KAROLINA KOZIURA

THE HIDDEN MINORITY? DILEMMAS AROUND THE STATUS OF THE RUSSOPHONE UKRAINIANS IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE

ABSTRACT

Ukraine, as one of the states which became independent in 1991, can be perceived as an example of the typical transition of Soviet Socialist Republics into democratic states centered on the issue of nationalizing policies and processes. However, there are also differences which make this country a very interesting case study for investigation. Mainly, Russians here form the biggest national group concentrated in the East and South of the country. The persistence and reuse of the “myth of two Ukraines” led to the widespread conclusion that Ukraine is a country which is divided between Ukrainophone West and Russophone East. This article focuses on the third group, which is somehow hidden in the mainstream linguistic debates, namely the Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine who define themselves as ethnic Ukrainians. Based on the examples of Donbas and Crimean regions, it tries to define whether one can perceive them as a national minority.

Key words: Ukraine; Russian minority; Ukrainophones and Russophones; linguistic debates; nationalizing states; “two Ukraines”

UKRYTA MNIEJSZOŚĆ? KONTROWERSJE WOKÓŁ STATUSU UKRAIŃCÓW ROSYJSKOJĘZYCZNYCH WE WSPÓŁCZESNEJ UKRAINIE

Streszczenie

Ukraina, która uzyskała niepodległość w 1991 roku, jest przykładem typowej dla regionu transformacji od Socjalistycznej Re-

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publiki Radzieckiej do państwa demokratycznego zorientowanego narodowo. Jednym z największych wyzwań w budowie współczesnego narodu ukraińskiego są kwestie językowe skupione wokół statusu Rosjan, którzy stanowią tu największą mniejszość narodową skoncentrowaną głównie na wschodzie i południu kraju. Wiąże się to z powstaniem mitu o „dwóch Ukrainach” podzielonych pomiędzy ukraińskojęzyczną ludność zamieszkującą zachód oraz rosyjskojęzyczną ludność dominującą na wschodzie kraju. Niniejszy artykuł omawia kontrowersje wokół statusu trzeciej grupy, pominiętej w tym stereotypowym obrazie państwa ukraińskiego, mianowicie Ukraińców rosyjskojęzycznych, i stawia za cel odpowiedzieć na pytanie, jak dalece grupa ta może być zdefiniowana w kategoriach mniejszości.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina; mniejszość rosyjska; problemy językowe; państwo zorientowane narodowo; „Dwie Ukrainy”

INTRODUCTION

One of the most important political processes in Europe in the 1990s was the challenge faced by Soviet Socialist Republics in transition from internal administrative borders to external international ones (Ratner, 1996). The new states which emerged after the dissolution of the Soviet Union faced not only the problem of international recognition of their external borders but also the task of building coherent states and preventing further separatist movements according to ethnic lines within their borders (Ratner, 1996). Thus, for them, maintaining territorial integrity became one of the most important challenges in the first decade of the 1990s. Nationalism was obviously a tool for the successful state-building process and the question “who are we” became one of the most important ones for new Central and East European states. Thus, they became labeled as “nationalizing states”.¹ However, nationalism was not only a consequence of the dissolution of the Soviet Union but its primary cause, and it emerged from the decline of its institutional coherence (Beissinger, 2002).

Ukraine, as one of the states which became independent in 1991, can, to some extent, be perceived as an example of the typical transition of a Soviet Socialist Republic into a democratic state. The first few years were dominated by national questions: on the one hand defining who they are as a nation, and on the other who “the Other” was, which created the biggest threat (Kuzio, 2001). In Ukraine, two regions were perceived both by Western observers and internal politicians as the most likely to separate: the Donbas region (eastern part of Ukraine) and the Crimea (a peninsula on the Black sea). However, there are also differences, which make this country a very interesting case study for investigation. Mainly, Russians here formed the biggest national group in the USSR and they in 1991 were the biggest minority, described by some authors as the second nation (Besters-Dilger, 2009; Kuzio, 2000). Thus, the problem of Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine and their relations with Ukrainians and Ukrainian-speakers became central for debates around the problem of nationalism in Ukraine.²

