. The authors have made a critical overview of the key psychological and symbolic domains of Galician and Little-Russian identity, drawing attention on their changes in the context of the current geopolitical conflict which led to the loss of territory in 2014. Throughout all the 20th century and nowadays, these identities form the political and cultural landscape of Ukraine and generate a number of social divisions. Apart from those identity issues and their preconditions, the obstacles for the realisation of the policy of Ukrainian nation-building are also discussed. The authors conclude that there is a tendency to strengthen the role of the Ukrainian language and break the ties with Russia in a radical way as well as expansion of the pro-Western attitudes and expectations. In terms of mentality and civilizational values, the widening gap between millions of Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians from the East and the population of the central and western regions of Ukraine is also pointed out.

Article details:

Received: 30 November 2016

Revised: 03 November 2017

Accepted: 08 February 2018

Key words:

Ukraine,
subnational identities,
internal geopolitics.

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1. Introduction

Traditionally, the main research scale of geopolitical analyses has a global and supranational scope. In the second half of the 20th century, the French geographers André Siegfried and Yves Lacoste paid attention to the importance of regional and local dimension of political geography and geopolitics which forms a direction known as internal geopolitics (*la géopolitique interne*) of separate states. The internal geopolitics is treated as a 'system of approaches, whose aim is to balance the political processes in all parts of national territory. Its special tasks include removing the factors which threaten the security and internal stability of the state, as well as preventing and resolving territorial conflicts (Dnistriansky, 2011: 292). Subnational identities have an impact on various dimensions of internal geopolitics, i.e.: national security, administrative-territorial division, principles of self-government, electoral and political situation at regional and local level, language question, national minority rights, etc.

Providing of balancing and effective internal geopolitics is among the key issues especially for those Eastern European countries which have no commonly accepted national/nationalist program because of a number of national, ethnic and religious groups with ambivalent self-awareness. This type of countries is characterized by a potential to change the identity of their population as a whole, of various social groups and regional communities. Whithout any doubt, contemporary Ukraine is among them. The year 2014 was a turning point which began radical transformations in the approach of the new authorities of Ukraine towards the most problematic parts of the internal geopolitics, albeit in conditions of significant influence of external factors.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, in Ukrainian, post-Soviet and global scientific literature there appeared a lot of geopolitical and geo-

cultural concepts about Ukrainian identity, state and society: a cleft country (Huntington, 1996), 'three Ukraines' (Il'in, 1998), 'Ukrainian disunity' (Shulman, 1999), 'two Ukraines' (Riabczuk, 2003), 'the myth of two Ukraines', 'a country of boundaries', 'Ukraine between Russia and the West', and so on. The mentioned concepts underline territorial and historical heterogeneity, civilizational and complex ethno-linguistic structure of Ukraine. The Euro-maidan Revolution in 2014 gave a new meaning of key terms like 'Ukrainian nation', 'Ukrainian identity' and 'Ukrainian unity'. The maintaining of this unity and the occurrence of certain internal conflicts as well, depend on the balance of influence of the Galician and Little-Russian macro identities on the public moods.

Throughout all the 20th century and nowadays, two mentioned identities form the political landscape of Ukraine generating visible or hidden social and territorial divisions. Wherefore, the subject *matter of our study* concerns the basic features of the West-Ukrainian (Galician) and Little-Russian traditions and their influence on the occurrence of new lines of internal consolidation and/or opposition. For that purpose, we have tried to sketch the chief differences in the ideological image of Ukraine among the main branches of Ukrainian identity, including their mutual perception, in the context of the changing internal geopolitics after the events of 2014-2015. What has been applied was a critical approach taking into account various perspectives of interpretation of the Ukrainian identity in politics, media, literature and social life. It considers the views and attitudes of (pro)Ukrainian opinions and interpretations (Dnistriansky, 2008, 2014; Golovchenko, 2015; Gorbenko, K. 2015; Moshovskyy, 2015) as well as (pro)Russian ones (Dugin, 2000; Bondarenko, 2014; Dergachev, Nemenskiy, 2014).

As regards the notion of 'inheritors of the Ukrainian identity', it is comprehended by the authors as the identity of the population within the territory of the Ukrainian state until the beginning

of 2014 (including the Crimea, Donetsk and Lugansk regions).

2. Ethnic, linguistic, and regional dimensions of identity and their impact on conflict potential of the Ukrainian society

The internal unity and the traditional conflicts of values in the Ukrainian society are determined by the dynamics of several factors like the ethnic self-identification, the linguistic identity, the changeover of language policy, and the political interests of local elites. Their impact on the Ukrainian identity has been examined in various studies (Riabczuk, 2000, 2003; Bojcun, 2001; Volovich, Voropaeva, 2007; Korostelina, 2013; Krylov, Gritsenko, 2014; Karmazina, 2015, etc.). Geopolitical transformation of the Ukrainian identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union, including the Russian-Ukrainian relations, also attracts attention of many scholars (Huntington, 1996; Kuzio, 1996; D'Anieri, 1997; Shulman, 1998; Riabczuk, 2000; Dugin, 2000; Dnistriansky, 2014a, b). In the current chapter, the above-mentioned questions are analyzed in the context of the ongoing debate on the territorial and political organization of Ukraine.

The first factor which shapes regional disparities in the internal geopolitics of Ukraine is the multinational structure of its population. The impact of this factor is so noticeable that 'all the aspects of the territorial and political identification of the Ukrainian society are in this or that way related to the ethnocultural self-consciousness of the population' (Dnistriansky, Skliarska, 2014: 190). In contrast to multinational countries existing nowadays or those that existed in the recent past, Ukraine is characterized by a relatively unitary nature of its political structure. The former Soviet Union (and also today's Russian Federation), the former Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia had a more complicated political system and administrative-territorial organization. These historical states were politically organized into national federal republics. The same problem concerns the current states like China, India, Switzerland, or Bosnia and

Herzegovina. In fact, before its annexation by the Russian Federation, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea was the only autonomous territorial unit in Ukraine where the Ukrainian language and identity had the weakest presence. As an ethnic majority, Russians represent about 75.0% of the citizens of Crimea and Sevastopol.

The international perception of this multiethnic state most notably includes the clash of the political and cultural interests of Russians and Ukrainians, and, in relation to the events in Crimea in 2014, of the Crimean Tatars. The situation, however, is more complicated at a regional level. Some regions have been under a strong socio-cultural influence of Hungarians, Belarusians (located in various regions), Zakarpattia Rusyns (Ruthenians) in the Zakarpattia region, Bulgarians (in the Odessa and Zaporizhia regions), and Poles (in the Zhytomyr, Lviv, and Khmelnytskyi regions). As a whole, the chief minority groups are located predominantly in Western and Southern Ukraine. From the point of view of the internal geopolitics of the central authorities, the Ukrainian and Russian identities, which are more flexible in terms of values and territorial distribution, bear a geopolitical and civilizational messianism capable of attracting the smaller nations living in Ukraine. Besides the Crimean Tatars, a more strongly pronounced emancipation with a geopolitical potential is also to be seen in other non-Slavic national groups. The Hungarian and Romanian minorities, whose number according to the 2001 census is respectively 156 thousand and 151 thousand people, rely on the active political support of the Hungarian and Romanian states.

