UNITY STRONGER THAN DIVISIONS

UKRAINE'S INTERNAL DIVERSITY

Tadeusz A. Olszański

POINT OF VIEW

NUMBER 40
WARSAW
MARCH 2014

UNITY STRONGER THAN DIVISIONS
UKRAINE'S INTERNAL DIVERSITY

Tadeusz A. Olszański

OSW | CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES
OŚRODEK STUDIÓW WSCHODNICH im. **Marka Karpia**

Content editor
Adam Eberhardt, Wojciech Konończuk

Editor
Anna Łabuszewska

Co-operation
Katarzyna Kazimierska

Translation
OSW

Co-operation
Jim Todd

Graphic design
PARA-BUCH

DTP
GroupMedia

Photograph on cover: Shutterstock

PUBLISHER
Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich im. Marka Karpia
Centre for Eastern Studies

ul. Koszykowa 6a, Warsaw, Poland
Phone + 48 /22/ 525 80 00
Fax: + 48 /22/ 525 80 40
osw.waw.pl

ISBN 978-83-62936-42-7

Contents

SUMMARY

- Ukraine is deeply divided internally, but in this respect it is not significantly different from many other countries in Europe and the world. As a result of the changes that have taken place since its independence, the country's internal divisions now have less and less to do with territorial divides, and the split into historical 'sub-Ukraines' has become less pronounced, especially for the younger generation. Several factors have contributed to strengthening Ukraine's unity, including a school education system that has reinforced the perception that unity is the natural state of affairs. Other factors include the stabilisation of the state structures, including the bureaucracy with its tendency to preserve the *status quo*. In the meantime, however, social and generational divisions have become more visible. These may pose a challenge to Ukraine's internal order, but not to its unity.

- Ukraine is not a country of two competing regional identities, one in the west, the other in the east. The western identity, with *sobornost'* (the unity and indivisibility of Ukraine) as a key value, coexists with the multiple and diverse local patriotisms of the different regions in the east and the south of the country, as well as a specific Transcarpathian identity. Crimea is an exception here, because in most respects it has remained unaffected by the dynamics of the social processes transforming mainland Ukraine.

- The present protest movement (the broadly-understood Maidan) has consolidated the country's sense of unity. The indivisibility of Ukraine has been championed not only by the protesters in the Maidan, but also by people in the Yanukovych camp; and even the backers of the ousted leadership tend to raise separatist slogans only exceptionally. Claims about the impending split, or federalisation, of the country, which have in large part been a product of the media, are aimed at

sabotaging the Maidan, but there is no political programme behind them.

- It is quite likely that most of those claims are inspired by, or come from, the Russian Federation, and that they are addressed to Western public opinion, which has been uncritical of reports of an impending 'division of Ukraine'. From Moscow's point of view, a division of Ukraine would be hardly advantageous to Russian interests. Russia would have to pay a price for keeping the eastern and southern parts of Ukraine within its orbit, and that price would be the emergence of a decisively hostile western Ukrainian state, as well as a number of other adverse international consequences. Russia's aim is to preserve its influence throughout the whole of Ukraine, and not just in parts of it. The annexation of Crimea in March 2014 does not invalidate this assessment.

- A protracted civil war is the only scenario in which Ukraine could really face disintegration. However, since Ukrainian society is not split into two conflicting groups, such a war (going beyond clashes, possibly involving armed action, between the people and the government) is highly unlikely. It would also run counter to the interests of all parties to the present conflict and its observers.

INTRODUCTION

The wave of protests that has gripped Ukraine since late November 2013, provoked by Kyiv's decision not to sign the association agreement with the European Union, has since transformed into an anti-government movement seeking deep political change. In the course of the protests both sides have raised the threat of disintegration, or even a political division of Ukraine. Some of them have warned against the consequences of deepening internal divisions in the event of the conflict continuing, while others have advocated a formal division of the country, arguing that this offers a chance to avoid its uncontrolled disintegration. Such claims have worried many people, also beyond Ukraine, about the durability of the Ukrainian state, and galvanised traditional views about the depth and power of the country's internal divisions.

However, those views are largely obsolete. They fail to take into account the changes that have occurred over the nearly quarter-century of Ukraine's existence as a state. A generation which has never experienced any reality other than the independent Ukrainian state in its current borders has already grown up in Ukraine. The way the protests have unfolded so far has shown that the link between political and social divisions on the one hand, and historical and territorial splits on the other, is increasingly weak. The Maidan has become an integrating element which has strengthened the young generation's belief that the homeland is a supreme good, and that democracy and pro-Western policies serve the interests of young people in all regions of Ukraine. Moreover, even among those who oppose the pro-Western option there are hardly any advocates of division of the country, even in the form of federalisation.

The present paper will discuss the historical origins of Ukraine's internal diversity, and will then show how this diversity has changed over time as a result of the emergence and existence of the independent Ukrainian state. It will also briefly discuss the

way in which Ukrainian intellectuals approach the country's internal divisions today. In the following sections it will delve into the impact of the ongoing protests on the formation of a sense of civil unity in Ukraine, and the political significance of the proposition of federalising the country. The final part will reflect on the position of the Russian Federation and the consequences for Russia of Ukraine's potential division.

I. THE FACTORS OF UKRAINE'S INTERNAL DIVERSITY

Ukraine is a country of great internal diversity, but it would not be difficult to name countries that are more diversified than it is while at the same time being much smaller (for instance Belgium). Ukraine has existed as an independent state since 1991, and was given its current territorial shape in 1944, as a Soviet republic. Ten years later, Crimea was attached to it, but, as the peninsula had never before been associated with any state entity that could be regarded as Ukrainian and differs from continental Ukraine in almost every respect, it will be excluded from further analysis.

