

Where Putin's Russia Ends

“Novorossija” and the Development of
National Consciousness in Ukraine

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In early 2014 the existence of an independent Ukraine hung by a thread. Russia had annexed the Crimean Peninsula, and with the “Russian Spring” a “hybrid” war in eastern Ukraine was initiated. At this moment the watchwords of “Novorossija” and Moscow’s “reconquering” of South-Eastern Ukraine gained popularity. Ultimately, the failure of the idea of a “Novorossija” is attributable mainly to developments within Ukraine that involved a renegotiation not only of ethno-national allegiances, but also of national and political loyalties since 1991.

Introduction

The Minsk Agreement of February 2015 (“Minsk 2”) marked the advent of a since then barely functioning ceasefire in the territorial conflict over part of the Donbass region. Nonetheless, until today, fundamental questions relating to the status of the territory remain unclear. In this respect, the prevailing public and academic debate concerning the background of the conflict (civil war, “imported separatism”, an interstate dispute)¹ conceals another central question: why did the “Russian Spring” (*russkaja vesna*), in other words the “reconquering” of entire South-Eastern Ukraine, which had been the declared objective of pro-Russian separatists along with cohorts of Russian volunteers and also some of the leaders within the Russian Federation, end precisely on today’s front line? Why were the targeted campaigns of terror and destabilisation carried out by pro-Russian forces unsuccessful in Odessa and Kharkiv and also in Dnipropetrovsk, Mariupol, Zaporizhia, Kherson and Mykolaiv as well as in large parts of the Donbass?

The endeavour to find answers to these still relevant questions inevitably leads us to the far more significant issue of how, just under 25 years after independence, things now look with regard to the Ukrainian nation and national consciousness in Ukraine. Outside of Ukraine, there has long been a rather uncritical agreement on this question. While an alleged ethno-cultural “divide” in Ukraine along the Dnieper has to date enjoyed paradigmatic importance in Western and espe-

cially German discourses,² partly guiding actions and policies, the matter is much clearer for the Russian elite. As early as 2008, Vladimir Putin claimed during a meeting with former American president George W. Bush that “Ukraine is not even a state”.³ After the conflict with Ukraine began in early 2014, Putin became even more unequivocal. Approximately “one third” of the population of Ukraine are deemed to be ethnic Russians by the Russian President, which is why Russia’s strong interest in their fate should be, according to him, only natural. Furthermore, especially the South-Eastern regions (Vladimir Putin expressly uses the term *Novorossija*, meaning “New Russia”) around the centers of Kharkiv, Luhansk, Donetsk, Kherson und Mykolaiv had only been handed over to the former Ukrainian Soviet Republic in the twentieth century, and this was by chance more than anything else (“why, God only knows”).⁴ This is also the reason why, said the Russian President in January 2016, the present-day border between Ukraine and Russia has an “artificial and gratuitous character”.⁵

If one accepts this argument, it would only have been logical to divide Ukraine back in early 2014 and throughout that summer, when a power vacuum had virtually been created due to Kiev’s “Revolution of Dignity” and the subsequent disintegration of the Donetsk elite clan in the country’s South-East. In reality, this did not come about. Moreover, the supporters of “Novorossija” had to be content with a much smaller territory that was also not uniformly governed and revolved around the self-proclaimed Donetsk



Border Issues: Vladimir Putin in front of a map of Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States. The annexation of Crimea has been a geopolitical break in the post-Soviet region and in Europe. Source: © Itar Tass, Reuters.

and Luhansk “People’s Republics” (“DNR” and “LNR”). This situation points either to a serious mistake in Vladimir Putin’s perception of national allegiances in the Post-Soviet region, or to a significant development in the identity of the inhabitants of Ukraine’s South-Eastern regions.⁶ How strong is the loyalty to the Ukrainian state there 25 years after independence? Is there any significant relationship at all between the ethno-national types of self-identification and the commitment to Ukraine? And finally, what influence did the turning points of the “Revolution of Dignity”, the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass have on the political attitudes of the people living there?

The “Unexpected Nation”

Ukraine’s emergence as an independent state in 1991 was mainly a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union (USSR) driven by republican elites who succeeded in the assertion of their

individual republic’s borders. In the “Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic” (UkSSR), similar to the situation in other emergent republics, the republican communist elite was also the main force behind independence. As for truly nationally conscious actors, the Ukrainian “Rukh” movement also established a political power base, yet it only had significant numbers of supporters in Western and in parts of central Ukraine. The Communist Party of Ukraine, whose members had transformed themselves into “national communists” led by Leonid Kravchuk, later the first President of independent Ukraine, pulled the strings in the state’s foundation, which for them was rather an instrument to remain in power and gain control over economic assets.⁷

However, for elite circles of its eastern neighbour, and equally for many western observers, founding an independent Ukrainian state within the borders of the former Soviet Republic took some getting used to. Because there were allegedly

significant ethnic, linguistic and religious differences in Ukraine, some observers liked to call the new state “artificial” and later described the Ukrainian nation as “unexpected”.⁸ Doubts were raised with regard to Ukraine’s ability to survive and, mainly among politically motivated critics, about the legitimacy of the new project. This was due to the large proportion of inhabitants identifying themselves as ethnic Russians (1989 Census, 22.1 per cent, see below), but also the widespread uncertainty at this time concerning constitutive elements, community spirit and the borders of the “Ukrainian nation”.

However, here one must take into account that, after seven decades of Soviet communism, ethnic or national criteria could only have a limited identity-defining effect not only in Ukraine. While the question of nationalities indeed served as a welcome political instrument (cf. the “korenisacija” policy⁹) especially during the founding period of the USSR, the work on the new “Soviet Man” and the internationalism propagated from above

had been internalised in many cases. This meant that for the majority of the population ethnic and national affiliations receded into the background. The year 1991 was thus partly a “zero hour” in terms of how most people living on the territory of Ukraine identified themselves. From this point on – as Fredrik Barth¹⁰ once wrote – ethnic and also national allegiance were once again to be renegotiated between external attribution and self-identification.