The most enduring psychological differences are caused by the historical belonging of certain Ukrainian regions to state entities of various social structures and cultural identities. On the one hand, certain objective historical differences are politically instrumentalized by the pro-Russian separatists who believe in the idea of a Russian World. Their geopolitical aims are directed to federalization or separation of the pro-Russian regions from Ukraine. On the other hand, in certain cases, the same applies to the patriots/nationalists, who insist on the Europeanness of Ukraine and on the cultural incompatibility between the Russian and Ukrainian societies. In reality, the differences in question are not so significant so as to speak of a total incompatibility of

the population's values as was the case of the former Yugoslavia which was far more heterogeneous in religious, cultural, historical, administrative, and political terms.

In contrast to a number of other multinational states, Ukraine is characterized by national and religious groups with relatively close ethnocultural and civilizational features. The main pillars of populations' identity are: the Slavic ethno-linguistic element (Ukrainians, Russians, Ruthenians, Belarusians, Bulgarians, Poles), the Christian/Orthodox religion (with a significant presence of Greek Catholics in the Western regions), the use of a common (Cyrillic) alphabet. The lack of dialogue and of an elaborate democratic model for consensus and reconciliation are the factors which give the impression of a deep geopolitical and civilizational rift among the Ukrainian citizens. Some are of the opinion (Moshovskyy, 2015: 45) that the conflict in Donbass is not purely geopolitical in nature, but a 'deeper – cultural, visional, metaphysical conflict between two Russian Christian civilizations'. This conflict of values of different groups of the Ukrainian population, however, has its clearly defined geopolitical projections. The history after Yanukovich's presidency has many remarkable examples in this regard. The participants in the revolution on the Maidansquare in Kiev waved not only the Ukrainian flag, but also the flag of the EU to demonstrate their civilizational and geopolitical choice. In contrast, the Russian flag was a part of the counter-revolutionary regional protests and the subsequent public activity of their opponents who favour integration in the Eurasian structures.

The terms Western and Eastern Ukraine, which are the key to the geopolitical analyses, are meta-geographical units. The boundaries of these internal spatial spheres are blurred. Their arbitrary character can be seen in the Dnystriansky's cartographic model (2008). Taking into consideration signs like the maturity of the ethnic self-identification, the dominance of the Russian or Ukrainian language, and the electoral preferences of the population, this author divides Ukraine into four types of territories. They do not coincide with the traditional macroregions (Fig. 1). This map shows the weakening of the spatial concentration of the Ukrainian cultural element (language, and ethnic self-identification) from west to east and from north to

south-southeast. The strong presence of Ukrainianness is to be found mainly in the zones of types I, II, and III. Zone IV includes 'territories with an acute crisis of the Ukrainian identity' which include the seceded Autonomous Republic of Crimea, as well as parts of the 'separatist' Donetsk and Lugansk regions.

A number of other lines of discordance in identity determinants, for instance, language, religion, historical awareness, and historical policy, are layered over the two main axes of opposition: West – East, and Ukrainians – Russians. As Ryabchuk aptly notes, one-third of the population have a clear national consciousness and unequivocally identify themselves with the Ukrainian political nation. The remaining two-thirds of Ukrainians are neither Russians, nor Ukrainians, but rather 'local' people who have a pre-national stage of consciousness. Potentially they could be both Russians and Ukrainians and even citizens of Kievan Rus, or, could create some Donbass, Kherson or Krivorozh nation (Riabczuk, 2000). The results of the Kiev International Institute of Sociology's survey conducted in 2004 showed that citizens with dual (Ukrainian-Russian) self-identification represent 11.0% of the population of the western regions of Ukraine. In the southern and eastern regions,

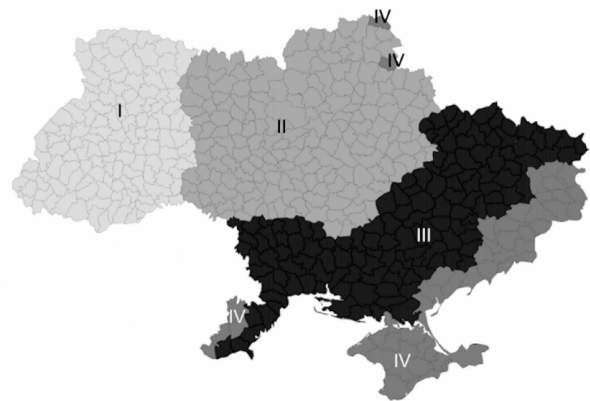


Fig. 1. Regional differences in the cultural and linguistic structure of the population of Ukraine

Explanation: I – areas (regions) with a relatively homogeneous Ukrainian cultural environment; II – areas where the Ukrainian language dominates in villages and small towns and the Ukrainian population in the large cities is partially assimilated; III – areas with impaired ethnocultural ties between the largely assimilated population of the large cities and the partially assimilated population of the villages; IV – areas with an acute crisis of the Ukrainian identity

Source: Dnystriansky, M. 2008

the people with dual self-identification represented 41.0%. It is typical that the Russian speaking Ukrainians have a post-Soviet identity; they consider 'Slav' or 'CIS resident' as the most important identifiers (Volovich, Voropaeva, 2007).

Declaring a 'Ukrainian' nationality at the population censuses does not necessarily mean that every person who declared it is loyal to the Ukrainian project. On the other hand, not everyone who defines himself or herself as a Russian-speaking Ukrainian in cultural and linguistic terms, shows solidarity with the policy of the Russian Federation, considering their own identification as a citizen of the Ukrainian state to be more important.

In Ukraine, the language is considered to be a 'strategic key', a 'guarantee of national self-awareness and historical memory' (Kresina, Gorbatenko, 2008). Further to the frequent changes of the central government's policy, the Ukrainian territory went through different phases of Russification and Ukrainization throughout the entire 20th century, accompanied by conflicts which left many traumas in the minds of certain groups of people.

According to a number of indicators, the Russian language has kept its strong positions in the social, cultural and educational fields throughout the entire post-Soviet period. For example, the Russian-speaking Ukrainians represent 15.0% of the population. According to data for the mid 2000s, Russian is the preferred language at work, in public places and in

school (Table 1). Another proof of the complicated and unique linguistic situation in Ukraine is the relatively high share (between 15.6% and 17.2%) of citizens using a mix of Russian and Ukrainian words (the so-called Surzhyk).