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¹ By “nationalizing goals” I refer to Brubaker’s idea of nationalizing states which appear after the dissolution of empires (for example Soviet Union or Yugoslavia) and are directed towards building a nation-state. The idea of nationalizing states points to the unfinished and ongoing nature of nationalist projects and processes. It is characterized by five motifs: the idea of the existence of the core nation, its claims to ownership of the state, the existence of a weak/titular nation and specific state’s action to strengthen its position and finally the number of remedial actions. See: Brubaker, 1996.

² As for Juliane Besters-Dilger (2009), Ukraine unites all possible linguistic problems of former Soviet Eastern Europe.

According to Taras Kuzio, nationalism is the most misused term in the study of contemporary Ukraine (Kuzio, 2000). It is usually discussed in the context of linguistic debates and in reference to the Ukrainian-speaking population, living in the West of the country, and the Russian-speaking population inhabiting the East. As Mykola Riabchuk points out, it is very hard to find any Western publication on Ukraine which does not stress the significance of the linguistic and cultural differences between particular regions in Ukraine based on its historical and political foundations (Riabchuk, 2005). Sociological polls, results of elections, politicians' rhetoric and academic works seem to prove this idea. Thus, starting in the beginning of the 1990s up to now, Ukraine has been perceived as a country divided into two parts: nationalist West and pro-Russian East or even more strictly, Ukrainian speakers in the West and Russian speakers in the East. As for Catherine Wanner, nationalizing efforts in Ukraine faced two potential obstacles, namely, the largest Russian diaspora of all the former Soviet republics and one-third to half of the citizens were considered "russified" or "denationalized" (Wanner, 1998).

In my article, I discuss the dilemmas of the status of Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine, who define themselves as ethnic Ukrainians, a group which is somehow hidden in the mainstream of linguistic debates in Ukraine.³ In their case, the possible line of identification can be only through nationalist oriented Ukrainian-speakers on the one hand, and pro-Russian Russian-speakers on the other. In this context, my main research question is whether and to what extent Russian-speaking Ukrainians can be perceived as a minority in Ukraine.

The following work is divided into three parts. In the first I discuss the legal aspects of the functioning of both language usage and minorities in Ukraine. Thus, I start my investigation from the Law on Languages in the USSR, introduced by the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in 1989, then the Citizenship Law from 1991, the Law on National Minorities from 1992 and the new language law from 2012. In this part as well I briefly discuss the emergence of the myth of the "two Ukraines". In the second part of my paper, I use sociological data on the usage of Ukrainian and Russian languages and follow national identities in order to show how complicated the people's lines of identification are in contrast with the advocates of the "two Ukraines" claim. The analysis of sociological polls helps also in understanding who Russian-speakers are in Ukraine and who they identify with. In the final part of my paper, I use two examples of regions in Ukraine, mainly the Donbas and the Crimea to show local specificities of Russian-speakers in Ukraine. I choose these regions as, for many scholars and politicians in the beginning of the 1990s, they were perceived as the biggest threat to Ukrainian state integrity.⁴

LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC ISSUES IN POST-SOVIET UKRAINE

In October 1989, the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic introduced the Law on Languages in the USSR, according to which the Ukrainian language became recognized as the

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³ This article is partially based on my research conducted in the framework of a research grant given by the Polish National Science Centre, no 2012/07/N/HS3/04169 realized at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland.

⁴ The main parts of the following article were written prior to the events which happened in Ukraine in December 2013, known as the "Euromaidan revolution," and later the invasion of the Crimean peninsula by Russian forces. Thus, I do not largely refer to any kind of data from this period (mostly because of the lack of professional, ideologically-free sources). However, I claim that the main findings of this paper are not changed and when it is possible I compare them to the "Euromaidan" case.