Ukrainians, Russians and People with Hybrid Identities – On the Complexity of the Nationality Question

The fact that as a fledgling independent state Ukraine was suspected of being a divided nation is due in particular to the rigid criteria that foreign countries – for different reasons – on the one hand applied to the question of nationalities in Ukraine, and yet on the other hand also because of the nature of questions posed inside Ukraine concerning ethnic or national affiliations in the

Table 1: National Affiliation in Ukraine According to the Official Census as a Percentage of the Overall Population

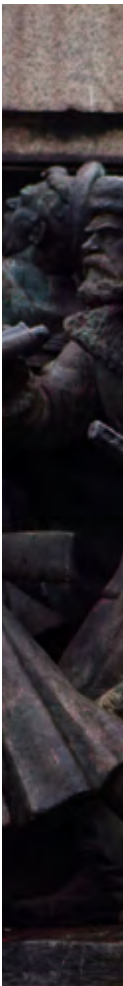
National affiliation	1989	2001
Ukrainian	72.7	77.8
Russian	22.1	17.3
Belarusian	0.9	0.6
Moldavian	0.6	0.5
Crimean Tatar	0.0	0.5

Source: State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, in: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality> [30 Jan 2016].

Table 2: A Historical and Comparative Perspective of Language Use in Ukraine

Language groups	1991–1994	1995–1999	2000–2003
Ukrainian-speaking Ukrainians	41.2	46.3	45.4
Russian-speaking Ukrainians	32.6	28.2	30.9
Russian-speaking Russians	19.7	17	16.5
Other	6.5	8.5	7.2

Source: Khmelko, n. 13.



last official 2001 census (see table 1). Because a large majority of those who described themselves as “Russian” in the extremely simplified official census were also concentrated in Crimea and in the country’s South-Eastern region, the alleged “divide” also acquired a sensitive geopolitical significance.

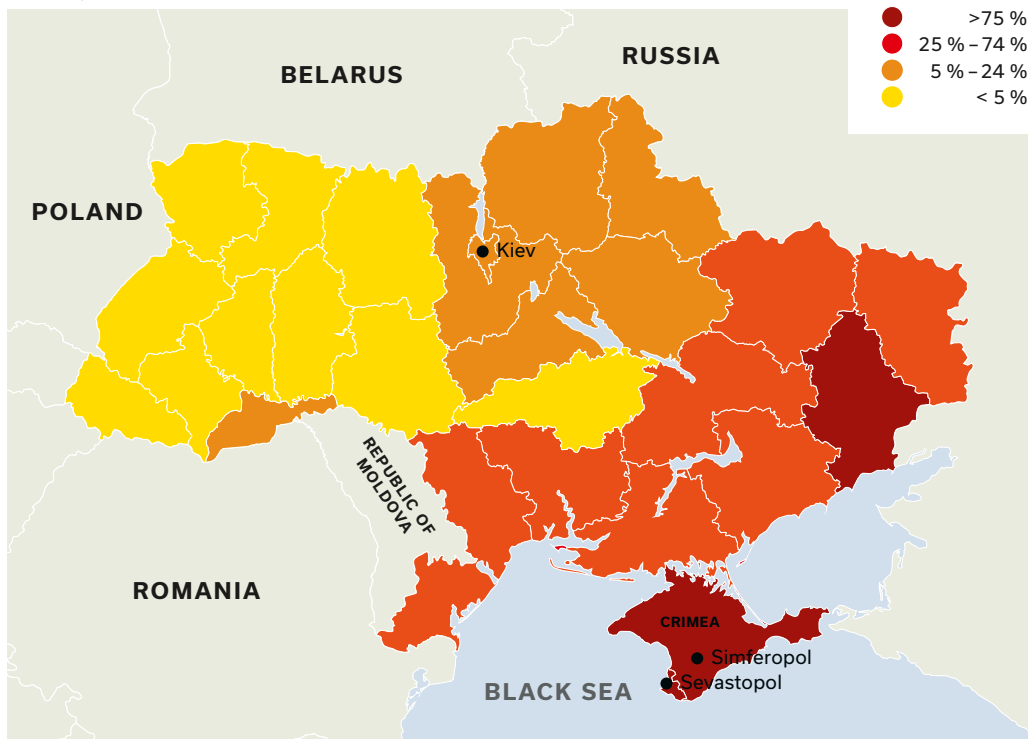
However, critics¹¹ stressed early on that the simplistic way of comparing ethnic Ukrainians and Russians was hardly useful. Firstly, in the absence of other criteria a distinction was predominantly made between them purely on grounds of language as an “identity marker”. In this respect, it is often overlooked that a sizeable

majority of Ukrainians are basically bilingual or speak mixed forms such as “Surzhyk”, and that the boundaries between languages are therefore not clear-cut. Hence, if on the one hand language is seen as a key distinguishing criterion for “national communities” living in Ukraine and then weighed against the obvious existence of a large group of multi-lingual people on the other, the “ethnic divide” argument already loses impact (see figures 1 and 2 as well as table 2). Furthermore, it needs to be borne in mind that precisely in regions such as the Donbass (the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk), which are characterised by a particularly high concentration of native Russian speakers and ethnic Russians



Showing one’s colors: Parts of this soviet monument in the Bulgarian capital Sofia have been painted in the national colors of the Ukraine to show solidarity. Source: © Pierre Marsaut, Reuters.

Fig. 1: Percentage of Native Russian Speakers in the Overall Population



Source: Own illustration based on CNN 2014: A Divided Ukraine, 3 Mar 2014, in: <http://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2014/02/world/ukraine-divided> [17 Feb 2016]; Natural Earth ©, <http://naturalearthdata.com> [10 Mar 2016].

(according to the 2001 Census, 38.2 or 39 per cent), there is a clear urban–rural split. In other words, the “Russian”-dominated towns and cities are often surrounded by majority “Ukrainian” rural areas.¹² This circumstance also contradicts the generally accepted “divide” paradigm.