Ukraine's most important historical division, albeit one that is seldom mentioned today, concerns the line between the historical Rus, which has been part of Europe for a thousand years, and the area of the Great Steppe in the east and south of the country, incorporated into the European civilizational space only in the late eighteenth century. The second most important dividing line separates those lands which were part of the Russian Empire from the end of the eighteenth century, and those annexed by the Soviet Union during World War II (Volhynia being a special case here, as the region was separated from the Russian/Soviet state during the inter-war period).

Those historical divisions are reflected in Ukraine's ethnic and religious splits. Rural areas in most of Ukraine are inhabited by ethnic Ukrainians. Large Russian communities exist only in the southern oblasts and the Donetsk Basin, but substantial groups of Russians also live in Ukraine's major cities, especially in the eastern and southern parts of the country. In the east, substantial swathes of the society do not profess any ethnic identity, as a result of decades of Sovietisation. The Greek Catholic religion is dominant in Eastern Galicia, and Orthodox Christianity is the main religion in the rest of the country. However, in the east and the south, mostly but not only in cities, atheists and people who do

not identify with any confession constitute a substantial proportion of the population.

The fact that some regions were subjected to Sovietisation for longer than others is also reflected in the deep ideological and political divisions in Ukraine: the western oblasts (as well as Kyiv, which is home to huge numbers of migrants from the western part of the country) were already more disposed towards independent political and civil activity towards the end of the Soviet area (and thereafter, they also displayed a stronger entrepreneurial spirit). The further east, the less people were willing to act on their own, and the more they tended to expect the government to dictate solutions. However, even in western Ukraine, Sovietism undermined the civil and patriotic traditions, and 'infected' the national and nationalist movements with elements of Communist ideology and the low intellectual standards typical of the Soviet mentality.[1]

*

Today many of those divisions are treated as aspects of the underlying territorial division. Yet after seven decades of more or less free internal migrations, this approach is largely obsolete. Many Russians and Ukrainians from the east live in the cities of western Ukraine, and even larger numbers of migrants from the west of Ukraine, as well as their children and grandchildren, are present in the industrial cities of eastern and southern Ukraine. There are hundreds of thousands of regionally mixed families. Migrants of this kind are even present in Crimea – if the Soviet industry in the peninsula attracted at least 30,000 job migrants from Belarus,[2] then there must have been a considerable proportion of people

[1] For more information see Tadeusz A. Olszański, Kresy zachodnie. Miejsce Galicji Wschodniej i Wołynia w państwie ukraińskim, *Prace OSW*, nr 43, Warsaw, 2013, pp. 61-62.

[2] According to the 2001 census.

coming from the western oblasts who migrated to the Soviet industrial centres in droves among the 500,000 Ukrainians who migrated to the peninsula. Kyiv's demographic continuity was effectively interrupted by the last war, and the city's current inhabitants hail from places throughout Ukraine (as well as Russia and other Soviet republics). That is because, as the capital of an independent state, the city has been an attractive destination for large numbers of intellectuals and entrepreneurs from the entire country. Finally, all regions of Ukraine, and the cities and industrial centres in particular, are home to millions of immigrants from other parts of the former Soviet Union, their children and grandchildren,[3] whose ties with Ukraine as a homeland are naturally weaker than those of families who have been living in Ukraine for centuries.

In all regions of Ukraine, people speak Ukrainian as well as Russian and *surzhyk*,[4] albeit in different proportions: Ukrainian is predominant in the western and central oblasts, and Russian in the south and the east (however, Ukrainian is also spoken in the rural areas of eastern Ukraine, and *surzhyk* is the most common language in the cities in central Ukraine). The younger generation of Ukrainians have learnt the Ukrainian language and literature in school, as well as the history of Ukraine, (and not the history of the Soviet Union, i.e. Russia); and for a decisive majority, Ukrainian has been the language of instruction for the other subjects.

Atheists and religiously indifferent people account for a large proportion of the urban populations throughout Ukraine, and Greek Catholic communities are also present in cities everywhere in the country (the metropolia of the Greek Catholic church is currently

[3] For more information see Tadeusz A. Olszański, 'The language issue in Ukraine. An attempt at a new perspective', *OSW Studies* issue 40, Warsaw 2012, pp. 10-12.

[4] *Surzhyk* is a way of mixing elements of Ukrainian and Russian, without any discernible rule. See Tadeusz A. Olszański, 'The language issue in Ukraine ...', *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

based in Kyiv), and Orthodox Christianity, introduced in western Ukraine in the 1940s, still holds considerable influence in the rural areas there.

All this does not mean that Ukraine is becoming less diversified. However, the territorial aspect of its internal divisions has been losing importance (while not disappearing altogether), and the links between the individual present-day divisions and the historical-regional splits have been less and conspicuous. As a result, the country's diversity poses less and less of a threat to its political unity, although it remains a major internal policy challenge. It also remains a convenient object of manipulation, especially during political crises.

II. THE FACTORS OF UKRAINE'S NEW UNITY

In Ukraine, as in the other post-communist states, two new, very deep and significant splits have emerged over the last twenty years: the social divide, and the generational divide. The former has replaced the relative homogeneity of the Soviet society, in which the vast majority of people were employees of state-owned entities (offices, public services and enterprises), with a plurality of social classes and groups. It also has led to the emergence of drastic and readily visible social disparities (in Soviet times, the extremes of wealth and poverty were hidden), and openly disparaging attitudes towards wage hired workers (which, for example, have manifested themselves in delays of salary payments to employees in the public sector, lasting many months or even many years in a certain period). Those phenomena, related to the gradual replacement of the command economy with market economy models more typical of the second half of the nineteenth century than the present day,[5] were particularly severe in the great industrial centres of eastern Ukraine and in rural areas, but they affected all of Ukraine and were also felt in Lviv and Lutsk.