"state language." In this sense it could be used in work places, administrations, organizations and so on (Riabchuk, 2005, p. 65). Moreover, every state clerk (no matter their institutional affiliation) was to know both languages: Ukrainian and Russian and, if not, he or she needed to express their willingness to learn Ukrainian in a concrete amount of time. According to the Law, every school should not only guarantee possibilities of learning both Ukrainian and Russian but even give priority to Ukrainian which should be used in all exams (Riabchuk, 2005, p. 65).

The Law was not as radical as it may sound. Although it broadened the possible usage of the Ukrainian language, it also guaranteed the status of Russian. As before, Russian-speakers could still gain their education in Russian, communicate in this language in public institutions and fulfill all the cultural, informational and social needs in this language (mainstream media, publishers, cinema, theaters and so on were in Russian). Moreover, the Law did not introduce any real penalties for disobeying it and give an approximately 10-year period to learn Ukrainian (Riabchuk, 2005, p. 67).

The one inconvenience for Russian-speakers, which this new Law brought, was the obligatory task for them to learn Ukrainian. However, the similarity of these two languages means that almost all Russian-speakers at least passively know Ukrainian (and definitely nearly all Ukrainian-speakers know Russian). However, theoretically the Law gave the priority to not only Ukrainian but also any other national language used by the majority of the population in a concrete region. In practice, it referred to the Eastern part of Ukraine, where especially in big cities the majority used Russian. Moreover, the majority of mainstream magazines, journals and TV programs were in Russian, thus Ukrainian-speakers noticed serious problems in fulfilling the cultural needs in their own language. The Law should be described as a form of "constitutional nationalism" in which members of one ethnic group are legally privileged (Hayden, 1992).

Although it seemed like Russian was more in favor than Ukrainian in the last years of the existence of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the situation changed after the Republic became independent. As was presented by many scholars, the early stage of Ukraine's independence was centered not around the Russian-Ukrainian question, but the process of building the Ukrainian nation as such without reference to the ethnic origin of the new state's citizens (Goshulak, 2003; Kuzio, 2000). However, as David D. Laitin (1998, p. 262) states, the dissolution of the Soviet Union was the most shocking experience for Russian-speakers and they were a group who faced a radical crisis of identity. Before 1989, it was unusual to see any kind of public identification of Russians living in the Union Republics. They were (although very often privileged) the same "family" of nations as the others. As for them, being a Russian simply referred to being Soviet. Starting from the 1990s, they occurred as living in new states which bore the name of its titular nation and as such they become a new national minority. Their "identity struggles" referred to questions: who they are? What will they become? Are they people in a diaspora or should they return to a homeland?⁵

From the perspective of nationalizing states, two laws introduced in Ukraine in its early stage of independence are the most important. The first was the Citizenship Law

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⁵ David D. Laitin (1998) conducted very interesting research in which he compared the situation of Russians in four post-Soviet countries, namely: Kazakhstan, Estonia, Latvia and Ukraine. As he shows the difficult bias situation of new Russian minority in these countries the best reflect ambivalent terms they are described, for example: "the unrooted", "people without a country", "foreigners", "noncitizens", "unwanted citizens" and finally compatriots and simply Soviets.

introduced on the 8th of October 1991.⁶ The Law was a kind of compromise between the Ukrainian nationalists claiming that citizenship should be granted just to ethnic Ukrainians and the pro-Russian politicians opting for dual citizenship (Kuzio, 2002). According to it, privileges were given to, on the one hand, ethnic Ukrainians and on the other to everybody residing in Ukraine at that time, no matter ethnic, social, political, linguistic or racial origins. The only criteria required for citizenship was sufficient knowledge of Ukrainian. In this sense, neither the ethnic background nor the linguistic aspects defined Ukrainians but their civic belonging to the state.⁷