The data of sociological survey from 2016 conducted by the Ukrainian organisation *Space of Freedom* on the territory controlled by the government of Kiev prove that the Ukrainian language is declared as the mother tongue by 60.0% of the population, whereas the Russian language by 15.0%. On the other hand, in everyday life the linguistic situation is much more complicated. For instance, the percentage of people who speak Ukrainian at home (49.0%) is lower in comparison with the people who declare this language as their mother tongue. A slightly smaller number of people communicate in Ukrainian at work or in school (46.0%). In family environment, 24.0% of Ukrainians speak the Russian language. At the regional level, Ukrainian is a mother tongue for 93.0% of residents of Western Ukraine and for 78.0% of residents of Central Ukraine. On the contrary, the Ukrainian is least spoken in the South (35.0%) and in Donbass (20.0%). As the survey showed, an indicator that proves the complexity of the language issue is the share of respondents who consider their language both as Ukrainian to the same extent as Russian. In 2016 it was 22.0%.

Despite all the measures against broadcasting of the Russian language TV channels and programs,

Table 1. The use of the Ukrainian and Russian languages in Ukraine (based on data from the annual monitoring of the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences)

Language use	Language used for communication in the family	Language used in everyday life	Language used at work, in shops and public places	Language used for communication at work and school
Exclusive use of Ukrainian	34.0	29.3	24.1	22.3
Prevailing use of Ukrainian, rarely Russian	8.4	8.6	11.7	12.1
Mixed use of both Ukrainian and Russian words	17.3	15.7	17.8	17.1
Prevailing use of Russian, rarely Ukrainian	9.7	10.7	15.6	17.1
Exclusive use of Russian	29.5	35.0	30.7	30.2

Source: Movna situatsia v Ukraini: mizh konfliktom i konsensusom, 2008

there is ‘information-psychological dependency’ (Dnistriansky, 2008) of the population on Russian cultural TV productions. In print media, however, the share of the Russian language editions prevails. In 2005, 31.3% of the circulation of all newspapers are in the Ukrainian language (as opposed to 64.0% in Russian) (Movna situatsia v Ukraini: mizh konfliktom i konsensusom, 2008). Taking into account only the territories under Ukrainian control, in 2015 the situation did not change much. The percentage of books and brochures published in Ukrainian was 65.2%, while in Russian 30.4%. The Russian language (the language of a national minority) has maintained its dominant position in the total circulation of printed newspapers (61.5%), exceeding almost twice the newspapers in Ukrainian (34.0%) (Stanovishhte ukrains’koyi movi v Ukraini u 2016 roci, 2016).

The political disputes over the status of the Russian language played an important psychological role in the past and will undoubtedly have a direct impact on the future relationship between the central government and the Russian speaking Ukrainians. Victor Yanukovich came to power in 2010, promising to give the Russian language a status of the second state language in Ukraine. During his presidency, however, the Russian language was given the status of a regional language only. Immediately after Yanukovich’s dismissal, this status was repealed by the government. It was a purely political decision and is considered to be one of the biggest mistakes of the new government which lead to an increasing discontent of the East. President Poroshenko’s policy leaves no doubt as to what the intentions of the central authorities are in regard to the language issue: ‘Ukrainian has been and will remain the only state language’, as stated by the provision of Art. 10 of the Constitution of 1996.

This conception based on the idea of Ukrainization was applied to the new education law accepted at the beginning of September 2017. According to the new law, the process of teaching in the language of national minorities became limited just to the level of initial classes. Later, however, the teaching must be conducted only in Ukrainian. In 2015/2016, in the districts of the western and central part of the country above 99.0% of pupils received their education in Ukrainian. However, in the Odessa region (69.0%), the Lugansk re-

gion (65.0%) and the Donetsk region (58.0%), the largest number of pupils was educated in Russian (www.slovoidilo.ua/2017/09/26/infografika/polityka/skilky-ditej-ukrayini-navchayutsya-movamy-nacjonalnyx-menshyn).

The new law condition would fundamentally change the situation of national minorities, which are now deprived of the right to receive education in their mother languages. The reason of mentioned legal changes is the target of authorities to eliminate the Russian language from schools and public life. It refers to 614 schools where the Russian language is taught (according to the data for the year 2015/2016). At the same time, the new legal regulations directly threaten the education in a mother tongue in 75 Romanian, 69 Hungarian, 5 Polish and 3 Moldavian schools as well as 594 educational units where education takes place in several languages. Thus, there are conditions creating future conflicts not only between central authorities but national minorities as well.

In conclusion, it shall be noted that during the post-Soviet period, the most significant obstacles in the way of modernization and internal consolidation of the fragile Ukrainian state were the following: the persisting economic crisis, the cyclical political coups (also including the ‘Orange Revolution’), the competition between regional socio-economic clans, and the clash of divergent interests of external geopolitical centres of power (Russia, the EU, the USA, and Turkey). Taking into consideration all obstacles, which to a large extent still exist, even in more acute forms, some geopolitical analysts predicted a possible separation of parts of Ukraine or its dividing between the neighbouring states. These scenarios could not have been partially fulfilled (like the loss of Crimea) if a harmonized policy, based on dialogue and balanced internal geopolitics, was provided, and if the interests of the major foreign policy partners of Ukraine were taken into consideration. But why was this model not meant to be? It is impossible to give an unequivocal answer to this question. It is a part of numerous discussions on the modern Ukrainian ethnocultural and ethnopolitical identity. A few basic macro approaches to the definition of its essence dominate. They could be divided in pan-Ukrainian/strictly Ukrainian, pro-Russian/Little Russian, East-Slavic and all-Ukrainian ones.

3. Self-identification and administrative-territorial organization

The specifics of the historic past, the ethnic diversity as well as the various political and economic interests are in the basis of the requests for a greater autonomy of particular regions or federalization of Ukraine (1). The striving for autonomy depends on a certain historical and geopolitical context and follows the changes of the political and psychological atmosphere in the society. In this regard, Dergachev (2007) concludes that Ukraine's local patriotism is not based on the principles of the European regionalism, but rather on the territorial separatism. In the end, the nationalist model of the unitary regionalism is replaced by 'oligarchic regionalism' which is also devoid of the principles of the EU's policy.

As Wolczuk (2002) points out, between 1989 and 1994, the ideas of federalism were popular among the non-communist elite in three regions of Galicia, who won the local elections. Near the end of the existence of the Soviet Union, this was the desired form of decentralization of the country. The then Chairman of the Lviv region saw the ideas of the autonomy of Galicia as an opportunity to counter the central communist government in Kiev in 1990-1991. After Ukraine declared its independence, there comes a period when the West Ukrainian elites change their opinions and oppose projects for strong decentralization. In the next years, the concept of local autonomy gains ground among the Romanian and Hungarian minorities, as well as among the representatives of the mainly Russian-speaking southeast. After the Orange Revolution which brought Viktor Yushchenko to power, the nationalist policy pursued by the central government meets the awakening of the regional nationalism in the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine. The initiative of the local administrative leaders from the eastern regions led to the emergence of a conception of Southeast Autonomous Ukrainian Republic encompassing the following territories: the Lugansk, Donetsk, Dnepropetrovsk, Kharkov, Zaporozhye, Kherson, Nikolaev, and Odessa regions as well as the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. After Yanukovich's dismissal, similar initiatives were proposed in the Ukrainian parliament by deputies from the Party of Regions. Radical measures in this direc-

tion was also taken in the spring of 2014 with the self-proclamation of the Lugansk and Donetsk regions as "independent republics".