The emergence of the second, generational split is directly related to the fact that Ukraine has been an independent state since 1991. This means that its citizens who started school in that year or later do not remember any reality other than the Ukrainian state. Ukraine within its current borders is their existing reality, something unquestioned. Adult Ukrainian nationals who started their education after 1991 (i.e. those born in the years 1984–1995) numbered around 7 million in 2013, accounting for over 15% of the country's population. Those among them who have better education have been the main force behind the present protests,

[5] Cf. Anders Aslund, 'Comparative Oligarchy: Russia, Ukraine and the United States', *CASE Studies and Analysis* no 296, Warsaw 2005. http://www.case-research.eu/upload/publikacja_plik/4931074_SA%20296last.pdf

but even for their less educated peers, from among whom the so-called *titushki* hail,[6] Ukraine is the only reality they know.

The modernisation processes taking place in Ukraine have also thinned out the differences between regions. This particularly concerns the rise of popular culture and the westernisation (Anglicisation) of both the Russian and the Ukrainian language. These processes have been developing in a very similar way in all regions, and the linguistic innovations in Russian and Ukrainian have in many cases been identical.

School education, whereby all young Ukrainians have been learning the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian history, geography and literature according to a uniform programme, has been a key factor in forming the Ukraine's new unity. Even if some of those young people do show a certain aversion to these subjects, treating them either as elements of a foreign tradition or, more often, as part of schooling as such, all of them, from Uzhhorod to Mariupil, still learn the same things at the same age and in the same form. They not only read Shevchenko's poetry, but are also exposed to the belief that he was the poet-prophet, 'our everything', the alpha and omega of national culture. They study the heroic (but also anarchist) tradition of the Cossacks, and absorb the narrative according to which the Ukrainian nation has always (for at least a thousand years) fought for independence and *sobornost'* for the integrity of all ethnically Ukrainian areas within a single state organism. The symbolic places of Ukraine, as understood in this way, are neither in the west nor in the east of the country. The west is indeed too 'western', and does not have enough of the Cossack and Shevchenko spirit in it, while the east has no history before the nineteenth century. The symbolic core of Ukraine lies in

[6] *Titushki* is a term that refers to young people from working class backgrounds, often hooligans, recruited by the security services to disrupt demonstrations and persecute protesters. The term comes from the name of Vadym Titushko, who beat a journalist during an opposition demonstration in 2013.

middle-Dnieper Ukraine: its heart beats in Kyiv, Kaniv and Chyhyryn, in Kholodnyi Yar and Khortytsia.[7] Perhaps one should also mention Chernobyl, located not far from Kyiv, which has been one of the symbols of Ukraine since 1986.

These are the elements that 'organise' the imagination of young citizens of Ukraine. They focus thinking on Ukraine around the country's centre and its unity. They are reinforced by the significance attached in the learning of national history to the two events which integrated all the regions: the *Holodomor* and the Great Patriotic War (while the 1917–1920 independence struggle and the activities of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) receive less attention in history education, and the latter is neglected in many regions). As a result, only 7% of Ukrainians back the federalisation of Ukraine, and only 8% of the inhabitants of Donbas and just 1% of the people in Eastern Galicia support their regions' separation from Ukraine.[8] Among the young generation, the popularity of federalisation and secession is even lower.[9]

*

7 Kyiv is the real and symbolic capital of the country, the location of Ukraine's holiest national site, Saint Sophia's Cathedral, erected a thousand years ago. Kaniv is the resting place of Taras Shevchenko, who was also born not far from there. Chyhyryn was the capital of Bohdan Khmelnytsky's Cossack state. Kholodnyi Yar is a forest range near Chyhyryn, a hideaway of the *Haidamaky* and the insurgents of 1918–1922, and finally Khortytsia (today part of the city of Zaporizhia, 550 km from Kyiv down the Dnieper river) was the main seat of the Zaporizhian Sich.

8 Research by the centre Rejting e, quoted after Ivan Malyshko, 'Mifotvorchist' pro rozkol kraiiny', *Komentari*, Issue 3, 2014.

9 Research carried out by the Razumkov Centre in December 2013 shows that a substantial majority of Ukrainians oppose both federalisation and division of the country (61–80% of votes against, depending on the variant). People in the eastern region and southern region of which Crimea is part, were also mostly opposed to such projects (53 and 63% respectively opposed federalisation, and 87 and 81% respectively opposed the separation of their home region). The published version of the research results does not include a breakdown of the data by generation. http://glavcom.ua.articles/17966.html, accessed on 4 March 2014.

The continued existence and consolidation of the formal structures of the state has also had a stabilising effect on the unity and indivisibility of Ukraine. The Ukrainian bureaucracy (the state apparatus in the broad sense), which existed as an autonomous subsystem even before 1991, quickly transformed into an independent, closed system, developing its own patterns of action and hierarchic structures (it is irrelevant here that they were often archaic and criminally pathogenic). Its group interests are linked with the state, which is the source of status, prosperity and power. The bureaucracy is uninterested in undermining the state, and certainly not in its break-up, also for another reason: it is an inert group interested in preserving the *status quo*, which perceives change mainly as a threat to the established structure of procedures, dependencies and privileges.

The bureaucratic centralism characteristic of Ukraine's internal system of government has contributed to the country's unity in one more way: by attracting large numbers of members of local business and intellectual elites to the capital, and in this way brain-draining the regions (only Kharkiv has for the most part resisted this process[10]). All in all, this has been unfavourable for Ukraine, but has strengthened its unity. Any potential separatist tendencies in the eastern regions have been undermined by the fact that at most times during independence, their elites enjoyed a stronger position in Kyiv and had a decisive say in the affairs of the state.