The territorial division of “Ukrainians” and “Russians” therefore assumes more highly complex dimensions if, as a supplement to such categories, another criterion is included, as has been the custom since the early 2000s in Ukraine: namely, a further category of ethnic self-identification or so-called “bi-ethnors”,¹³ or to adopt a relevant term in this context “people with hybrid identities”. The appropriate introduction of this so-called type of hybrid identity, that is, the possibility of describing oneself both as “Ukrainian” and “Russian”, can be traced back to the observation that a large group of people with such a “hybrid identity” live in the towns and cities of

South-Eastern Ukraine in particular. As a result, opinion polls (see table 3) reveal a highly differentiated picture with regard to Ukrainians’ self-identification and it is notable that the group of “pure” ethnic Russians is subsequently almost cut in half.

The ethno-national structure of Ukraine is therefore shown to be much more complex than is suggested by the official census with its simplified Ukrainian-Russian dichotomy. But what conclusions can actually be drawn from this, especially if we recall what was referred to above as the evidently limited meanings of ethnic and national references in around 1991? Were there significant debates on the national question and such related aspects as the orientation of cultural and foreign policies in the first two decades of independent Ukraine? Were the results of the opinion polls on self-assigned group identities therefore actually reflected in the political reality of Ukraine as well as in the political actions of elites?

Table 3: A Historical and Comparative Perspective of the Ethnic Structure of Ukraine

Identity	1994–1999	2001–2003
Only Ukrainian	59.8	62.9
Russian and Ukrainian	24.4	22.5
Only Russian	11.3	10.0
Other	4.5	4.6

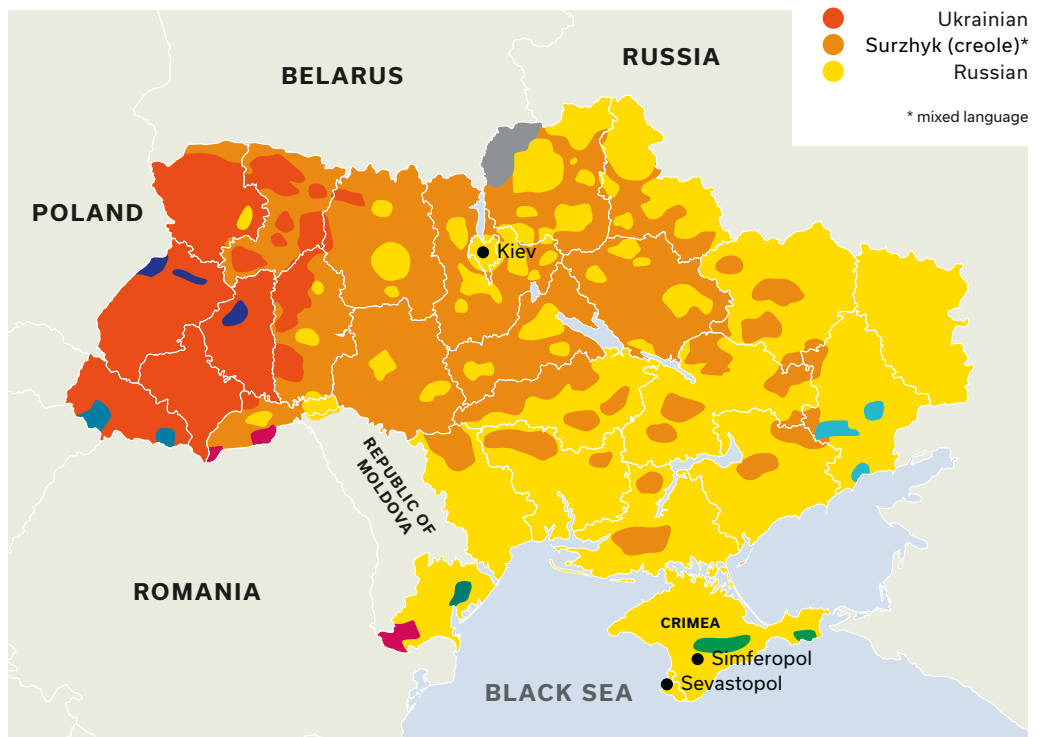
Source: Khmelko, n. 13.

**The “Amorphous” Ukraine:
On the Importance of Ethnicity
and the Nation Before the “Maidan”**

The Ukrainian analyst Oleksandr Sushko recently described this reality in the most telling manner when he spoke of the “amorphous identity” of Ukraine before the “Euromaidan” and the “Revolution of Dignity” in 2013 and 2014.¹⁴ He sug-

gests that there could only be limited political effectiveness of ethnic and national self-identification in a post-1991 society that was mostly preoccupied with adapting to new and, for most social groups, difficult economic conditions. Moreover, society was still caught up in the Soviet tradition and therefore to a large extent subjected to the political elite. Alongside those with hybrid identities, also the groups describing themselves

Fig. 2: Languages Spoken at Home in Ukraine



Source: Own illustration based on National Linguistic University Kiev 2009; Natural Earth ©, <http://naturalearthdata.com> [10 Mar 2016].



Epicerter: The Place of Independence in Kiev, the so-called Maidan, was the hub of protests associated with the Orange Revolution in 2004 and the Euromaidan-movement. Source: © Petro Zadorozhny, Reuters.

simply as “Ukrainian” or “Russian” were, with the exception of marginalised nationalistic fringe groups, hardly “nationally aware” and distinct, let alone having any incentive to be mobilised on grounds of ethnic dividing lines.

Most Ukrainian presidents consciously decided against the role of “ethnic” or national “entrepreneurs” and conformed to the “amorphous” national identity of Ukraine.

