

# Is There a Successor Generation in the Former Soviet Union?

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**T**he collapse of the Soviet system and the bankruptcy of communist ideology have left an important gap in the consciousness of many people of different generations living within the territory of the former USSR (FSU). Since the sudden disappearance of the powerful Soviet empire, the whole mode of existence and the very philosophy of life have been increasingly linked with the past.

The gravest concerns pertain to the system of values, political orientation, and ideals of the younger generation. Although it is precisely this new generation that will determine the destiny of the posttotalitarian countries, as well as the future of the emerging democratic, market-oriented societies, young people perceive the current vacuum in socially recognized political, ethical, even aesthetic values and standards of behavior with particular sharpness. All of the countries of the FSU have faced similar problems. However, in this article we will deal primarily with the problems facing the new generation in Russia and Ukraine.

Russia and Ukraine are the largest postcommunist countries. They display different geopolitical orientations posing fundamental political challenges for the younger generation. Although differences are evident among the views of Russian and Ukrainian youth on topics of international development and external political issues, such as NATO enlargement or East-West cooperation, many similarities also exist that may be regarded as common to the younger generation in all FSU republics. In this article we address both common features and national peculiarities.

Russia and Ukraine have developed jointly for more than 300 years, since the time of Pereyaslavskaya Rada (1654), leading to similar historical, cultural, religious, and linguistic features, as well as a common mentality in the two nations.

The second similarity is a national system of values. The ideals surrounding the national revolution in Chechnya, for example, naturally have been more prom-

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inent among Chechen youth and hardly shared by youth in Moscow or St. Petersburg. With this in mind, as well as the multiplicity of forms of collective consciousness and modes of individual behavior, it can be said that there is no universal trend in the behavior of youth in terms of cultural or political activities.

Differences between the youth of today are more determined by national factors than by any other. And there is another specific dimension in the development of youth determined by the demographic aspects of the problem. From the demographic point of view, we consider the younger generation to comprise people up to the age of thirty, for these are the people whose mentality has not been fully determined by the ideology of the past. In the Russian federation, people younger than thirty number 54.1 million or 36 percent of the population.

In analyzing this segment of the population, we must also consider the divergences between different groups of “age peers”—groups who experience the same problems of living and are influenced by similar events. These groups are also bound together by ideals, social or economic interests, and values that produce common features in behavior, desires, preferences, and attitudes in relation to political and social events they face.

From these premises, we can include in this generation those born between 1968 and 1984. Children younger than 14 depend on their parents, and from the sociopolitical point of view they are not adults. After the age of 14, people can get a civilian passport, get a job, and are responsible for their actions under the law. Among those 14 years old and older, we should distinguish two demographic or “age peer” groups: those who are between 23 and 30 years of age and those between 14 and 23.

The first age group (23–30) includes those who were born during the years 1967 to 1975 and attended school between 1975 and 1991 (the last years of the Soviet Union). The features of this period were a unified country, a single education system, and a common set of values (although for many Ukrainians, as well as for people in other FSU republics, it was also a period of revival of national traditions and a shift in political orientation toward nationalist ideology).

Their system of childhood ideals was formed under the influence of Soviet ideological institutions—the Pioneers, the Komsomol, and so forth. The student and social life of the group began in the years 1985–91, when they confronted a dramatic situation: they encountered the grim reality of a life that diverged completely from all that they had been told. They faced the process of perestroika, the collapse of ideals, and the collapse of the country that had embodied national patriotism and political affiliation, followed by the emergence of new independent states and the formation of new national political elites and new ideals.

The age group 14–23 includes those who were born during the period 1975–91 and whose school years were between 1982 and 1998. The mature mentality and ideals of these people formed in the years 1992 to 1998. They grew up in the newly independent countries, and some of them do not remember what “the USSR” meant. This generation, more than the previous one, was influenced by Western ideology, ideals, culture, and advertisements. Such notions as the free market, democracy, capitalism, and freedom were part of their life.

Teenagers 14 to 17 have a very special subculture, which differs from that of previous generations. Some of them belong to official organizations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, organizations that were reborn in the early 1990s. Others, imitating Western youths' modes of life, prefer to realize themselves in different informal groups, such "metallists," "punks," "acid heads," "rappers," "raves," "hip-hops," and so on. They prefer American and European music to Russian and Ukrainian and listen to such groups as "Spice Girls," "Oasis," "Radiohead," "the Prodigy," "Boyzone," "Backstreet Boys," "Aerosmith," "Eternal," "Garbage," and others. They are crazy about Madonna, Eros Ramazzotti, Celine Dion, and Michael Jackson. The most popular magazines among them are *COOL*, *Rovesnik*, and *Vse Dela*. The main subjects for discussion are music, sex, drugs, cosmetics, and sports.