Post-revolutionary central authorities make every effort to counteract the ideas of restructuring of Ukraine on a federal or confederal basis. A similar scenario for Donbass is strongly rejected by nationalists and is accompanied by accusations of collaboration with the 'Donbass separatists' and the 'Russian occupiers'. A certain pressure has been exerted within the so-called 'Norman Four' group on the Ukrainian government in order to achieve a deeper political and administrative decentralization. In this format of negotiations, France, Germany and Russia are the main mediators between Ukraine and the Lugansk and Donetsk separatists. As a result of the so-called Minsk II agreements of February 12, 2015, a ceasefire was reached, meaning that the intensity of the fighting on the front lines in the two southeastern regions was reduced. Point 11 of these agreements concerned future constitutional reforms and the introduction of a new constitution by the end of 2015, stipulating decentralization and the adoption of a special status of certain parts of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions, including the right to determine their language. A possible implementation of this plan would mean that the two pro-Russian regions will continue to play a significant role in the political and economic life of Ukraine, also with their electoral weight and influence over the determining of Kiev's foreign policy priorities. The fears of the political elite have been shown in various academic studies over the years. For instance, according to the Ukrainian geographer Dnistriansky (2014: 176), from a functional point of view, some federal states represent a specific compromise in the historical process. Some of them, however, like Canada, Belgium, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, are characterized by instability and the reason behind this is that there has always been a threat for the federalist ideas to grow into the separatist ones. The identification of those two options lead to the fears of the federalization of Ukraine, which is considered to be an unacceptable and dangerous form of decentralization.

The political leaders of the eastern regions, where the Russian and post-Soviet identity dominates, conduct a completely opposite policy. After the Euromaidan revolution, the so-called Lugansk

and Donetsk People's Republics were proclaimed. They were created by local pro-Russian forces that refer to the principle of self-determination and preservation of political, administrative, and linguistic autonomy. The two republics merged on May 24, 2014 to form the Confederation of Novorossiya, which dissolved itself in May 2015. The revolutionary forces in Kiev were criticized mainly for organizing an anti-constitutional armed coup and also for the fact that the new government ignored their demands and interests. It should be noted that the local military forces and the police also crossed a number of regions and cities of the separated territories on the side of the self-proclaimed republics.

At the same time, the republics, morally and politically supported by Russia, were declared terrorist organizations by the Ukrainian government who considered Donbass and Crimea to be temporary occupied territories.

According to available data, in the mid-2015, about one-third of the territory of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions are under control of the pro-Russian separatists (Table 2). As regards the population under their control, our calculations show that its share is 54.0% of the population of the Donetsk region and 67.0% of the population of the Lugansk region. Together with the territory of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, over 6 million people

Table 2. Territory and population out of control of the Ukrainian authorities, 2014

Territorial Unit	Territory, km ²	Share of the territory of Ukraine, %	Share of the relevant territory under control of Russia/DNR*/LNR **, %	Population, 2014,	Ukraine's population %	Share of the population under control of Russia/DNR*/LNR **, %
The Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol	26 964	4.5	100	2 353 129	5.2	100
the Republic of Crimea	26 100	4.3	100	1 967 259	4.3	100
the city of Sevastopol	640	1.4	100	385 870	0.8	100
The Donetsk region	25 592	4.2	33.4	4 343 882	9.6	54.0
DNR	8 538	1.4	100	2 332 556	5.1	100
The Lugansk Region	26 684	4.4	31.3	2 239 473	4.9	67.0
LNR	8 352	1.4	100	1506549	3.3	100
Ukraine	603 628	-	-	45 226 249	-	-
Territory/ population out of control of the Ukrainian government	43 854	7.3	100	6 192 234	13.4	100

Explanation: *DNR – the Donetsk People's Republic; **LNR – the Lugansk People's Republic.

Source: Elaborated by the authors on the basis of: <http://pop-stat.mashke.org/ukraine-division.htm> (Accessed on: 10.02.2016); <http://glavstat.govdnr.ru/> (Accessed on: 11.02.2016)

are beyond Ukraine's control. What makes the appropriate illustration of the economic relevance of these territories is the fact that the so-called DPR and LPR are composed of about 14.0% of the industrial production of Ukraine (Slyvka, Zakutynska, 2016: 100).

The moods of Ukrainians regarding the status and policy of the state of the rebellious regions are the subject of a number of sociological studies. For instance, between 19 and 30 November 2015, the Rating Group Ukraine conducted a national opinion poll, excluding territories without control of the central government. According to 75.0% of the respondents, the Donetsk and Lugansk regions should remain within Ukraine: with the same status as before the war (32.0%), with extended responsibilities as a result of decentralization reform (35.0%), or as an autonomous region (8.0%) (IRI's Center for Insights Poll...).

Another sociological survey, conducted by the Centre for East European and International Studies (Berlin), also shows social attitudes towards the status of the Donetsk and Lugansk regions not only on the areas controlled by Kiev. While in these territories 65.0% of respondents pleaded for return of the so-called DNR and LNR in the Donetsk and the Lugansk regions, the moods in the areas controlled by pro-Russian forces are opposite. 33.0% of them opt for joining their territories to Russia in the form of special autonomy, whereas 35.0% see a solution to the political problem of the status of autonomy within the Ukrainian state (Doslidzhennya: na rozdilennomu Donbasi naseleennya maye shozhi nastroyi).

4. The pan-Ukrainian identity model.

From regional separatism to statebuilding power

The pan-Ukrainian identity model is also called strictly Ukrainian or a Ukrainian-nationalist model. It has different versions. One of them considers the regional Western Ukrainian or Galician identity as the core of the model. The affirmation of that identity took place in the 19th century in the relatively more liberal Austro-Hungarian Empire. The

Western-Ukrainian identity is typical for the population of today's Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn and Rivne regions. Traditionally, they have close cultural ties with Poland and Central Europe. Their cultural profile, historical sensitivity, civilizational and political orientation towards external powers differ from the traditional 'Little Russian/South-Russian' identity which is also part of the Ukrainian nation-building process. During the period of Soviet Ukraine, in the years after the Second World War, the ideology of Western Ukrainians developed in the form of specific regional separatism. It got stronger through the years, expanding its influence to the central, southern and eastern parts of Ukraine. This is also valid for the Ukrainian language which has no traditions in the mentioned regions.

West-Ukrainianness is mainly associated with the social and political values historically shaped in Galicia. That is why the Ukrainian nationalism is called 'Galician'. According to Dnistriansky and Skliarska (2014: 197), the high degree of involvement in the all-Ukrainian historical process and quite an integral ethnic cultural environment enables the Volin and Galicia areas to become the leaders in the consolidation of both the Ukrainian national state and the political nation. The population of the Eastern regions, in turn, see the policy of the Galician group as a desire to impose the Ukrainian language, their version of the Ukrainian history, their symbols and national heroes, myths and rituals, on the rest of the ethnic and regional communities of the population. According to Nemenskiy (2014), the promotion of the image of the Galician citizen as a true Ukrainian convinces people from other regions that they are not true Ukrainians. It is difficult to question this as the Galician citizens themselves are Ukrainian speaking. It is not a coincidence that about two-thirds of the people killed in the most tragic days of the protests (February 18-21, 2014) were citizens of the western Ukrainian regions (i.e., Lviv, Ternopil, Ivano-Frankivsk, Volyn and Rivne, Vinnytsia, Ternopil, and Zhytomyr).