The second important law implemented in Ukraine at that time was also a very liberal Law on National Minorities introduced in 1992.⁸ It granted equal political, social, economic and cultural rights to all citizens, regardless of their ethnic origins under one condition: their loyalty to the Ukrainian constitution, state sovereignty and territorial integrity (Kuzio, 2002, p. 94). According to the Law, national minorities are defined as “groups of Ukrainian citizens who are not Ukrainian by nationality and who manifest national consciousness and community of interest within the group” (Kuzio, 2002, p. 94). Russians were defined within this category. The Law on National Minorities was based on “individual rights” in which individuals are treated equally regardless of their origins. An example of this is that in the Ukrainian passport, one could not find information on ethnicity (unlike in the Soviet passport). In this sense, the Ukrainian government wanted to create a civic state, in which civil society was more important than ethnicity. However, the group hidden in these discussions was Russian-speakers.⁹ These were people who, despite using Russian in their everyday talks, defined themselves primarily as Ukrainians. In the face of both laws, they were a group in between, which escaped the mainstream vision of being Ukrainian or Russian-speakers and following this identification.

The linguistic debates became highlighted again when, in September 2012, a new language law was introduced in Ukraine.¹⁰ According to it, in an *oblast* (main administrative unit) when around 10 per cent of the population speak a different language than Ukrainian, this language can reach the status of the second language in that area. Until now, only in the Eastern parts of Ukraine – mainly in Donbas and in Crimea, Russian has been introduced as a second language. In contrast, this status was not allowed to any other language widely used in multilingual regions in Ukraine (for example the case of Hungarians in the Transcarpathian region). Thus it is perceived that the law itself was directed only to Russian-speakers in Ukraine. Again, newspapers, journals, Internet blogs and so on were full of anti-Russian agitation, and the new law was perceived as first of all a threat to the status of Ukrainian. Especially, as in the context of the main usage of languages in the media, many “Ukrainophones” perceived themselves as a minority.

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⁶ As Rogers Brubaker (1996) claims the questions of citizenship and nationhood were the core aspects of the definition of statehood and the nationalizing projects in the beginning of the 1990s.

⁷ This kind of civic basis of the first Ukrainian citizenship law is a consequence of the shape of Soviet state, in which the national question was highly institutionalized. Although the republics “belonged” to particular nations, their actual power within it was limited. As Rogers Brubaker points: “Ethnocultural nation did not depend on the existence of national republics; but the national republics did depend on the existence of ethnocultural nation.” See Brubaker, 1996.

⁸ Following Rogers Brubaker, I define the national minority in political dimension as a subjective precipitate shaped by the national scheme of social classification. See: Brubaker, 1996, p. 66.

⁹ As David D. Laitin (1998, p. 264) shows, “the Russian-speaking population” is a term basically invented in 1989. In many sources it refers to persons, community but never to a nationality or people (*narod*).

¹⁰ The ruling Party of Regions used an international document ratified by Ukraine, namely Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. See: Kulyk, 2009, p. 22.

As Katherine Verdery (1995) shows in the case of Romania, the main group responsible for the spread of nationalist claims is formed by intellectuals. In the case of Ukraine, the most powerful group was formed of oligarchs who, since Ukraine's independence, have influenced mainstream policies.¹² The problem of the relations between Ukrainians and Russians in Ukraine started to be visible in the middle of the 1990s. Mostly as a consequence of the elites' struggles for recognition, mainly two clans – one from Dnipropetrovsk and a second from Donetsk, emerged. This became evident when Leonid Kuchma won the presidential election against Leonid Kravchuk in 1994. The first one during his campaign promoted the image of Kravchuk as being a nationalist and in favor of Western globalization, in response Kravchuk created the picture of Kuchma as being pro-Russian. Kuchma was also the first politician who officially promised the introduction of Russian as a second language (Bilaniuk, 2005). In stressing this, journalists started to publish election result maps in which Ukraine was divided into two parts: Western – pro-Kravchuk and Eastern – pro-Kuchma. However, in reality both represented similar policies in favor of their clans and groups of support. The creation of their image as being pro-nationalist or pro-Russian was largely a myth from the beginning, and the result of the clans' struggles for power (Riabchuk, 2005). From now on, the "language card" was frequently played by different political actors in Ukraine (Kulyk, 2009, p. 22).