The political-societal dynamic together with policy makers’ actions become the primary sources for “renegotiating” identities precisely if

one leaves behind the classic primordial perspective of basically predetermined and rigid ethnic group allegiances and accepts a constructivist view of the concepts of “ethnicity” and “nation” instead. Against this background all Ukrainian presidents, with one notable exception, deliberately decided against the role of “ethnic” or national “entrepreneurs” and conformed to the “amorphous” national identity of Ukraine with regard both to their domestic and foreign policies. The major issues here were the, to a certain degree unavoidable, Ukrainisation policy as well as the general foreign policy in regard to the West and its institutions on the one hand and Russia on the other. Although the Ukrainian language became the national language in the new Constitution of 1996 and specific legislation from 1998, the elites only implemented this central part of the Ukrainisation policy in a “lax” manner.¹⁵ This was a consequence of the delicate politicisation

of the issue: Under Viktor Yanukovich, a law on regional languages was even introduced, albeit controversially, in the form of the “Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Law” (2012). In the area of the “politics of memory”, too, President Leonid Kuchma, who was in office from 1994 to 2004, was happy simply to refer to the fact that “Ukraine is not Russia”.¹⁶ Yet, like Viktor Yanukovich later (2010 to 2013), Kuchma otherwise refrained from constructing a dedicated national Ukrainian view of history. Only Viktor Yushchenko (2005 to 2010) very consciously deviated from this policy and attempted a more progressive form of nation-building with numerous initiatives related to the “politics of memory”. Furthermore, with his foreign policy geared towards joining the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Yushchenko discontinued the “multi-vector” or “block-free” policy that Kuchma and, until 2013, Yanukovich had been operating. This foreign policy, in both their views, was in accordance with Ukrainian interests as well as with the people’s allegedly “hybrid” attitudes concerning this question.¹⁷

In Ukrainian politics a narrative with an unwillingness to make clear commitments at its core became firmly established.

Hence, a type of “amorphous” political narrative became firmly established in Ukrainian politics – with a notable unwillingness to make clear commitments at its core. One should neither work too progressively towards a Ukrainisation of the state, nor should one focus on deciding on a clear foreign policy direction. Ukraine was therefore always implicitly “caught in the middle”: between Ukrainian and Russian identity-wise, and between the West and Russia geopolitically (see the frequently used “bridge metaphor”¹⁸). This self-attribution was convenient especially for the majority of the Ukrainian elite. Although the spectre of separatism was present during the

early phase of the new state and thus needed to be acted upon, once it had been overcome the fact that the majority of elites refrained from creating progressive policies on nationality and deciding on a foreign policy orientation can be largely explained by their interest in retaining power. In particular, none of the directly elected presidents could (normally) have an interest in mobilising society along ethno-national lines and thereby risking the carefully constructed balance between regional power structures ultimately characterising Ukrainian politics.

Revolution, Annexation, War: A Change of Narrative and Mobilisation along Ethno-National Lines

The restraint shown by the political actors therefore partially explains the relative stability of ethno-national attitudes in the first two decades after independence. The less effort the political actors had invested in the construction and consolidation of a national identity or identities, the less was their potential for change, mobilisation and therefore also for “danger”. However, the pivotal question now was what would happen if the existing balance made up of “amorphous” identity and “narrative” was to be challenged or completely upset by specific internal and external developments.

The loyalty issue had already briefly emerged in the wake of the “Orange Revolution” in late autumn 2004 (cf. the Separatist Congress in Severodonetsk). Yet this issue had largely been removed from the agenda by an elite consensus that was basically putting an end to the “revolution”.¹⁹ The situation arising in late autumn 2013 and winter 2014 was however a novelty. Viktor Yanukovich had only realised too late that the Association Agreement negotiated over a long period of time with the EU was, certainly from the point of view of his own people, yet also in the Kremlin’s eyes, basically forcing him as the first leader of independent Ukraine to clearly decide on a foreign policy direction. This made a retreat to the “amorphous narrative”, which had actually prevailed until then, impossible. In retrospect, however, the “Revolution of Dignity”



With eagle-eyes: Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko followed by the presidents of Russia, Vladimir Putin, and Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko. A solution to the state of emergency at the Eastern EU border is still not within sight. [Source: © Grigory Dukor, Reuters.](#)

resulting from the “Euromaidan” triggered by the Vilnius summit can be assessed as far more crucial in terms of policies relating to nationality. This was because the revolution brought about the implosion of the elite network of the “Party of Regions”, which almost wholly monopolised power in South-Eastern Ukraine since the early 2000s, thus creating a power vacuum that the Russian government used to intervene both in Crimea and later also in the Donbass.

In relation to the question of nationalities and a so far unknown mobilisation of people along ethno-national “dividing lines” in Ukraine, an entirely unprecedented situation had emerged: Firstly, the “Euromaidan” had been transformed into an ultimately victorious revolutionary movement. The latter, also due to Russia’s role before and after the summit, bore strong characteristics of a national Ukrainian liberation movement. As a result, along with radicals, large sections were

mobilised of what until then had been moderate national “camps”. During this process, and in particular from April 2014 on, a clearly reciprocal effect was recognisable – a type of mutual mobilisation and growing national awareness. Secondly, the new rulers in Kiev – partly due to pressure from protesters on the street – quickly abolished the “amorphous narrative” and now openly committed themselves to a foreign policy course aimed at full integration into the West and to a national Ukrainian narrative that had been badly prepared and was not well thought through.²⁰ Thirdly, the “Russian Spring”, in other words Russia’s policy of intervention and annexation in Crimea and later in the Donbass based on a hybrid type of warfare, had created an option that up to that point had almost been unthinkable: a “reconquering” of South-Eastern Ukraine by the Russian Federation, or at least a secession of those territories supported by the Russian government – the so-called “Novorossija Scenario”.

**Why “Novorossija” Failed:
The Emergence of a Civil Nation in Ukraine**

In early 2014, an event occurred that even people in Russia had not seriously expected: after an illegal “referendum”, which took place during a de facto occupation, the Crimean Peninsula was officially annexed or, in the language of the Russian President, “incorporated” into the Federation.²¹ Vladimir Putin’s decision wholly to integrate a part of the former empire into the Russian Federation for the first time since the break-up of the Soviet Union must, even in the light of Moscow’s long-standing support of pro-Russian de facto states, be considered a geo-political earthquake of the first order. This earthquake set important revisionist forces in motion in Russia and also had a profound impact on the neighbouring states.