Strong regional identifications in Ukraine (mainly in Donbas, Kharkiv and Odessa, and also in Transcarpathia) have the nature

[10] Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, was the capital of the Ukrainian SSR in the years 1917–1934. It is an important industrial and academic centre, and its inhabitants retain a strong sense of local identity (it is still common there to refer to Kharkiv as the 'first capital'). On the other hand, the fact that the Kharkiv elites (unlike those of Lviv, Dnipropetrovsk or Donetsk) have never been involved in governing the country on a larger scale has slowed down their outflow to the capital.

of local patriotisms. So far these have not engendered any separatist aspirations[11] or ambitions to gain autonomy (although Transcarpathia may become an exception here: it has a Hungarian minority which is very large, considering the scale of the region, and is also seeing the development of a political concept of a local Rusyn identity). However, there is a growing opposition to centralism, the hierarchic system of administration and the fiction of local self-governance, and calls for the regions to become more independent from the centre have been gaining popularity. But this new tendency has in fact united the regional elites around a new, shared objective.

[11] Cf. e.g.: Donbas. A Stagnation Period (interview with a Donetsk sociologist Oksana Mikheyeva), *The Ukrainian Week*, 4 February 2014. http://ukrainianweek.com/Society/100514

III. THE DISCOURSE OF 'TWO UKRAINES'

One often hears in Ukraine (and beyond) that there are in fact two Ukraines: the '(pro-)Western' one, which historically, socially and ideologically belongs in Eastern Europe, and the '(pro-)Russian' one, which is a kind of no man's land, an object of nation and state-building efforts by Ukraine and Russia. Mykola Ryabchuk is the principal contemporary exponent of this theory. He is a well-known intellectual who applies post-colonial theory to the study of Ukraine's internal divisions, and who denies the inhabitants of most of the eastern part of the country the right to be called Ukrainians, calling them Creoles instead.[12] Ukraine's most distinguished historian of the middle generation, Yaroslav Hrytsak,[13] and the writer and journalist Oksana Zabuzhko,[14] are among those who have fiercely criticised Ryabchuk's concepts. However, an attitude of superiority, if not outright disdain, towards the 'nationally and socially backward' inhabitants of Donbas or Odessa can also be found in the writings of Zabuzhko (who comes from western Ukraine) and many others (but not Hrytsak).

Maksym Vikhrov, a Lviv-based journalist, has recently come up with a bitter summary of the attitudes of the western Ukrainian intellectual elites towards the people of the eastern and southern oblasts, and Donbas in particular.[15] According to his diagnosis, which can also be applied to considerable parts of the Kyiv elite, the west regards the "easterners" as: (1) "degenerate cattle" unable to experience civil and national sentiments, or any nobler emotions; (2) foreign "non-Ukrainians" who are incapable of becoming

[12] Cf. Mykola Ryabchuk, Dwie Ukrainy, Wrocław 2004.

[13] Cf. Ukraina. Przewodnik Krytyki Politycznej. Z Jarosławem Hrycakiem rozmawia Iza Chruślińska, Warsaw 2009.

[14] Cf. Ukraiński palimpsest. Oksana Zabużko w rozmowie z Izą Chruślińską, Wrocław 2013.

[15] Maksym Vikhrov, 'Chomu shid ne z Maidanom', http://zaxid.net/homer/showSingleNews.do?chomu_shid_ne_z_maydanom&objectId=130066, accessed on 10 January 2014.

involved in the struggle for the country's freedom, (3) ignorant of the important aims and objectives of the protest movements in "true" Ukraine. Vikhrov goes on to say that the "'pro-Ukrainian' (...) political forces have for years made every effort to make the east an enemy, rather than an ally" and points to such examples as the statement by the famous writer Vasyl Shklar that Donbas is the "gangrene of Ukraine", etc.

However, it is true that while the "western" Ukrainians (wherever they live today) do devote a great deal of attention to the question of the unity of the country and nation, such reflections are harder to find in the east and the south, and so is the sense that they areneeded. No separate identity is being born here: the old sense of pride of the inhabitants of "the Union's furnace-room", i.e. Donbas, or the "rocket capital", meaning Dnipropetrovsk, was too deeply Soviet in nature, and too closely linked to the existence of the Soviet state, to survive in any form other than the nostalgia of the departing generation. Under the influence of school programmes, the young generation has been adopting an 'all-national' identity narrative, which leaves little room for local identities. As a result, only "some of the local inhabitants have become involved in the all-Ukrainian [political] process. And even those who did entered politics not as advocates of the interests of their regions *vis-à-vis* the rest of Ukraine, but as representatives of the rest of Ukraine *vis-à-vis* the regions".[16]

This type of identity discourse among Ukrainian intellectuals hardly contributes to building the country's unity, but nor does it foment its disintegration, because it does not lead to the formation of two competing national identity projects. The disparaging attitude of the 'westerners' (not only the intellectuals) to their compatriots in the east and south has only provoked the people in those regions to develop an aversion to the 'Banderites' from Lviv

[16] Kostyantyn Levin, 'Dvadtsyatimilyonna provintsia', www.pravda.com.ua/articles/2014/02-6-7009698/view_print/, accessed on 10 February 2014.

or even Kyiv, and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has been the only entity to exploit the west's disdain in an effort to build a positive eastern identity. In practice, then, it does not stand in the way of a consolidation of the 'school' version of state and national identity and the local patriotisms, which do not pose a threat to the unity of the state.

IV. UNITY AND DIVISIONS IN THE MAIDAN (AND BEYOND)

The first demonstrations against Yanukovych's decision not to sign the Association Agreement with the EU in November 2013 were social protests: the participants were mainly students and young specialists with university educations, etc. These were people who did not remember Soviet Ukraine,[17] who believed their personal interests to be linked with the country's pro-Western course, who often held negative attitudes to politics and politicians, and were immersed in 'digital modernity'. The first radical organisations that joined the protesters in Kyiv also hailed from this demographic.