The similar case as between Kravchuk and Kuchma appeared between Viktor Yanukovich and Viktor Yushchenko in 2002. The first, Viktor Yanukovich, was perceived as heir to Kuchma and declared the continuation of his policy. The second, Viktor Yushchenko, together with his political party "Our Ukraine" (*Nasha Ukrajina*), was the representative of the national democrats. The appearance of the new political force led by Viktor Yushchenko was perceived as a threat to the former communist who remained in power. Thus, they created a very unpleasant image of him in the media. He was accused of being nationalist and having relationships with fascists (although in fact he was from Eastern Ukraine). Public opinion was warned that his possible rule together with Yulia Tymoshenko would cause the nationalization of the industry and unemployment.

The myth of the "two Ukraines" seemed to decline during the Orange Revolution. Although a description of the political situation in 2005 goes beyond the scope of this article, for many Ukrainians it was perceived as the beginning of the new era of the united nation. Language was also not an issue during the revolution. However, one needs to take into consideration that the main body of the pro-Yushchenko electorate and Orange protesters was formed by the Ukrainophones of the West and center of the country (Kulyk, 2009, p. 25). Although during the rule of the Orange government language questions were not in the center of politics, several steps were taken to promote the Ukrainian language.¹³

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¹¹ In this part of my article, I refer to the idea of "two Ukraines" shaped by political actors after the 1990s. However, one should take into consideration that Ukraine for many centuries used to be a divided country, mostly between Ukrainophone West and Russophone East. Thus, I do not refer to different historiographies and the current historical memories in different parts of Ukraine. In this regard see: Hrytsak, Portnov & Susak, 2007.

¹² At this point, Ukraine was typical for the region, an example in which in the process of formation of new entities, the central role was played by territorial-political elites while the marginal role was played by the ethnocultural nations. See: Brubaker, 1996, p. 61.

¹³ As Aneta Pavlenko (2008, p. 275) shows, one of the cosmetic changes introduced by the Orange government was the decision of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine that starting from 2008 all foreign-language movies, including Russian, shown in Ukraine should be translated into Ukrainian.

The myth of the “two Ukraines” found fertile ground in Ukraine and was accepted by the majority of the population. It was constructed and confirmed by politicians, scholars, intellectuals and journalists and in this shape entered the public consciousness of Ukrainian citizens. It was also visible after the events in Ukraine in the beginning of 2014. During that time, especially in the Eastern and Southern parts of Ukraine, anti-Ukrainophone propaganda was spread. In this regard, the so-called “Euromaidan” revolution was connected with fascist and nationalist activity of Ukrainophones. As a response, the city of Lviv mobilized an effort called “Lviv speaks Russian”, in which “Euromaidan” activists encouraged citizens to speak in Russian in order to show their support towards Russian-speakers.

PROBLEMS WITH ESTIMATES

According to the first Ukrainian census of 2001, in comparison to the last census in the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic from 1989, the number of ethnic Ukrainians rose (from 72.7% in 1989 to 77.8% in 2001) mostly because the number of ethnic Russians declined (from 22.1% in 1989 to 17.3% in 2001). The number of other nationalities did not change much (from 5.1% in 1989 to 4.9% in 2001). During the census, it became evident that 85.2% of ethnic Ukrainians (66.3% of the total population) declared Ukrainian as their mother tongue and 14.8% of them (11.5% of the total population) declared Russian. Among ethnic Russians almost all declared Russian as their mother tongue (96%). To sum up, the census showed that 67% of Ukrainians perceive Ukrainian as their mother tongue and 29.6% Russian.¹⁴

Fig. 1. Percentage of the population who declared Russian as their native tongue by region¹⁵

However, everyone who has the possibility to stay in Ukraine for a given amount of time notices that neither ethnicity nor language play a significant role in the everyday life of its citizens. People usually freely communicate in both languages, even when for some reason they do not want to use a particular language.¹⁶ Moreover, the census re-

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¹⁴ All data from <http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/ukr/notice/news.php> (“All-Ukrainian population census”, n.d.).