The traditional geopolitical consciousness of the Galician nationalism is rich in both anti-Russian and anti-Polish views. The nationalist interpretation regards not only the Moscovians but also neighbouring countries like Poland, Romania, and Hungary as occupiers of the 'Ukrainian ethnic lands' at

one period of history or another. The Moscovians have always been, and they still are, the main enemy in the value system of the Ukrainian geopolitical consciousness, influenced by this model of interpretation. They are perceived as the main factor blocking the processes of building the Ukrainian nation, of the full development of the Ukrainian state, language, and culture. The image of Russians is based on the perception of an alien nation, described by some highly subjective interpretations as a nation with non-Slavic origin (Ugro-Finnic, Tatar-Mongolian), attached to a collective life, to the authoritarian models of political organization, to leaderism, and to the lack of traditions of a civil society.

The ideologists of the Ukrainian independence defend a model of historical development combining both the experience of the western regions, which were parts of Rzeczpospolita and Austro-Hungarian Empire, and the history of Cossack territorial-political formations between 16th and 18th centuries in the central and eastern parts of today's Ukraine, regarded as a Ukrainian proto-state. These two different traditions have influenced the formation of a more freedom-loving spirit and non-centralized models of political organization and social relations. The result of the geopolitical and geocultural presence of the Western-Christian civilization is the heritage of the *Greek Catholic Church*, which was founded in the middle of 17th century through the organizational inclusion of a part of the Eastern-Slavic population to the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout the entire 20th century and in relation to the events around the Orange and Euromaidan Revolutions, the heritage of the *Greek Catholic Church* remains a strong factor for occidentalization of the Ukrainian society. A number of social phenomena, however, suggest the preservation of typical post-Soviet features of the post-communist transition, typical also of Russia. Ukraine is still distinguished by an oligarchic economic model, a deep social differentiation of the society characterized by a low number of multi-millionaires controlling a vast share of the regional and national economy, weak middle class and a significant share of the population living below the poverty line, massive corruption, etc.

In the socio-political sphere, the far nationalist trend of interpreting the essence of the Ukrainian-ness is monopolized by organizations such as the 'Right Sector' (2), and some parties which are pre-

sented in the parliament, i.e. the Svoboda (Freedom) party of Oleh Tyahnibok and the Radical Party of Oleg Lyashko. Both the moderate pro-Ukrainian forces and the far nationalists had a common platform for more than a year. They shared the same view on the internal geopolitics and still have common grounds like the fight against Yanukovich, rooting out his economic and political heritage, the decommunization of the political life and public space (including the destruction of some monuments dating back to the Soviet era). The Ukrainian identity in its anti-Russian/anti-Soviet form is also reflected in the four laws for decommunization which entered into force in May 2015. The controversial law condemning the communist and Nazi totalitarian regimes in Ukraine and prohibiting the propaganda of their symbols forbids all Soviet symbols; the members of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army were declared heroes and fighters for the Ukrainian independence. This law treats both communism and Nazism as *equivalent regimes*. Its implementation revises the symbols of the communist era which has been a part of the cultural landscape of thousands of Ukrainian cities, villages, administrative districts, and regions for decades. According to a list from the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, more than 500 names of communist activists need to be eliminated from the public life in Ukraine. Apart from renaming streets bearing the names of communist activists, this measure also results in changing the names of some 1,000 cities. Cities like Dzerzhynsk, Ilichovsk (Chornomorsk), Artemivsk (Bakhmut), Krasnyi Lyman (Lyman) were renamed as part of this campaign by the end of 2015. The same fate awaits Dnipropetrovsk, Dniprodzerzhynsk, Kirovohrad, Komsomolsk, Dimitrov, Ulyanovka, and others.

The Euro-Atlantic vector of the Ukraine's geopolitical consciousness is tightly connected with the evolution of the Galician interpretation of the history of the Ukrainian culture and statehood. The historical forming of the Ukrainian ethnicity is presented as a result of the favourable civilizational influence of Poland, the Catholic world and Latin Europe on the Eastern Slavs from the western parts of the territory of today's Ukraine. The pro-European policy of the current Ukrainian government is stimulated to a large extent by Poland. Namely, the Polish diplomacy was one of the key initiators

of the European Neighbourhood Policy program, where Ukraine is one of the largest beneficiaries.

On a global scale, the EU and the USA are the main directions of the desired integration of Ukraine. In psychological and moral terms, the image of the EU is attached to the European values, with an integration vector which is the source of political and social ideas for the modernization of the Ukrainian society. Another aspect is the expected help from the European Union in the local governance and regional politics, which could support the policy of transition from regional-oligarchic to the democratic, pluralistic, and self-governing model of development of the regions and their relations with Kiev. After 8 years of negotiations, on January 1, 2016, a free trade agreement between Ukraine and the EU entered into force. However, the perspectives of a EU membership of the country remain unclear and without any guarantees. The process was accompanied by a cancellation of the free trade and the suspension of air communication with Russia.

The implementation of the pro-Western course allows for a potential membership in the EU, combined with the continuation of the policy of reducing the energetic and economic dependence on Russia. The increasing sympathy towards NATO among the traditionally moderate politicians is an indicator of changes in the geopolitical consciousness of the Ukrainian elite. A current example is the evolution of the political views and activities of Leonid Kravchuk, the first President of independent Ukraine. He was among the active opponents of NATO, leading an anti-NATO 'educational campaign' in 2012. *Nevertheless*, he completely changed his position in the new geostrategic situation in April 2014, saying that 'the only possible protection from Russia's aggression is to join NATO' (see Karmazina, 2015: 160).

The 'Finlandization' of Ukraine is also possible. This option means only a EU membership, without accession to NATO. In the current geopolitical situation, such a scenario is inconceivable for the pro-Western post-revolutionary government, but it fits the psychological and political expectations of the pro-Russian citizens concentrated mainly in the eastern regions.

5. The Little Russian/Pro-Russian/Post-Soviet identity. Different names, common values

This subnational identity opposes the pan-Ukrainian idea which, in the opinion of the pro-Russian Ukrainian geopolitician Vladimir Der-gachev, is an 'ideology of the Ukrainian fundamentalism whose aim is to 'conquer' the living space of Ukraine by 'the true Ukrainians', so that they impose one all-Ukrainian way of thinking on all the citizens, regardless of their nationality'.