This generation—whether schoolchildren or students, young workers or peasants, military or unemployed—was removed from the old traditions but still had not acquired new ideals. They are not fully adult and can be considered as marginals.

### **Some Problems of Russian Youth**

Youths aged 15 to 29 in Russia number 31 million people—one-fifth of the total population or 33 percent of the able-bodied people. Among them, 3.1 million are schoolchildren, 3.7 million are students in technical vocational schools, and 2.8 million are students in institutions of higher education. The majority of this age group have jobs or serve in the army. But 2.5 million of them do not work or study anywhere.

In 1994, new legislation on education came into effect under which the mandatory tenth and eleventh years of secondary education were abolished and replaced by a requirement of nine years of middle education. That year, nearly 1.8 million young adults had just finished their ninth year of school. This reform did not resolve the question of a guaranteed professional education, which has appeared to be an important condition for employment for teenagers aged 14-16. The number of professional-technical institutions of higher learning decreased by a significant number.

According to the Ministry of Labor of the Russian Federation, people younger than 29 years of age made up 34 percent of the registered unemployed in 1996. In thirteen regions of Russia, the figure was more than 40 percent.

All of these groups (schoolchildren, students in technical-vocational schools, students at institutions of higher education, professional workers, or servicemen) have their special features and problems of adaptation to modern Russian reality. It is impossible to explain all of them in one article. As Kozma Prutkov said, "You can't embrace the boundless." That is why we would like to confine ourselves to such specific problems as the sociopolitical image of Russian students, youth and the army, and the demographic crisis and the future of youth.

### **Sociopolitical Image of Russian Students**

In the near future, the political mood of the younger generation and its support of political parties, movements, and reforms will influence the development of

Russia toward democracy. The attitude of youth toward politics currently depends on their social status, sociocultural values, and actions. A collective image of Russian students at the end of the 1990s emerges from seven sociological studies conducted in different regions of the Russian Federation—Moscow,<sup>1</sup> St. Petersburg,<sup>2</sup> Bashkortostan,<sup>3</sup> Krasnoyarsk,<sup>4</sup> Kemerovo,<sup>5</sup> Ekaterinburg,<sup>6</sup> and Arkhangelsk<sup>7</sup>—giving a more-or-less complete picture of the needs, values, and ideals of the younger generation in Russia.

The distribution of students according to gender has remained virtually unchanged for many years. Traditionally in Russia, there is a predominance of young men in technical schools and of young women in the humanities. In pedagogical and economic universities, there are four to five times as many female students as male students; in medical academies, male students outnumber females ten to seven; and in classical universities there are twice as many females as males. The process of feminization of higher education has remained “spontaneously stable” and does not match the situation in the labor market; the majority of the unemployed are women with higher education.

Nevertheless 75 to 80 percent of the students are satisfied with their choice of institution. The fundamental motivation involved in the choice of institution of higher learning are interest in a profession (45–50 percent); opportunity to prove one’s abilities (33–40 percent); authority or prestige of the institution (32–36 percent); prospective good job after graduation from the institution (30–43 percent); and influence of family traditions or advice of parents (15–22 percent).

Russia has maintained its tradition of early marriages. Thus, toward their third university year, 11 percent of students are married and 4 percent have children. By the time of their graduation, the number of those married is 40 to 50 percent, and half of those married have children.

The poor social conditions of a significant number of students create crucial social problems. The degree of uneasiness among young women is higher than among young men. All of them face poor living conditions, and women can expect possible unemployment, a worsening of health, and little hope for free time. A greater number of men can count on supplemental incomes.

The fundamental sources of students’ income are the following:

- Eighty percent of students receive a stipend from the government, but its size is minimal—83.49 rubles, or \$14, plus 10 percent for good grades (or 20 percent for straight A students); parentless students get an extra 50 percent, as do handicapped students. In the Arkhangelsk oblast, all students receive an additional 10 percent “hardship pay” for living in the far north. As a result, students get from 100 to 150 rubles (\$16.50 to \$25.00) per month. According to the Law of Education, students have to get double the minimal salary, but the law for fiscal year 1998 cut this to only the minimal salary. Postgraduates get 250 to 350 rubles (\$42–60) per month.
- Eighty-seven percent of students receive financial assistance from their parents.