Yet as Kyiv's Independence Square became the Euromaidan, the national capital of protests, people from other backgrounds started joining the original group of students and specialists from various regions on the Kyiv Maidan, in response to the beating of students during the night of 29/30 November 2013. These included numerous veterans of the war in Afghanistan (from throughout Ukraine, Donetsk and Crimea included[18]), members of Cossack organisations from the central and southern oblasts, workers in unexpectedly large numbers[19], as well as farmers[20]; in short, people

17 No detailed data is available on the make-up of the protests at that stage. According to sociological research from December 2013, people aged 15–29 accounted for 34% of the group 'on permanent duty' in the Maidan, and those with university education (graduates and those still studying) were 59%. Specialists with university education accounted for 38% and students 10%. It should be remembered, though, that after 30 November 2013, representatives of other age and profession demographics started joining the protest. See http://dif.org.ua/ua/jfjeifjoejfowjervojriohvj.htm, accessed on 10.01.2014.

18 Yuri Butusov, "'Afgantsy Maidana': trebovaniye odno – polnaya perezagruzka vlasti", *Zerkalo Nedeli,* issue 4, 2014.

19 According to research from early January 2014, workers accounted for 14% of those permanently present on the Maidan, but only 7% of those gathering for demonstrations. See http://dif.org.ua/ua/jfjeifjoejfowjervojriohvj.htm, accessed on 10 January 2014.

20 Aleks Lisitsa, 'Lubov i fermery', www.epravda.com.ua/columns/204/01/13/-414298/view_priont/, accessed on 14 January 2014.

representing different regions, generations and social strata, who spoke different languages and professed different religions.[21] People from all regions have been present on the Maidan, even if activists from the east and the south have been the least numerous, and if Crimea has only been represented by Crimean Tatars.

In situations of revolutionary tension, the voices of radicals are particularly audible, hence the nationalist slogans and symbols which have been conspicuous in the Maidan. However, the nationalists have moderated their most extreme demands: even though they openly draw on the traditions of Stepan Bandera and the UPA, the nationalist ideology in the Maidan has been reduced to just one slogan, that of *sobornost'*, i.e. the unity and indivisibility of the country. Nobody there has advocated separating Galicia or expelling Donbas or Kharkiv. The aim of the protesters is to integrate the country more deeply, by including the east and the south into the tradition of Ukrainian statehood and nationhood, or perhaps into the tradition of nationhood above all.

This is not to say that the earlier divisions are disappearing. Perhaps they are not even losing much of their strength. However, their significance is changing: they become diversities within one supreme community, the Nation, understood in civil terms as a community of all inhabitants of Ukraine. The fact that the first person to die on Hrushevsky Street was an Armenian from Dnipropetrovsk, the second a first-generation immigrant from Belarus, and only the third a Ukrainian from western Ukraine (who was, by the way, a professional soldier and an Iraq veteran), is a symbolic illustration in shorthand of this new quality.

[21] The present protest action was the first in the history of independent Ukraine to include a religious element: church services was celebrated on the Maidan, and chapels for prayer were established. A more detailed discussion of this aspect of the protests is beyond the scope of the present paper, but it is important to note that representatives of various confessions took part in the prayers together.

The rebellion in the regions has not been a rebellion of the regions, either. It has been one element of an all-Ukrainian protest, an element which, by the way, joined in late (the initial decision to limit the protests to Kyiv and bring most of the activists from the provinces to the capital should be seen as a major mistake on the part of the leaders). Even if the protesters renounced allegiance to the central government, they did not raise secessionist slogans or demand autonomy, but rather backed the demands of the Kyiv Euromaidan, which concerned the entire country. The demonstrations in the regions were also a way to protest against the glaring abuse of the local authorities, but not against links with Kyiv and the other regions.

The scope of the protest campaign transcended the borders of western Ukraine from the very start, and while it is true that the further east one looked, the weaker the protests and the stronger the backlash from the authorities, this can be explained by differences in the pre-existing potentials for protest. While in Lviv, the city mayor was at the helm of the protests from the start, in Cherkasy and Sumy the attempts at occupying state administration buildings were undertaken by poorly organised groups of people numbering only several hundred strong, and in Kharkiv and Donetsk, there was no-one to organise even that.

But in that same Donetsk, the miners, pensioners and veterans of the Afghan war who were called on to defend public buildings against an allegedly impending 'invasion by the Right Sector', carried banners with slogans about the indivisibility of Ukraine; for them, too, splitting the country was out of the question, even though they were concerned about certain other threats.[22] The small group that gathered in the Donetsk Euromaidan was defended against the *titushki* by radical fans ('ultras') of Shakhtar Donetsk. In mid-January groups of ultras from all the major football clubs of Ukraine (except for the ones from Crimea) appeared

[22] Cf. Lina Kushch, 'Stabilnist' iz kulakami', *Holos Ukrainy*, 28 January 2014.

on the Kyiv Maidan and backed the protest. Shortly afterwards they agreed on a ceasefire; the hostilities between clubs had to give way (for a time, naturally) to the superior interest of the homeland.

Unlike in 2004, the Party of Regions decided not mobilise its supporters into massive demonstrations of support. At that time the 'anti-Maidan' in Donetsk[23] was a manifestation of the beliefs of its participants, expressed spontaneously, even if with encouragement and support from the local authorities (the Orange Revolution in Kyiv also enjoyed the near-open backing of the city authorities). Presently, the anti-Maidans are made up almost exclusively of two groups of people: officials and employees of public-sector institutions (often women approaching retirement, office workers or teachers), who are carrying out the orders of their superiors, and young people from the working class or the lumpen proletariat, who do not even try to deny that they are participating for money. Apparently the authorities are unconvinced that those who support closer ties with Russia are still willing to back the rule of Viktor Yanukovych, or maybe they know that this is not the case. Therefore, they prefer to avoid risks, and limit themselves to actions which they can control. But in this way, they are suppressing the potential for civil activity in the 'Eurasian' camp.

[23] This name was not used at that time.

V. THE IDEA OF FEDERALISATION AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE

The idea of transforming Ukraine from a unitary state into a federation returned with new force during the recent events. The idea has been introduced into public debate for specific current political reasons, but it refers back to older discussions and concepts.