In the spirit of the old imperial traditions of Russia, Ukraine and Ukrainians are respectively called Little Russia and Little Russians. They are considered to be an integral part of the great Russian ethnicity. Another evidence of this is the fact that in 2014 deputies of the nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia suggested renaming Ukraine to Little Russia. From the point of view of the national identity and psychology of Ukrainians, the controversial ethnonym is unacceptable as there is a fraction of national contempt enshrined in it, implying ethnocultural secondness, a subordinate political status and even historical inferiority. Concerning the origin of the term Little Russia, it first appears at the end of the 14th century in Byzantium in order to designate the Galicia-Volhynia and the Kiev kingdoms for the purposes of the territorial organization of the Orthodox Church. Little Russia is also a term used for expressing the self-identification of a number of intellectuals of the 19th century who are nowadays included in the list of heroes of the Ukrainian nationalism.

From the point of view of the Little Russians, the establishment of specific Ukrainian consciousness, language and literature are usually seen as artificial phenomena resulting from 'a negative impact' of the Polish-Lithuanian state and Austro-Hungary on the western and southern parts of the former Kievan Rus. The most radical supporters of this approach are convinced that the 'Ukrainians are westernised Russians' and Ukraine is an 'imaginary' and 'artificial' country with the non-coherent regions united in a new republic (and later on independent country) thanks to *achievements* of the Soviet geopolitics. For instance, the radical Russian geopolitician Dugin used a similar approach. He claims that exis-

tence of a state like Ukraine does not have any geopolitical sense in the Eurasian space. It owns neither the characteristics of a culture with universal significance, nor geographic uniqueness or ethnic exclusivity (Dugin, 2000: 216). According to him, the existence of a unitary Ukraine is unacceptable and he predicts its division into 4 geopolitical entities, namely Western, Eastern, Central Ukraine, and Crimea.

The conservative Russian geopolitical consciousness regards Ukrainians, Russians and Belarusians as elements of the “indivisible” Eastern-Slavic nation, united by the heritage of the Kievan Rus, the Cyrillic alphabet and the Orthodox Church. The same models of perception of Ukraine, of its political and ethnic Ukrainianness, were carried over and adapted in the Russian World doctrine emerged at the beginning of the 21st century. During the current Ukrainian crisis, the use of the terms a Little Russian and a New Russian identity intensifies in the Russian information space. We must keep in mind that the Little Russians are Russian-speaking Ukrainians do not deny the right of Ukraine to exist as a multicultural and bilingual state.

The New Russian identity is a branch of the Little Russian one whose outlines appeared after Left-bank Ukraine joining Russia at the end of the 17th century. In essence, it is a Russian identity, a regional variation, which unites the people with Russian ethnic consciousness. These are fellow countrymen living in a diaspora. The Russian historian Nemen-skiy (2014) clarifies that the New Russian identity is still to emerge in geopolitics, and that there are only initial attempts in order to construct it. The two projects – both of the New Russian and the Little Russian identity – have a common ground in the South-Russian consciousness and culture, historically formed on the territory of today’s Ukraine.

One of the local variations of the Little Russian/New Russian ideological tradition is the Donbass identity. It is based on social codes as follows: the industrialization, the remembrance of the victory over fascism in the Great Patriotic War, the Russian language, the nostalgic feeling for the Soviet era, the proximity to Russia, the electoral support for the Party of Regions and the Communist Party. Yanukovich’s dismissal is perceived as an armed coup inspired and financed by the West. At the end of 2013 and in 2014, the Donbass identity was in a

primary phase of passivity awaiting of the outcome of events of the Euromaidan. Afterwards, the political appeals for listening to the voice of the East intensified and led to an armed conflict proclaiming of two ‘independent’ republics.

The protests against Yanukovich were accompanied by slogans such as ‘Listen to the voice of Donbass’, ‘We worked while they stayed on the Maidan square’. Later on, during the protests of the co-called Russian spring there appeared slogans like ‘Russia, come’, ‘Putin, bring army’, ‘referendum’ (Gorbenko, 2015:137). According to the Russian political scientist Bondarenko (2014), the Russian spring can be regarded as ‘an awakening of a political nation and a revival of the conservative values’. The pro-Russian opponents of the Revolution were stigmatized as second category people, orchestrated by the Kremlin propaganda, without active civic engagement and their own social position.

Millions of citizens from the Ukrainian east and south support the integration course of the country, which takes into consideration its East-Slavic and Orthodox supranational identity. These people regard themselves as a part of the historic Little Russian project. This suggests priority participation in the integration structures developed in the post-Russian space of Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan (e.g., the Eurasian Economic Union, the Eurasian Customs Union, etc.). This option remains acceptable for the larger part of the ethnic Russians and a part of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians, especially those who are middle-aged and old generations. Their sentiment towards Russia and Belarus and the Soviet symbols expressed in the sociological surveys throughout the entire period of transformation, show an evidence for the preservation of the Soviet mentality. They deny the right of the Western Ukrainians to consider themselves a benchmark of Ukrainianness and their claims to be the only inheritors of medieval Rus, emphasizing on the ‘betrayal’ of the Orthodox religion, the breaking up of the unity and authentic identity of the East-Slavic Orthodox people. Regarding the sphere of economy and security, the pro-Russian project aims to involve Ukraine in the re-integration of the post-Soviet region.

It is worth stressing that there is no clear border between Russia and Ukraine, the two largest Slavic countries, because of the fact that their territories

lands remain tightly connected in economic, communicative and ethnocultural terms. In over two decades, significant parts of it have not even been demarked. The historic region of Slobozhanshyna, encompassing parts of today's Ukraine (the Kharkiv regions, the parts of Sumy, the Donetsk, and Lugansk regions) and of Russia (parts of Belgorod, the Kursk, and Voronezh regions) is a representative model of the transience of the cross-border areas. The characteristics of the classic ethnocultural frontier areas can be seen in the results of the research on the regional identity conducted by Krylov and Gritsenko (2014). The ethnocultural identity of the population in the areas close to the state border has mixed features. Moving away from the border and deeper into the territory of Russia and/or Ukraine (Fig. 2) is accompanied by decreasing duality of the consciousness and, at the same time, the hardening of the national self-awareness.