Although we still do not know today if Vladimir Putin’s personal strategy was actually geared towards the reconquering of what he and a majority of Russian nationalists described as “Novorossija”²² (see Figure 3), there is good reason to believe that, had it developed successfully, he would not have interfered with this scenario. Putin’s remarks, mentioned at the beginning, make it clear that he openly questions the existence of Ukrainian statehood where, in his opinion, a majority of “Russian citizens” is living. Fur-

thermore, the official Kremlin narrative, which contests any direct or official participation by the Russian military as well as any support for the “DNR”/“LNR” separatists, is to be understood merely as a tactic. This is how it was and is possible for pro-Russian forces and forces “imported” from Russia to use hybrid warfare methods, such as targeted experimental moves and month-long massive destabilisation campaigns, in the centers of the South-East, for example particularly in Kharkiv and Odessa, but also in Zaporizhia or Mariupol,²³ without losing face should there be a negative outcome.²⁴ There are also numerous indications that these “experimental moves” were centrally controlled and financed by Moscow.²⁵ However, one thing was certain – only a corresponding reaction or support from the people living in those regions would have facilitated the referendum- and the subsequent secession policy later successfully implemented in Donetsk and Luhansk. Why did this not happen here, and why did the projects planned for the “Kharkiv”, “Odessa” and “Zaporizhian People’s Republics” fail?

In this situation the people in the towns and cities of South-Eastern Ukraine were assigned a key role, all the more so because large sections of the existing elite had, as mentioned above, discredited themselves and a power vacuum emerged in many places. Although the situation

Table 4: Do You Agree that Russia is Justifiably Protecting the Interests of Russian-speaking Citizens in South-Eastern Ukraine? (April 2014)

Region or oblast	South-east as a whole	Dnipropetrovsk	Donetsk	Zaporizhia	Luhansk	Mykolaiv	Odessa	Kharkiv	Kherson
Yes	32.6	21.0	47.0	19.5	44.2	14.6	30.6	36.6	23.5
No	49.9	65.6	33.4	53.3	31.8	71.5	52.3	53.0	61.1
Difficult to say	16.1	12.1	19.6	23	19.6	13.4	15.8	10.1	14.9
I would prefer not to answer	1.4	1.2	0.0	4.2	4.5	0.5	1.2	0.2	0.5

Source: Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) 2014: The Views and Opinions of Southeastern Regions Residents of Ukraine: April 2014, in: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=news&id=258> [2 Feb 2016].

Fig. 3: The Claimed Territory of "Novorossija"



Source: Own illustration based on edmaps.com, Historical Maps of Novorossiya, Federal Republic of Novorossiya (source list), <http://edmaps.com/html/novorossiya.html> [16 Jun 2016]; Natural Earth ©, <http://naturalearthdata.com> [10 Mar 2016].

varied from one town and city to the next, there was one similarity. Pro-Russian activists failed in their attempts at destabilisation wherever it was possible to mobilise broad groups of pro-Ukrainians and wherever they were supported by the remaining local political elites and businessmen. In particular, the pro-Russian side underestimated the potential of mobilising the pro-Ukrainian people in the South-Eastern Ukrainian towns and cities, and even pro-Ukrainian observers and analysts were surprised by the magnitude of the phenomenon.²⁶ Although opinion polls carried out in these regions with a majority of Russian-speaking inhabitants and a high percentage of ethnic Russians had always revealed little sympathy for separatist projects or for annexation by Russia, for the first time these options now basically appeared within the realm of possibility. A particularly revealing picture for an investigation into the underlying causes for the ultimate failure

of the "Novorossija Project" is therefore given by opinion polls (see tables 4, 5, and 6) from April 2014, when the window of opportunity for this was wide open. The following conclusions can be drawn from these opinion polls:

1. First of all, it is interesting that a majority of the inhabitants of the regions in question expressly denied the Russian state the right postulated by Vladimir Putin (see above) to represent their interests (see table 4). Here, we refer to absolute majorities of over 70 per cent, in particular outside the Donbass (Mykolaiv). If we start by assuming that Vladimir Putin aimed his statement about rights both at the groups of ethnic Russians clearly over-represented in these regions and at those with hybrid identities, even the relatively high "positive" values in Kharkiv and Odessa are shown in their true light. However,

Table 5: Which of the Following Variations on the Status of Your Region Would You Choose if Such an Opportunity Were to Arise? (According to Region, April 2014)

	Donbass	East (others)	South	Center
Retention of the present status in a united Ukraine with the current jurisdictions	9.3	17.8	23.4	30.5
Retention of the present status in a united Ukraine with expanded jurisdictions	25.7	55.2	58.9	53.8
Autonomy in a federal Ukraine	23.5	9.5	7.0	2.3
Separation from Ukraine and creation of an autonomous statehood	8.4	2.1	0.5	0.4
Separation from Ukraine and unification with another state	22.5	3.2	2.3	1.0
Difficult to answer / I don't know / still haven't made a decision	10.6	12.2	7.9	11.9

Source: KIIS 2014: Attitude to the Unitary State and Separatism in Ukraine, in: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=319> [2 Feb 2016].

in Donetsk und Luhansk the trend is reversed although – even here – there are no absolute majorities supporting an intervention to protect “Russian citizens”. This statistic is not only the first indication that, excluding the present occupied areas, the people living in the South-East did not question the territorial status quo despite an often ambivalent attitude to the revolution in Kiev and the general uncertainty. Furthermore, it virtually makes it impossible to suggest a connection between their ethno-national identification and their attitude to Ukrainian statehood. Both aspects become clearer in light of the next two sets of statistics.

2. Even in this situation of “multiple possibilities” the inhabitants of the South-Eastern oblasts – in particular Kharkiv, Odessa, Kher-son, Mykolaiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Zapor-izhia – were unable to get used to the idea of any type of “separation” of their territories from Ukraine nor to “autonomy” (see table 5). The very low values (all three “negative” options together <15 per cent of those questioned) correspond more to those for Central Ukraine, but diverge significantly from those for the partial region of Donbass (here all

three “negative” options together = 54.4 per cent, whereby only about one third of those questioned are in favour of both separation options). More than the statistics mentioned above it is clear here that even during the tense situation in April and May 2014, when a change to Ukraine’s territorial status quo had already occurred (in Crimea), no significant support for further processes of this type is discernible outside the Donbass. On the contrary, these high values in favour of maintaining the status quo point to the significant potential of a possible mobilisation of parts of the pro-Ukrainian population, which was then also possible to observe in many of the affected towns and cities.