¹⁵ Source: <http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua> (“All Ukrainian population census 2001”, n.d.).

¹⁶ On the blurred and permeable lines between using Ukrainian and Russian in the everyday context, see: Bilaniuk, 2005.

vealed the problem of “mother tongue,” which seems not to be the measurement of using a particular language (for example in the big cities people prefer to use Russian, or rather *surzyk*—a mixture of Russian and Ukrainian). Thus, sociologists decided to introduce the term “language of everyday use” rather than “mother tongue” in order to describe the linguistic preferences of Ukrainian citizens. According to these surveys, it showed that only 40-45% of ethnic Ukrainians preferred to use Ukrainian in their everyday communication and 20-22% preferred Russian. Research showed that around 60% of Ukrainians can freely communicate in Russian, and 33% of Russians in Ukrainian.¹⁷

Thus, the citizens of Ukraine can be divided into four categories: Ukrainians using one language (20%), Ukrainians who are bilingual (52%), Russians using one language (14%) and Russians who are bilingual (8%). Consequently, it reveals that the citizens of Ukraine cannot be simply divided as many expect into a Ukrainian majority and Russian minority. Thus, to stress the linguistic specificity, sociologists proposed two new terms: “Ukrainophones” and “Russophones” to stress language preferences (Riabchuk, 2005, p. 39). However, the idea of conceptualizing Ukrainian society according to linguistic, cultural, regional lines has several disadvantages. First of all, it ignores the existence of the third group—people who use both Russian and Ukrainian in everyday life, or who despite using Russian, declare themselves as Ukrainian. Those people are usually characterized as having double identification which is rather weak and unstable (visible in the sentence: “I am not sure who I am”). Secondly, it seems like the role of language was highly exaggerated as an important factor for identification (visible in the debates around using the “mother tongue” or the “language of everyday usage” in surveys). Finally, the investigation of public opinion in 1998 showed that only 3.9% of respondents agreed that the Ukrainian language was an important factor in determining Ukrainian identity (Wilson, 2002). However, this does not mean that Ukrainian is not at all important. It is more a sign that other aspects, such as common history, ancestors or citizenship are more significant.

THE CASE OF DONBAS AND CRIMEA

The early stage of Ukraine’s independence showed that there was a strong support for its territorial integrity (Kuzio, 2000). In the declarations of both presidents, Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, the main idea was to build a common sense of Ukrainian identity, no matter the ethnic and linguistic origin of the state’s citizens (Wanner, 1998). In many cases, central elites maintained the need to keep current borders. However, most of the outside observers, as well as many in Ukraine, assumed that the Russian-speakers in Ukraine are likely to be separatists. “In actual fact, only a small minority of Russians in eastern Ukraine regard Russia as their ‘homeland’” (Kuzio, 2002, p. 80). Thus, separatism in Ukraine was largely a myth. As statistical data show, no secessionist movements were possible, mostly because there was not an obvious line of ethnic or linguistic mobilization.¹⁸

However, there were two regions where the Ukrainian national idea was the weakest (mostly because of the presence of ethnic Russians or Russian-speakers), namely the Donbas and the Crimea. In this part of the paper, my main question is the situation of Russians and Russian-speakers there and their lines of everyday identification.

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¹⁷ All data from <http://ukrstat.gov.ua> (“State Statistics Service of Ukraine”, n.d.).

¹⁸ Moreover, as Brubaker points out, Russians outside of the Russia Federation were not institutionally organized and empowered and as such did not develop strong elites. See: Brubaker, 1996, p. 61.