Since 2014, all changes have pointed to an unequivocal course to the Westernisation of a predominantly Orthodox country. Large parts of its

population remain tightly connected to Russia and Belarus in terms of a way of life and family relationships. In this context, the new geocultural approach of Russia, based on the ethnocentric concept of the Russian World, wins supporters among the Ukrainian population thanks to reference to -Soviet and post-Soviet elements of historical memory. It breaks away from traditional and more pluralist concepts of the Slavic brotherly and the Orthodox unity, narrowing the field of sympathy and participation in the Russian-centred project for integration by the people with strong Ukrainian self-awareness. In the traditionally 'proletarian' Donbass, the influence and concept of a Russian World leads to re-formatting of the identity of millions 'Russian-speaking non-Russians' and 'non-Ukrainians' (Nemenskiy, 2014) to an identity with more pronounced regional elements and a preference for Russian cultural values and models of social relations. On the other hand, the geopolitics of soft power wins the pro-Western sympathy of Ukrainians with a supra-

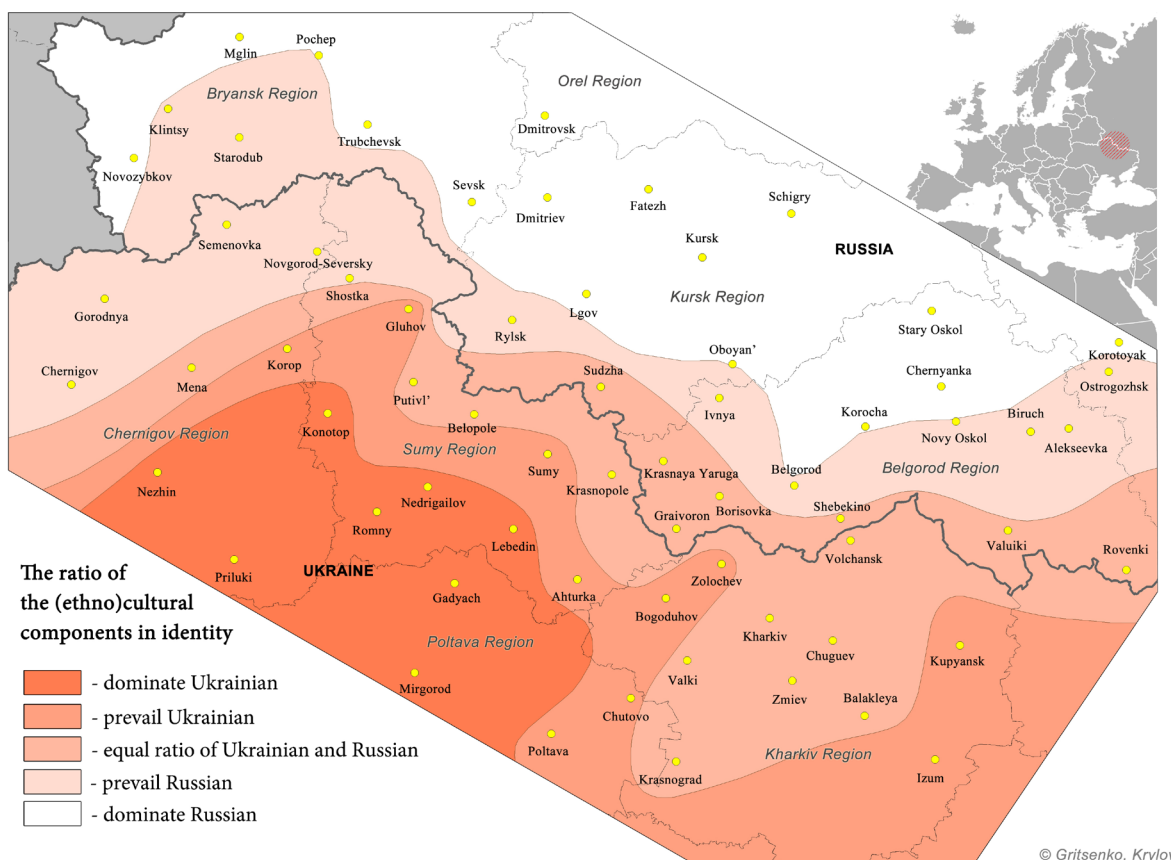


Fig. 2. The Russian-Ukrainian ethnocultural gradient (according to Krylov and Gritsenko)

Source: Krylov, M. and Gritsenko, A. 2014

national project emphasizing on liberalization of the economy, security and development of civil society.

6. The model of the Ukrainian political nation. A missed opportunity or a still possible option?

The key terms in this model are ‘people of Ukraine’ and ‘Ukrainian nation.’ The most accurate description would be the one of a constructivist model of creating a Ukrainian political nation through the consolidation of the people living in a common state, sharing one territory but possessing a particular historical experience, mentality, language, as well as civilizational and geopolitical orientation. The essence of a French model of political nation is the consolidation of equal citizens of various social groups united by a common language and equal political rights. This civil model of the nation failed in Ukraine for several reasons.

First, the Ukrainian experience in applying Western European models of nation happened at a later historical stage – between the 20th and 21st century.

Second, the Ukrainian regions are continuators of opposite political and ethnocultural traditions, thus they have a different degree of maturity and internal consolidation.

Third, there are the attempts to impose the strictly-Ukrainian model of identity on all other regions, including the part of the Russian-speaking population which possesses an established and stable ethnic, linguistic, and symbolic image of the world, as well as ethnocultural self-identification.

Fourth, there is ignorance on behalf of the supporters of both the Galician and the pro-Russian identity of these different traditions and historical sensivity, the lack of self-criticism of their own myths, and of dialogic approach which would allow opening the arguments of the opposing side.

Regardless of all problems of the ‘belated creation of the Ukrainian nation’ (Riabczuk, 2000), it was only the all-Ukrainian approach which carried and still carries hopes for ensuring the geopolitical unity. The pan-Ukrainian approach could succeed only if it were placed on a wide politico-cultural basis instead of a mono-ethnic (pan-Ukrainian) one.

This means the realisation of a model of Ukraine as a multinational country, which guarantees the rights, freedoms, and equality of all its citizens, regardless of their linguistic, ethnic, religious, or regional affiliation. The pan-Ukrainianists, however, fight for the implementation of political and administrative tools to ensure the domination of the Ukrainian language. Whereas the pro-Russian Ukrainians provide politics of bilingualism, emphasizing the peculiarities in the language policy of separate regions.

The success of the all-Ukrainian project depends on the synthesis of ideas, values, symbols and traditions not only of the pan-Ukrainian/Galician/pro-European identity, but of the pro-Russian/post-Soviet/Little Russian option as well. This model offers a more balanced option for the internal structure and international policy of the state. It is desired by the Ukrainian patriots in the east and west of Dnieper, and its ultimate goal is to preserve the territorial integrity of Ukraine as a result of a balanced all-Ukrainian strategy. This means, in the first place, a consolidated, supranational, democratic, and pluralist society with a modern developed economy, with devotion of all citizens to the Ukrainian state, perceiving it as their homeland, and a strong commitment to establish it as homogenous geopolitical subject with a positive image internationally. This project still has potential even if we exclude the population of Crimea and the pro-Russian separatists of Donbass. Ukraine remains a multinational country with regional differences in regard to the language, ethnic self-awareness, and electoral *behaviour*. The pluralistic option for development seems to be the most natural from the perspective of the long-term stabilization of Ukraine. It has to be taken into consideration that neither Russia and its policy for unity of the Russian World will eliminate the feeling of the Ukrainian identity, nor the nationalist oriented language policy of the Kiev government will succeed, given that 50.0% of the population speaks only or predominantly Russian.