Mykhailo Drahomanov, the founding father of Ukrainian political thought, and Ukraine's greatest historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky were both advocates of a federal system of government for the future Ukrainian state. Yet during the independence war in 1917–1921, the Ukrainian People's Republic was established as a unitary state (which formed a federation with the Western Ukrainian People's Republic only because it proved impossible to reconcile the socialist nature of the UPR and the national-democratic character of the WUPR), although initially it did not rule out the possibility of maintaining federal relations with the 'new' Russia. The independence struggle of the Ukrainians was one of the factors which contributed to the Soviet state formally becoming a federation. One of the present-day consequences of this is that the idea of a federal state is commonly misunderstood, and 'federation' is taken to mean 'Sovietness'.

In 1991 Vyacheslav Chornovil, the leader of the People's Movement of Ukraine, put forward the idea of reforming the organisation of the Ukrainian state. However, what he apparently meant was not so much the creation of a federal state such as Yugoslavia or Germany, as a replacement of the arbitrarily delineated borders of oblasts with the borders of the historical lands, and the award of broad self-government powers or even autonomy to the new administrative units. It was a visionary project which, had it been implemented in the early 1990s, would have solved many of the country's problems.

However, the project (or rather postulate, because an implementable project was never put forward) met with universal opposition.

The champions of independence feared that federalisation would lead to a break-up of Ukraine and the incorporation of its eastern regions into the Russian Federation. There was also little enthusiasm for the idea in eastern Ukraine itself, and on top of that, no specific concept of how to organise the new state developed at that time. Several factors discouraged such experiments, including the Crimean oblast's declaration of autonomy (underpinned by a clear ambition to break away from Ukraine), the contemporaneous disintegration of the Yugoslav federation, and finally, the emergence of new quasi-states in the former USSR, not only of the kind of Transnistria and Abkhazia, but also of Tatarstan and Chechnya.

The independence movement feared that allowing federalisation, or even granting broader powers to the local self-government (at that time the distinction between the two options was not understood clearly enough, if at all) would lead to the secession of some regions. Those fears coincided with the central bureaucracy's ambition to keep as much power as possible to itself, and with the need to ensure that the state remained manageable after the decomposition of the dual Soviet system of party committees and councils of people's delegates (soviets). The latter problem was solved by introducing a hierarchic system of administration (president – governor – county head). As a result, independent Ukraine was established not only as a unitary state (despite the recognition of Crimea's autonomy), but also one that was excessively centralised.

Federalism re-emerged as an idea in late 2004. During the Orange Revolution, a congress of delegates from oblast, city and county councils, mostly from southern and eastern Ukraine, was held in Severodonetsk. Most of those who attended were Yanukovych supporters. The congress formulated a demand for the creation of a South-Eastern Ukrainian Autonomous Republic within Ukraine, in order to protect this part of the country from 'westernisation' or, as some said, 'fascistisation' under Yushchenko's

rule. However, that concept was not a political project either, but merely a slogan, and no-one thought about the methods and means that would be needed to implement it.

The opponents of the project, especially among Yushchenko supporters, denounced it as separatist, and after their victory, accused the initiators of having orchestrated "an attack on Ukraine's territorial integrity". In this way they discredited autonomist aspirations altogether (presumably deliberately). Yet the intention of those who organised the Severodonetsk congress was for a new autonomous republic, which would span one-third of Ukraine, from Kharkiv to Dnipropetrovsk and to Odessa, having a status comparable with that of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, rather than being an independent state or a republic within the Russian Federation. For Yevhen Kushnaryov, one of the main promoters of the idea, the main objective may well have been to make Kharkiv a capital again.

However, what was possible in the case of Crimea was not feasible in the case of the proposed republic. Granting autonomy to a region inhabited by nearly a third of the country's population and hosting the lion's share of its economic potential would have transformed Ukraine into a dualist country and made it inevitably unstable, even with a reasonable division of prerogatives between the two capitals. The South-Eastern Republic itself would also be unstable, as there is no 'south-eastern' identity to bind together the inhabitants of Odessa, Donetsk and Kharkiv, and the three regions do not share economic or other interests; the only thing that they have in common is their dependence on Kyiv (or some other external centre).

After Yushchenko came to power, calls for autonomy subsided, and after Kushnaryov died in 2007, the Party of Regions once again became the party of a single region, representing the interests of the Donetsk Basin, rather than the entire eastern and southern Ukraine. Since then, calls for autonomy would sometimes

re-emerge in Donetsk, but always on the margins of political life, even at the regional level.

After the outbreak of mass protests in November 2013, the subject of the federalisation of Ukraine returned with new force, and in a way which suggested that it had been introduced into public discourse in a deliberate and controlled way. As early as December 2013, Viktor Medvedchuk, a former head of the Presidential Administration under Leonid Kuchma who was considered to be the main lobbyist for Moscow's interests, said that "the break-up of Ukraine was a fait accompli",[24] and on several occasions later on he spoke about federalisation as a way out of the ongoing crisis, or even the only way of preventing the disintegration of Ukraine (without, however, identifying where the threat of such disintegration would come from).[25] He was backed, in almost the same words, by Ukraine's leading Russophile, Vadym Kolesnichenko.[26] Some Russian politicians also expressed similar views, including President Putin's close aide Sergei Glazyev.[27] On the other hand, some members of the ruling camp spoke out against federalism, including Andriy Shyshatski, the head of the Donetsk oblast administration.[28] Others, including the head of Kharkiv's oblast administration Mykhailo Dobkin, supported federalisation (considering it to be the only possible variant of decentralisation![29]) but at

24 www.pravda.com.ua/news/2013/12/6/7005273/, accessed on 6 December 2013.

25 Cf. e.g. Viktor Medvedchuk, Eta igra slishkom dorogo obkhoditsia, http://lenta.ru/articles/2014/02/04/medvedchu/, accessed on 5 February 2014.