3. The values shown in table 6 ultimately make it clear that there is, in contrast to the alleged direct connection postulated by the apologists for “Novorossija”, only a relatively weak connection between ethno-national self-identification and people’s attitude toward Ukrainian statehood. Among the ethnic Russians in Ukraine in particular only a fifth of those questioned appeared to be able to warm to the idea of a change to the territorial status quo; however, up to a third of

those with a hybrid identity were able to do so. If these values are compared with data from similar surveys taken during the time before the “Maidan”, no direct effect appears to have been produced by the revolution and war. For example, in 2007 only 25.5 per cent of the ethnic Russians in Ukraine answered “No” to the question as to whether they would consider Ukraine their homeland.²⁷

What can now be concluded from the mainly negative reactions of the inhabitants of South-Eastern Ukraine to the “Russian Spring” with regard to national self-identification and the general understanding of the concept of “nation” in the region? First of all, it can be assumed that the types of ethno-national self-attribution, which formed the basis of survey questions since the beginning of the 2000s (in other words, including people with hybrid identities), have remained relatively consistent. However, as of 2014, the number of ethnic Russians has fallen to 6.4 per cent (2013: 8.3 per cent) and the number of people with hybrid identities to 17 per cent (2013: 21.8 per cent),²⁸ though this can be explained above all by the loss of Crimea (no longer included in opinion polls from 2014). The movement of refugees from the Donbass into the Russian Feder-

ation might be the reason for smaller numbers of ethnic Russians since 2015. At the same time it has to be stated that, next to the above mentioned negative attitude towards “Russian support” and a change of the territorial status quo, a significant increase in many indicators of patriotism is observable after the events of 2014 among all parts of the South-East’s population. This trend is particularly striking among younger cohorts; in this respect, 81 per cent of all 14- to 35-year-olds are proud to be Ukrainian; among teenagers and young adults in the South-Eastern oblast of Odessa the figure is an astonishing 62 per cent.²⁹ In contrast to the overriding identification with one’s own region, commune, etc., identification as “inhabitants of Ukraine” increased by ten per cent in the country as a whole.³⁰ Furthermore, in the South-East a long-term trend appears to be continued. After 2005, when only 32 per cent of the inhabitants of the Eastern regions and 35.8 per cent³¹ of those in the Southern regions indicated that they considered themselves first and foremost to be “inhabitants of Ukraine”, this number rose in 2015 from 53.8 per cent and to 45.1 per cent³² respectively.

It is possible to propose a thesis based on the situation in early 2016. This proposal is not to

Table 6: Which of the Following Variations on the Status of Your Region Would You Choose if Such an Opportunity Were to Arise? (According to Nationality, May 2014)

	Ukrainians	Russians	Ukrainians and Russians	Others
Retention of the present status in a united Ukraine with the current jurisdictions	25.2	7.9	8.8	22.9
Retention of the present status in a united Ukraine with expanded jurisdictions	57.2	34.5	22.8	28.6
Autonomy in a federal Ukraine	4.7	19.7	17.5	14.3
Separation from Ukraine and creation of an autonomous statehood	1.1	6.1	8.8	2.9
Separation from Ukraine and unification with another state	2.3	16.2	24.6	14.3
Difficult to answer / I don't know / still haven't made a decision	9.5	15.7	17.5	17.1

Source: KIIS 2014: Attitude to the Unitary State and Separatism in Ukraine, in: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=319> [2 Feb 2016].

overstate numbers and trends; moreover, considerable caution in view of the continuing unstable and dynamic situation in the affected regions is recommended: external observers, in particular, have underestimated how tenuous the link was and is of ethno-national self-identification aspects on the one hand and attitudes to Ukrainian statehood and “nation” in South-Eastern Ukraine on the other. Rather, both elements seem to have become even more decoupled from each other in the long term and in an accelerated fashion due to the shock effects of 2014. Therefore, it can be stated that there is a definite trend towards a “Ukrainian civil nation”³³ in South-Eastern Ukraine that involves the dissociation of the national consciousness from ethnic and linguistic patterns. However, this “civil nation” should not be confused with a “Ukrainian political nation” – although the vast majority of inhabitants in the South-Eastern regions identify with Ukrainian statehood, state symbols and the Constitution, they would have a negative view of an aggressive policy of Ukrainisation in terms of language and how the country’s history is viewed.

The Russian policy of annexation in Crimea and the later intervention in the Donbass led to a “rally around the flag” effect among many Ukrainians in the South-East of the country.

One can only speculate about the reasons for this development towards a “Ukrainian civil nation”. On the one hand, it is not possible to deny that the Russian policy of annexation in Crimea and the later intervention in the Donbass triggered a “rally around the flag” effect, which was clearly embraced by many inhabitants of Ukraine, whose loyalty to the Ukrainian state had previously been much less than equivocal. This factor is still gaining strength in many ways today, above all in the unoccupied parts of

Donbass³⁴ after it became clear that the Russian government is primarily pursuing geo-political and few, if any, humanitarian goals there. On the other hand, attention can certainly be drawn to a long-term “habituation effect” which, after 25 years of their own statehood, has also had an effect on people living in the South East. Younger cohorts in particular no longer have experience of the Soviet Union; despite what in many cases are a complex ethnic patterns of identification, Ukraine is the only reality and experience of their homeland. Lastly, one can point out the role of the Ukrainian elites who, despite the “amorphous narrative” described above, also never questioned independence based on their own interests. This also applies to the “Party of Regions”, which monopolised the South-East for a long time, but whose leaders were less inclined to pro-Russian policies than often assumed and on the contrary proved more sympathetic towards an implicitly defined “pragmatic nationalism”.³⁵

Conclusion and Outlook

The 2014 “Revolution of Dignity”, the annexation of Crimea in March and the war in Donbass were turning points for the history of independent Ukraine, the Post-Soviet region as such, but also for European politics. Revolution and war are profound shocks to domestic and international order, which give rise to basic questions such as personal survival, but also cast doubt over self-identification and allegiance to a community. What was obviously taken for granted for many years, and therefore went unquestioned suddenly becomes an existential matter. In Ukraine, in the wake of the “Revolution of Dignity” a hitherto prevailing “amorphous identity” could not survive. That identity was propped up by a corresponding elite-narrative and allowed a large number of Ukrainians’ during the first two decades after independence to avoid a definitive commitment to Ukrainian statehood and nation. However, the revolution not only rescinded the “power pact” between competing regional elite clans that had always been in force up until then, thus creating a power vacuum in the South-East of the country. The subsequent annexation of

Я З ВАМИ !