Mykhailo Hrushevsky, considered one of the fathers of the Ukrainian historiography, was of the opinion that pluralism should be a basic principle of the Ukrainian international policy (Shablyi, 2003: 390). In theory, at least, this is a natural way for Ukraine, taking into account the diverse historical experience of the regions, the geographical po-

sition of the country and the divided geopolitical consciousness of the population. The main obstacles for successful multi-vector Ukrainian geopolitics, aimed at numerous 'strategic partners', are not only the influences of external geopolitical centres such as Russia, the EU, the USA, Poland, China, or Turkey. They have their own interests in solving the Ukrainian issue in one way or another, and in many global affairs provide a hostile policy against their competitors. In such circumstances, the geopolitical situation of Ukraine is also formed by the internal political and economic instability, the series of crises, failures to reach ethnic, confessional, and linguistic consolidation in the period of independence, and the inability of the central government to balance between the different interests of the regional politico-economic clans. It was exactly the lack of internal unity which did not allow Ukraine to change its function of a passive recipient of external geopolitical and economic influences.

In an environment of multi-vector geopolitics, the elaboration of a common platform of national memory and political priorities requires an active and open dialogue. This is very difficult in cases where the parties to the dispute have to unite around a common version of extremely traumatic moments of the history. What is it in this common history that divides Ukrainians? The dispute over the activity of the Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, who joined Left-bank Ukraine with Russia in 1654, is an emblematic example. He is treated as a positive person in the East but in the West, Ivan Mazepa, who led a pro-Western policy, is considered a national hero. While the vast majority of Ukraine's population sees the Pereyaslav agreement as a historical mistake, a large part of the population in Donbass, according to sociological studies conducted between 1995 and 2010, appreciate this historic agreement (Mikhalchenko, 2015:11). Furthermore, the rehabilitation of the Ukrainian collaborators of the Second World War, the attempts to present the military units which fought against the Soviet Union (and in certain phases – against Poles) as national heroes, are sources of a deep and long-lasting conflict of the collective memory. The chauvinistic views of some of the leaders of the Ukrainian nationalists from the mid 20th century, like Stepan Bandera, with whom the far-right nationalists, close to the current government, identify themselves, are

unacceptable for Ukrainians with Russian/post-Soviet self-consciousness. Even the memory of one of the most tragic events in the history of Ukraine – the Great Famine (*Holodomor*) in 1932–1933 cannot bring together the views of all citizens. In 2006, the Ukrainian government adopted a law that recognized the Great Famine as genocide committed against the Ukrainian people, planned by the central Soviet government. The opponents reject such an interpretation, arguing that not only Ukrainians were victims of the Great Famine, but also other ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, including people of other republics (Russia and Kazakhstan).

As Nemenskiy (2014) concludes, during the period of independence, the preservation of the Ukrainian state could have been possible only by meeting two conditions: the internal condition – a political power, regardless of which part of the country it is elected by, would be positioned not as a representative of its 'half', but as a mediator of the expectations of the whole population; the external condition – requires the maintaining of a geopolitical uncertainty where the country can take a temporary position between the main centres of power. The simultaneous participation in two integration projects proved to be impossible, however, the attempts to preserve an interim position were also unsuccessful.

7. Conclusion

The events of 2014 and 2015 were a result of unsolved political and economic questions accumulated during the period of post-Soviet transformation. Among them are issues of both internal and external nature, such as follows: the complicated geopolitical position of Ukraine, the lack of a strategic vector of supranational integration, the divided historical consciousness of the population, and influences of external powers (especially Russia). The competition between different models of identity was not probably the main reason for the Ukrainian crisis which started with the students' protest against a political decision of the central government in November 2013. In the course of time, the ethnic and regional confrontation became a dominant factor of the Ukrainian issue.

Four years after the pro-Western revolution in Kiev, two clear vectors of transformation of the sub-national identities in the post-Soviet Ukraine can be outlined.

First, there is a tendency to *strengthen* the role of the Ukrainian language in the information space of Ukraine and break the traditional ties with Russia in a radical way. There is an increased consolidation around the idea of a strong and independent Ukrainian state and the principles of a Western type of political democracy. The fight and revolution against the pro-Russian government and the President, the cult of the 'blue squadron', the victory of the Revolution of dignity and the fight against the 'pro-Russian separatists' from the east proved to be the new symbols of this group. There exists an ideological convergence between part of the representatives of the Little Russian and Galician branch of the Ukrainian identity (e.g., in cities with a traditional presence of the Russian language and culture like Odessa, Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk, or Zaporizhia).

The second trend comprises the widening of the gap in mentality and shared civilizational values between the population of the central and western regions of Ukraine and millions of Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians living in separate parts of the East. This is the so-called New Russian identity and its 'Russian spring' which led to loss of control over 7.3% of the territory of the Ukrainian Republic and 13.4% of its population in the first half of 2014. Counteracting the extreme radical groups, the armed fight against the Ukrainian army, the ideas of "an united and indivisible Russian World", promotion of the so-called Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the postulates for joining Russia, and the requests for federalization of Ukraine, have all become the symbols of unification of this group. As in the case of both moderate and radical Ukrainian patriots/nationalists, the moral spirit of Novorossiia is also based on its own pantheon of heroes and martyrs like the victims of the anti-Maidan movement who died in the fire in Odessa on May 2, 2014.

The most complicated task for the internal geopolitics of Ukraine is searching for instruments for re-integration of two self-proclaimed "people's republics". Loss of control over some strategic territories required using of military means in order to

defend the *sovereignty* and territorial unity of the state.

The drastic changes in conditions of internal geopolitics influence the geopolitical position of Ukraine on an international scale. In the course of a quarter of a century of independence, the chief factors of internal division and opposition and were not so strong and did not jeopardize the unitary nature and unity of the Ukrainian state. This period of Ukraine's development, however, is already part of history. From the perspective of its geopolitical positioning, Ukraine has entered a phase of distancing itself from the period of uncertainty and attempts for an asymmetrical integration. The central government follows a clearly defined direction of its global geopolitics and foreign policy. They are more pro-Western and less pro-Russian.

The political mobilization of both All-Ukrainian identity and its regional (subnational) components, especially those distancing themselves from it, required changes in the current internal geopolitics. Like other European countries with a complex ethnic and regional structure, Ukraine came across the universal problem of balancing between the right of people to self-determination (it concerns titular nations and minority groups as well), but in a situation of disintegration of its territorial unity. The specifics of the Ukrainian issue is that separatist groups on the East are supported by their powerful neighbour. That is the reason why Ukraine is in a difficult geostrategic situation. Regardless of the means used by the central authorities (military, legal, diplomatic ones, etc.) as the example of crises in former Yugoslavia shows, without a decisive share of external factors, the problem of territorial unity will be impossible to solve.

Notes

(1) A brief episode of the history of autonomism on the territory of Ukraine is the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic which existed for a few weeks in 1918. The Republic was formed on the basis of economic specialization including rich coal and ore reserves.

(2) Till 2014 – UNA-UNSO – Ukrainian National Assembly – Ukrainian National Self-Defense.

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Ministry of Science
and Higher Education
Republic of Poland

The proofreading of articles, positively reviewed and approved for publishing in the 'Bulletin of Geography. Socio-economic Series', was financed from the funds of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education earmarked for activities popularizing science, in line with Agreement No 509/P-DUN/2016.