Fig. 2. The Donbas region¹⁹

Donbas is a region which lies on the Ukrainian and Russian borderland and it is well known for its heavy industry. 85% of the region lies in Ukraine in two *oblasts* of Donetsk and Luhans'k. Traditionally, Donbas was always a pro-Russian and later a pro-Soviet region, mostly because of its high industrial development in these two periods. Many scholars perceived this region as typical for Eastern Ukraine. This assumption is as wrong as describing Galicia as typical for Western Ukraine (Kuzio, 2002). In contrast, in Ukraine each of the regions has its specificity and local peculiarity. Thus, instead of "two Ukraines" one can say that we face "many Ukraines" (Riabchuk, 2005).

Most of the Russians who live in the Donbas have lived there for many generations. Thus, they do not perceive Russia as their 'homeland', they are more locals—and this is the most common line of their identification (Motyl, 1987). As the census from 2001 showed, this group is largely in transition (the decline of ethnic Russians in favor of ethnic Ukrainians) and nowadays the number of people who are bilingual continues to increase—as Mark Beissinger points out, "the massive reimaginings of self characterized the Soviet Union in its final years" (Beissinger, 2002, p. 147). However, still there is a huge group whose members are not sure about their own national belonging. In the first years of Ukraine's independence many of them were more likely to declare themselves as Russian mostly because it was a kind of natural prolonging of their Soviet identity (Kuzio, 2000). Ten years later, people understood that it was somehow better and more profitable to be Ukrainian (in a Ukrainian state) and thus "switched" their identity. In this sense, Russian speakers in the Donbas are neither anti-Ukrainian, nor anti-Russian. This kind of "schizophrenia" is typical not only for Ukraine but many post-Soviet states.²⁰

However, the elites have a huge impact on people's everyday identification and are perceived as the biggest actors in the raise of nationalism in transitional states (Snyder, 2000). In the case of the Donbas, as was mentioned before, two clans played the most significant role: one from Donetsk and the second from Dnipropetrovsk. Their struggle finished after the election in 1994 when Leonid Kuchma became president (and thus the second of the clans won). It was clear for these new elites that it was more profitable to organize themselves in Ukraine rather than in Russia. Moreover, there have been no institutional forms around which Donbasites could be mobilized as well as single leader

¹⁹ Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donets_Basin ("Donets Basin", n.d.).

²⁰ The main claim of the Russian government was the protection of Russians living in these regions of Ukraine. However, on the other side, throughout this period the majority of people living there express rather neutral or even ignorant attitudes towards these actions than were involved in any kind of political manifestations. (Riabchuk, 2005).

to follow. Even in cultural aspects, people here did not develop any indigenous forms of customs or folk tradition which could be perceived as Russian. Moreover, the last tendency of mass tourism of Eastern Ukrainians to the Western part of the country during Christmas and Easter Holidays shows that there is a further possibility of larger integration of this region into the rest of the country.

The Crimea region, in contrast to the Donbas, was always perceived as distinct and one which deserves special status (Kuzio, 2002, p. 86). In the beginning of the 1990s, it was clear that the region would gain autonomy—the only problem was whether it should be a Tatar autonomous republic or ethnic Russian. The region had its own institutions, political parties and even presidency around which there was a possibility of mobilization towards Russia. However, all the movements collapsed in the first years of Ukraine's independence, mostly because of the centrist politics of the first two presidents and governments stressing the territorial integrity of the state. The first steps towards the integration of the Crimea towards the rest of the country came together with the force to put on all the pro-Russian parties there to reregister as Ukrainian ones; then the disintegration of the Crimean Russian bloc in 1994-1995 and the abolishing of the Crimean presidency as an institution in 1995 (Goshulak, 2003). Finally, Crimean elites gave up the idea of being a sovereign state with stronger ties with Russia in favor of being an autonomous district with its own local government (and own elections) inside Ukraine's borders. The new district with the capital city in Sevastopol also received its own regional symbols and anthem.