НАША ДУМА,

НАША ПІСНЯ НЕ

ВМРЕ, НЕ ЗАГНЄ...

ОТ ДЕ, ЛЮДЕ, НАША СЛАВА, СЛАВА УКРАЇНИ!

ЯКБИ ВИ ВРОЛИСЬ ТАК, ЯК ТРЕБА, ТО Й

МУДРИСТЬ БИ БУЛА СВОЯ

БО ХТО МАТІР ЗАБУВАЄ,

ТОГО БОГ КАРАЄ



В СВОЇЙ ХАТІ

СВОЯ Й ПРАВДА,

І СИЛА, І ВОЛЯ

ПОКИ ЖИВИТЬ В

ХАТІ, НЕ БІЖЕ —

ТАНЦІЙ



Crimea and Moscow's intervention had also resulted in an alternative option for societal and political allegiance that became known as the "Novorossija Scenario".

Despite the thesis of an ethno-cultural division in Ukraine, which was mainly popular outside the country, this scenario ultimately enjoyed only extremely limited success in the form of the self-proclaimed "DNR" and "LNR" in Donbass. This fact can largely be explained by a gradual development, which was reinforced by the events of 2014, towards a Ukrainian "civil

nation" in the South-East of the country. In this region, where ethnic Russians and people with what may be called hybrid identities are over-represented, ethnic and linguistic identification patterns were decoupled from questions of national allegiance and loyalty to the state. After a quarter century of Ukrainian statehood a majority of people identify themselves in particular as "citizens of Ukraine" and reject a change to the territorial status quo. In Vladimir Putin's view, the revolution and intervention therefore had an unexpected and conflicting effect. Instead of the Ukrainian South-Eastern citizens rising up



Politics and education: The principal of this Ukrainian language school in Simferopol was dismissed shortly after the annexation of Crimea. This happened on the grounds that a school sending its students to Ukrainian universities has no longer a place on the Crimean peninsula. Source: © Maxim Shemetov, Reuters.

continued attempts at destabilisation from inside the occupied territories and beyond. If Kiev proves unsuccessful in providing sustained security and economic prospects in these regions, this could have an effect on identification with and support for Ukrainian statehood in the medium term. Furthermore, the nature of the relationship between the “Ukrainian political nation”, which is strengthened by the “Maidan” and the new elite, and the above mentioned trend towards a civil conception of nationhood in the South-East is still unclear. One must for example agree with Nikolai Mitrokhyn³⁶ when he states that a large majority of the citizens in the South-East do not share the “official narrative”, which is shown in the policies relating to Ukrainisation and the country’s history. After signs as early as the “Maidan” essentially pointed to the potential of an all-Ukrainian “civil nation”, in particular, above and beyond the boundaries of language,³⁷ Kiev’s current policy is more oriented toward a dangerous form of alienation. Finally, it should be reiterated that, despite the perspective chosen here with regard to the effectiveness of ethno-national types of self-identification, there are important objective consequences arising from the dynamic of the last two years. In this respect, the group of ethnic Russians in particular has been decimated by annexation, secession and exodus to such an extent that it represents now effectively a national minority due to its small numbers. Protection of this group should not just be of humanitarian interest to Kiev, but also especially because of Vladimir Putin’s “nationalist” logic, which was described here in detail.

against what Russian propaganda portrayed as a “fascist putsch” in Kiev and taking sides with the pro-Russian activists, a majority committed themselves to Ukrainian unity, thereby discouraging the apologists for “Novorossija”.

Despite these undoubtedly positive news for Ukraine, which had been severely affected by the crises of recent years, caution should be urged in several respects. Firstly, the situation in South-Eastern Ukraine is anything but consolidated. This is mainly related to the deep economic and political crisis in the country alongside