26 Cf.e.g.[http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/kolesnichenko/52ea62deca835/, accessed on 31 January 2014.

27 Cf. http://www.kommersant.ua/doc/2400532, accessed on 10 February 2014.

28 www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/10/7013349, accessed on 10 February 2014.

29 It is worth noting that federalisation does not necessarily have to involve the introduction of local self-government, as it may well be limited to duplicating the bureaucratic centralism at the regional level. For more information on the problems associated with the organisation of regional and local government in Ukraine, see Tadeusz Iwański, Piotr Żochowski, 'Under the veneer of decentralisation Ukraine's modernisation efforts stall due to lack of local government reform', *OSW* commentary, issue 102, 12 February 2013.

the same time admitted that it would not be possible to carry it out during the present crisis.[30]

This time around, however, the federalisation discourse provoked an unexpectedly strong reaction on the part of its opponents, and the impetus of criticism deepened the impression that a serious, or in any case realistic, political project was at hand. Yaroslav Hrytsak spoke of a Russian "plan for a break-up of Ukraine", and accused the Presidential Administration chief Andriy Klyuyev, and thus indirectly Yanukovych himself, of implementing this plan.[31] Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, the leader of one of the pro-European parties, said that "an order for federalisation had come from the Kremlin",[32] etc. Taras Chornovil (son of Vyacheslav, a former politician of Our Ukraine, then the Party of Regions), who in fact considers the federal system of government to be an adequate solution for Ukraine, went as far as to say that Klyuyev was carrying out a Russian plan to split Ukraine into three parts (the east and south, fully controlled by Moscow, the centre, indirectly dependent on Russia, and the west, which would be "pushed out" to become a separate state).[33]

Notable against this background was the calm opinion expressed by the former *Verkhovna Rada* speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn who said that the calls for federalism, while posing a threat to the country, were merely "political technologies", and Ukraine needed to be rebuilt along the lines of "unitary decentralisation".[34] The former

30 www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/12/7013658, accessed on 13 February 2014.

31 Piotr Jendroszczyk, 'To Rosja rozdaje karty', *Rzeczpospolita*, 24 January 2014.

32 http://blogs.pravda.com.ua/authors/kyrylenko/52eb9cfca4eb0/view_print/, accessed on 31 January 2014.

33 Taras Chornovil, 'Mene realno nudyt' vid zayav opozytsiynykh lideriv', www.from-ua.com/adds/print.php?politics/b4239338fc1dc, accessed on 24 January 2014.

34 Volodymyr Lytvyn, 'Postanovka voprosa o federalizatsyi nesyot ugrozu razvala strany', www.from-ua.com/adds/pront.php?politics/dc14da87628ad, accessed on 6 February 2014.

president Leonid Kuchma also denounced federalism as a threat to the sovereignty of Ukraine.[35]

The authors of this narrative, which may indeed have been invented in Moscow or in Russophile circles in Kyiv, intended it to impede any resolution of the current crisis and the emergence of a nationwide front of opposition against Yanukovych, and perhaps also to disrupt any agreement between the president and that camp. The predictable, violent and at times even hysterical reaction of the 'protest camp', including the open accusations of treason levelled at the president and the allegations that his aim was to become the 'governor of Little Russia', etc., could presumably have been intended by the authors of the plan for federalisation. In this way, the possibility of seriously discussing the possible options of reforming Ukraine's internal system of government was blocked again: any reference to federalisation in the course of works on the new constitution will be decried as an act of treason. In this, the opponents of federalisation will be backed by the main force opposed to the decentralisation of Ukraine, i.e. the bureaucracy.

[35] www.pravda.com.ua/news/2014/02/10/7013291, accessed on 10 February 2014.

VI. FROM MOSCOW'S POINT OF VIEW

It is a widespread belief that Russia is not only promoting a narrative about the impending disintegration of Ukraine and the necessity of transforming the country into a loose federation (which is beyond any doubt[36]), but also taking measures to *de facto* split the Ukrainian state in order to keep at least part of it within its sphere of influence. This view does not seem to be justified. The references to Moscow's backing of the secession of Abkhazia or the Transnistrian and Crimean separatisms in the early 1990s are tenuous because those developments took place while the Soviet Union was falling apart (all the post-Soviet quasi-states were established before December 1991 during the so-called 'sovereignty parade'), at a time of deep instability and disorientation. Today the post-Soviet states are well-established and full-fledged subjects of international law, and the international situation is also different: it would be difficult today to imagine Western powers recognising the division of a sovereign state, unless it happened as a result of a long war and an international peace intervention.[37] And allowing UN-mandated peacekeepers to be deployed in the former Soviet area would be a political disaster for Russia.

If one looks at rational arguments, a division of Ukraine leading to one part becoming dependent on Moscow and the other on the West would not be a favourable outcome from Moscow's point of view, mainly because the objective of Russia's policy (which from its own point of view is perfectly rational) is to subordinate the whole of Ukraine while at the same time eliminating, or at least mitigating, the European Union's and the USA's distrust of Russia. Russia also understands that Ukraine's association with the EU will not put an end to Russian influence in that country, contrary

[36] Russia has repeatedly used this threat since 1991.

[37] The EU's resistance to recognise Catalonia's or Scotland's right to secession is an indication that the Union will be even less willing to recognise the division of states in whose democratic order Brussels has little faith.

to what large numbers of Ukrainians believe. On the other hand, it would not be possible to "federalise" Ukraine in such a way as to permit one part of it to join the Customs Union, and the other to remain outside of it. This would only be possible if Ukraine was split into several new states.

Yet a hypothetical western-Ukrainian state would be decisively hostile to Russia and would intensively promote so-called Russophobia. As a result of the split, Russia would also lose access to Transcarpathia, where it holds major sway. If Ukraine was split into several parts (even if that went no further than real federalisation) this would render it difficult for Moscow to combat centrifugal tendencies (towards decentralisation or separatism) at home, and would encourage advocates of such projects within Russia to act.