Fig. 3. The Crimea²¹

The Crimea, which was given to the Ukraine Soviet Socialist Republic by the Soviet Union in 1954, is distinct not only in its policy but especially in its ethnic structure. Unlike other regions in Ukraine, the majority of the Crimean population settled in the region after 1945. They were mostly military personnel with stronger ties to the Soviet Union. They were most likely to declare Russia as their homeland (Kuzio, 2002, p. 87). The indigenous settlers of Crimea—mainly Tatars, were forced by Stalin's regime to move to the far eastern parts of the Soviet Union. Their return was possible during the first years of Ukraine's independence. Nowadays, for many scholars, a Tatar revival is perceived in the region and it is mostly expressed in the rising number of mosques there. Ukrainians there represent a minority with widespread usage of Russian in everyday communication, and only 1.7% of Crimean television and radio broadcasts only in Ukrainian (Kuzio, 2002, p. 88).

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²¹ Source: <http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/5174218> ("Crimean Oblast", n.d.).

The Crimean landscape is also different from the rest of the country. The symbols of the Soviet Union, together with the widespread statues of Lenin, are still the most significant elements in the cityscapes.

CONCLUSION

From the perspective of statistical data, lines and dependencies between language, identity and political preferences are not clearly defined and unambiguous. Nevertheless, they may serve for different political purposes and manipulation. Thus, in Ukraine, the myth of the “two Ukraines” grew in power, and linguistic issues from time to time have become a hot topic in the country. In most of the cases, it is highlighted before elections, political campaigns or by intellectuals, stressing that Ukraine should be divided. Moreover, the constant repetitions of differences between the Eastern and Western parts of the country in the press, radio and TV programs have consequences in people’s perception of their own country as being deeply divided. Thus, in Ukraine, the language question has a clear political dimension. From a Ukrainophone’s point of view, Russians and Russian-speakers in the East of the country are perceived as the biggest threat to the Ukrainian nation (Kuzio, 2001). This complicated internal situation of Ukraine is fertile ground for different kinds of manipulations—as the events of early 2014 showed. Until now, as the presented cases of Donbas and Crimea has shown, their perceived threat to Ukrainian state integrity was rather a myth. Even in the mass protests of Russian-speakers in the East and South of the country in favor of Russia’s interference in Ukraine, at the moment it is hard to estimate whether it is a sign of a pro-Russia feeling of the Russophones or rather a kind of disappointment of the current shape of Ukrainian state, and its economic situation. Thus, protests may reflect more a kind of Soviet nostalgia than a demonstration of any kind of national attachments.

Nevertheless, “Russophone” Ukrainians are a group which suffers the most in these debates. The need for recognition from the side of both Ukrainians and Russians is “the most driving force behind nationalism movements” (Taylor, 1994). However, as two cases from the Donbas and the Crimea show, it is quite hard to define Russians in Ukraine as one single group and in each of the regions Russians and Russian-speakers develop its own specificity. Paradoxically, “Russophone” Ukrainians are both the majority and minority. They form a dominant group when it comes to knowledge of Russian, its everyday use, the presence in mass media and so on but, on the other—they are in a minority when we talk about their bilingualism and thus “hidden” status in most of the sociological polls. In this regard, it serves no analytical purposes to try to define them as a diaspora, an interest group, or even a minority. More interesting are the tendencies of its development. Will Russian-speakers in Ukraine try to sharpen their boundaries and separate from others? Are there any chances for their political-territorial autonomy based on any kind of the cultural distinctiveness? As I claim throughout the paper, there are no visible evidences for such efforts at the moment. However, the so-called “Euromaidan” revolution, the presence of Russian forces in Crimea and finally mass pro-Russian protests in the Donbas region may give a future groundwork for such a national project of the Russophones in Ukraine. Thus, an open question is whether the Russian-speakers will remain, as Ronald Suny (1993) suggests, only a “cosmopolitan identity” living between Moscow and Kiev without any kind of claims, or perhaps they will develop a national consciousness.

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