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- 1 In this respect, see e.g. Wilson, Andrew 2014: Ukraine Crisis. What it Means for the West, New Haven and London, pp.99-143; Mitrokhyn, Nikolaj 2015: Infiltration, Instruction, Invasion: Russia's War in the Donbass, in: Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp.219-250. The "civil war" view is respresented, amongst others, in Buzgalin, Alexander 2015: Ukraine: Anatomy of a Civil War, in: International Critical Thought, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 327-347.
- 2 Cf. e.g. Schneider, Eberhard 2007: Ukraine – Gespalten zwischen Ost und West, bpb Informationen zur Politischen Bildung, 20 Feb 2007, in: <http://bpb.de/25087> [24 Feb 2016] oder zuletzt auch Hildebrandt, Reinhard 2015: Die Ukraine – Grenzland oder Brücke? Reflexionen zum aktuellen Konflikt, Frankfurt a.M.
- 3 The Moscow Times 2008: Putin Hints at Splitting Up Ukraine, 8 Apr 2008, in: <http://themoscowtimes.com/news/article/361701.html> [17 Jan 2016].
- 4 Cf. Putin's utterances known as "Novorossija Comments" from 17 April 2014, Kremlin, in: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20796> [13 Feb 2016].
- 5 This is what Putin said during his appearance at the meeting of the "All-Russian People's Front" on 25 Jan 2016, Kremlin, in: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/51206> [14 Feb 2016].
- 6 Other factors in the ultimate failure of the idea of "Novorossija" such as military resistance or strong local identities are covered, e.g. Portnov, Andrij 2015: Das neue Herz der Ukraine? Dnipropetrovs'k nach dem Euromajdan, in: Osteuropa, No. 4, pp.173-185.
- 7 On the phase directly before and after independence, cf. in particular Wittkowksy, Andreas 1998: Fünf Jahre ohne Plan: Die Ukraine 1991-1996, Münster.
- 8 Cf. Putin's comments above again and Wilson, Andrew 2002: The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation, 2nd edition, New Haven / London.
- 9 Cf. amongst others Simon, Gerhard 1986: Nationalismus und Nationalitätenpolitik in der Sowjetunion: Von der Diktatur zur nachstalinistischen Gesellschaft, Baden-Baden.
- 10 Cf. Barth, Fredrik 1998: Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Cultural Difference, Long Grove.
- 11 Cf. e.g. Pogrebinskij, Mikhail 2015: Russians in Ukraine: Before and After Euromaidan, E-International Relations, 26 Mar 2015, in: <http://e-ir.info/2015/03/26/russians-in-ukraine-before-and-after-euromaidan> [15 Jan 2016].
- 12 In this respect, cf. e.g. the Ukrainian Debates, reproduced in Wilson, n. 8, pp.279 ff.
- 13 Cf. Khmelko, V. 2004: Linguistic and Ethnic Structure of Ukraine: Regional Differences and Trends of Change Since Independence, in: Scientific Notes of Kyiv-Mohyla Academy, Social Science, No.32.
- 14 Oleksandr Suhsko used the formulation in the author's presence at a conference of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung entitled „Die Beziehungen EU-Ukraine-Russland vor dem Hintergrund eines andauernden Konflikts“ in August 2015 in Cadenabbia, Italy, <http://kas.de/ukraine/de/publications/42474> [16 Jun 2016].
- 15 Cf. e.g. Guttke, Matthias / Rank, Hartmut 2012: Mit der Sprachenfrage auf Stimmenfang: Zur aktuellen Sprachengesetzgebung in der Ukraine, in: Ukraine Analyses, No.106, 11 Sep 2012, pp.11-15.
- 16 Kutschma, Leonid 2004: Ukraina – ne Rossija, Moskau.
- 17 In this respect, cf. Härtel, André 2012: West-integration oder Grauzonen-Szenario? Die EU- und WTO-Politik der Ukraine vor dem Hintergrund der inneren Transformation, 1998-2009, Münster.
- 18 Cf. *ibid.*, p.304.
- 19 In this respect, cf. above all Wilson, Andrew 2006: Ukraine's Orange Revolution, New Haven / London.
- 20 Amongst others, see the attempted rescinding of the "Kivalov-Kolesnichenko Language Law" in 2014 or the new laws on the "de-communisation" of Ukraine (Apr 2015), which were criticised, e.g. by the Council of Europe, due to possible restrictions on freedom of speech.
- 21 Cf. Kremlin 2014: Address by President of the Russian Federation, speech by Vladimir Putin, 18 Mar 2014, in: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> [15 Feb 2016].
- 22 On the different meanings of the term "Novorossija" in Russian discourses cf. Gazeta.ru 2014: Četyre Novorossij i odin Krym, 10 Dec 2014.
- 23 A good overview of the campaign run by pro-Russian forces is provided in the recently published article: Korrespondent 2016: Koroli v Isgnanii, 4 Mar 2016.
- 24 In this respect Makarkin, mentioned in n.22, states that, "[...] the more unclear the term 'Novorossija' is, the less likely would it be for contradictions to occur in a case where something other than originally planned would develop from it."
- 25 On the debates about the Kremlin's financial and logistical support for the new "republics", cf. amongst others Gazeta.ru 2014: Ne raskačali lodku, 4 Dec 2014.
- 26 This is according to e.g. the respected Ukrainian professor at the National University "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy", Mykhailo Wynnickij, in the "Facebook Diary" he kept during the "Revolution of Dignity".
- 27 Cf. the opinion poll conducted by the Kiev-based Razumkov Centre from 31 May to 18 Jun 2007, in: http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=775 [13 Jan 2016].

- 28 2014 data obtained from a survey conducted by Kiev International Institute of Sociology from 29 Apr 2014 to 11 May 2014, Attitude to the Unitary State and Separatism in Ukraine, 22 May 2014, in: <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=319> [22 Jan 2016]. Comparables for 2013 obtained from Pogrebinskij, n.11.
- 29 Cf. GfK Ukraine 2015: Study entitled „Youth of Ukraine 2015“, 15 Dec 2015, in: <http://www.gfk.com/uk-ua/insights/news/doslidzhennja-molod-ukrajini-2015> [15 Feb 2016].
- 30 Cf. the statistics in Kulyk, Volodymyr 2015: One Nation, Two Languages? National Identity and Language Policy in Post-Maidan Ukraine, PONARS Policy Memo No. 389.
- 31 Cf. the opinion poll carried out by the Kiev-based Razumkov-Institut from December 2015, in: http://razumkov.org.ua/ukr/poll.php?poll_id=762 [2 Feb 2016].
- 32 Cf. an opinion poll not available to the author in published form, carried out by the Institute for Sociology at the Ukrainian National Academy of Sciences from 26 Jun 2015 to 18 Jul 2015.
- 33 Mikhail Pogrebinskij and other authors have already used the term (cf. n.11). However, I use it here only in a limited sense for the South-Eastern regions because these regions are to the forefront here and the question of a pan-Ukrainian type of national understanding has to be explained elsewhere (see also Conclusion).
- 34 According to an opinion poll carried out by the Kiev-based Democratic Initiatives Institute, in these areas an increase from 21 per cent to 63 per cent in the number of people identifying as “citizens of Ukraine” was recorded between 2013 and 2015. Cf. Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation 2015: Ukraine: Two Years After Maidan, in: http://dif.org.ua/modules/pages/files/1457009023_4029.pdf [13 Mar 2016].
- 35 Cf. Härtel, n.17, pp.297 ff.
- 36 Cf. Mitrokhyn, Nikolaj 2015: Zwischen Stabilität und Labilität: Die gesellschaftspolitische Situation im Süden und Osten der Ukraine, Studie, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Sep 2015, in: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/11625.pdf> [23 Feb 2016].
- 37 Cf. Kulyk, n. 30.