Moreover, if Russia backed the break-up of the Ukrainian state, it would have to shoulder the responsibility for the crumbling Ukrainian economy, sections of which compete with Russia's own economy. This would impose a very serious burden on the budget of the Russian Federation. Russia would also have to sustain the fiction that the rump Ukrainian state was still a separate entity – any potential annexation of part of it would not be recognised by the community of nations, entailing losses for Russia on the international stage which would be difficult to assess.

VII. A SPECIAL CASE: CRIMEA

Crimea, with its strong regional identity, pro-Russian separatist sentiments and the frozen ethnic conflict between the Slavic population (both Russians and Ukrainians) on the one hand and the Crimean Tatars on the other, poses a separate problem. If the peninsula has remained peaceful in recent days (February 2014), this was only because it was part of Ukraine and the Crimean Tatars were standing up for Ukraine's independence and indivisibility.

The Crimean elites backed the Yanukovych camp in the present crisis, and after it collapsed, the potential for social discontent arose in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in Sevastopol. The objectives were different than in the Euromaidans elsewhere in Ukraine, though: the main demands concerned deeper autonomy to prevent an import of western Ukrainian cultural models to Crimea, and stopping eastern Ukrainian business (with its links to the Party of Regions) controlling the peninsula's economy. The former set of demands, championed by Russophile organisations (with backing from Russia), gained new justification when the *Verkhovna Rada* imprudently repealed a law granting broad rights to the Russian language. However, the second aspect is more important; the elites of Crimea wanted to govern themselves (while remaining within the Ukrainian state), and that aspiration was very popular with the public in Crimea.

On the other hand in Sevastopol, which is still primarily a Russian navy base, the inhabitants removed Ukrainian state symbols from most of the places where they were displayed, proclaimed a new mayor in a political rally, and demanded self-rule for the city.[38] There were also calls for the city to join Russia, a move that would

[38] Sevastopol is the only city in Ukraine managed by a head of state administration (the equivalent of a governor) appointed by the president. Its districts, on the other hand, have local self-governments.

be highly popular in Sevastopol even without those 'prompters' from Russia who have undoubtedly also been involved.[39]

The political slogans demanding independence for Crimea or its joining Russia are marginal, and match neither the interests nor the views of the political elite of Crimea.[40] The main reason for this is that the Tatar community would account for around 12–15% of the population of independent Crimea, rising towards 20–25% within a short time, and would demand that the new state should become a Crimean-Tatar national state,[41] or at least a bi-national state. Such demands would trigger a violent reaction from the Russian majority, destabilising the new state.

Should Crimea become part of Russia, officials and oligarchs from Russia, who are more powerful and more efficient, would replace the Ukrainian officials and oligarchs now influencing the affairs of Crimea. In such a case it is almost certain that the republic could not maintain its present level of autonomy. For Russia, the incorporation of Crimea would increase the potential for irredentism in the Russian Federation by adding a large and well-organised community of Crimean Tatars which in the new circumstances would be hostile to Russia.

[39] When this text was finished, the situation in Crimea was very unstable. Shortly afterwards Russia annexed the peninsula following a sham referendum.

[40] The Razumkov Centre research quoted above shows that only 12% of people in the southern region would back the independence of their home oblast, and 13% would favour a merger with another oblast, while 81% and 17% respectively would be definitely against such moves (http://glavcom.ua.articles/17966.html, accessed on 4.03.2014). A breakdown of data for individual administrative units is not available, but since the inhabitants of Crimea account for around a third of the total population of the southern region in the meaning assumed in the study, and separatist tendencies are hardly present beyond Crimea, it can be inferred that although the popularity of separatist calls is much higher in Crimea than elsewhere in the region, the opponents of separatism are still more numerous than its advocates.

[41] Cf. the statement by Mustafa Dzhemilev, a senior Crimean Tatar leader, http://www.rp.pl/artykul/40,1090435-Dzemilew--Tatarzy-krymscy-niechca-obcej-wladzy-na-polwyspie.html, accessed on 28 February 2014.

CONCLUSIONS

While this paper was being written, the Ukrainian conflict led to the toppling of the Yanukovych government – a development that the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine accepted. In some regions separatist demands were raised; in Crimea the local elite made attempts at gaining broader autonomy, and the inhabitants of Sevastopol openly called for the city to become part of Russia. The Russian authorities and armed forces have actively backed those developments. However, regardless of how the situation in Crimea develops, the likelihood of the secession of eastern Ukraine is very low.

The events of recent months have strengthened, not undermined, the internal unity of Ukraine. Despite the existence of deep social, political and regional divisions, the recent conflict has not been a clash between two parts of the nation. It has been a conflict between the ruling camp and the activist-minded parts of the nation demanding change. Splitting the country, even in the form of federalisation, is not the objective of either side. Instead, it is a conflict about preserving the *status quo* or bringing about change – throughout the country. The claims that have been made about an impending split of the country have mainly been a propaganda instrument in the political conflict, and have served as a means of political sabotage for the Russian Federation.

There is no reason to believe that Ukraine faces a threat of breakup. It could only disintegrate as a result of a protracted civil war. That, however, is hardly conceivable, as the conflict at hand is between the people and the state apparatus, and not between two social groups. Furthermore, such a war would run counter to the interests of all the players in the current conflict, including the Russian Federation.

The fact that the subject of Ukraine's federalisation/division is being exploited in the political conflict diverts attention away from

reflections on reforming Ukraine's system of government, which should introduce genuine regional self-governance with broad prerogatives, instead of the present illusory self-rule. This is one of the challenges facing Ukraine.[42] However, no solution to it can be found or implemented amidst the revolutionary heat.

TADEUSZ A. OLSZAŃSKI

[42] For more information, see T. Iwański, P. Żochowski, *op. cit*.