- Every third student (34 percent) has a supplemental income in the form of wages, but supplemental work is not related to their studies. Eleven percent of those questioned indicated a connection in their work to their future professional degree, and another 12 percent use their professional knowledge partially.

The age of 21–22 (the last academic year in Russian universities) is the border for a change in the system of values. Fundamental orientations include the goals of material comfort, good wages, and successful careers. Those accepted into universities apply their knowledge according to specialty as follows: in the commercial sector, 40–42 percent; in the government sector, 24–29 percent; in a private business, 17–23 percent. For the last seven years only 23 percent of education majors who graduate from Russian pedagogical universities go to work in their field. The main reasons education majors do not work as teachers are low salary, low level of prestige, and high level of the job-related stress.

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Nearly 16 percent of all students plan to continue education in a graduate school and become involved in scientific research. A significant portion, 18–20 percent, wish to enter a second profession or receive an additional degree. The plans for the future of around 11 percent of students are not known. Fifty percent of all majors, at different types of educational institutions, are not needed by the labor market.

The significance of young people as subjects of and participants in political change is appreciated by representatives of all of today’s political forces, those in power and those in the opposition. However, politics is not the most important sphere of interest to contemporary students. Political interests of contemporary youth are “electoral” in character and reveal themselves from case to case. Only 1 percent to 4 percent of students are interested in and participate actively in some movement or party; 46 percent are interested in information about politics but do not actively participate; 47 percent are indifferent and have no distinct political orientation; and 7 percent react negatively to politics and want to know nothing about it. Students are more politically active in Moscow and St. Petersburg than in the outer parts of Russia (except Chechnya, where political activism of youth is extremely high).

The majority of students prefer democratic reforms. Although they suffer from negative consequences of the reforms, they remain essentially democratic in their outlook. Only 6–8 percent of students sympathize with the KPRF (Zyuganov’s Communist party) and the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR—Zhirinovsky’s party). However, one can foresee a change of values and a lowering of the prestige of political parties and movements in the eyes of students. This is facilitated by a lack of unity in the democratic movements.

Another important factor is the interest of parties in attracting youth. Unlike some other political parties, the LDPR works actively among youth, especially among schoolchildren and college students. For example, the LDPR faction in Arkhangelsk (which is supported by some small and middle entrepreneurs) acquired a building under city control, renovated it, and used it to organize activities for children and students. When LDPR members run for various government positions, children are given money to participate in their campaigns. In addition, an organization has been created to organize summer camps.

In the State Duma, 15.7 percent of the LDPR deputies are under thirty years of age. This is the lowest percentage of any political party.

### **Youth and the Army**

According to the Constitution of the Russian Federation, young men having reached the age of eighteen are required to enter the armed forces. In Soviet times, the army was considered the “school of life,” necessary to create patriots of the motherland, to build strength of character, and to instill social values. But the army has ceased to serve these goals. Over the past ten years, there has been a sharp decline in the prestige and popularity of the armed forces.<sup>8</sup> Today’s Russian army is not an insulated social mechanism but a part of society; therefore, all fundamental social problems are also manifested in the army.

The first problem is that of violence in training, which has two sides. First, the phenomenon of “hazing,” which is thriving in the Russian army. Its negative social consequences have been actively discussed over the past fifteen years by mass media. It is well known that the number of young people evading the draft grows every year, primarily because of hazing. The disciplinary code of the Russian army does not set out responsibility for violations in interpersonal relations. Moreover, in the system of hazing, officers and commanders serve as leaders and teachers. Soldiers do not have anyone to turn to for help or consultation. In the first months of service, the need for consultation is especially great. As a result, 13 percent of those serving in the armed forces indicate that over the period of their service there were times when life seemed unbearable and when they even considered suicide.<sup>9</sup>

Second, psychologists maintain that a person’s character is not formed until the age of twenty-one. But draft into the Russian army takes place upon youth reaching the age of eighteen. This presents a difficult problem. Immature young people are handed weapons and ordered to solve military problems that recently were connected with participation in armed conflicts—that is, connected with the use of weapons of war. Although the young people in the armed forces are taught to kill, no one discusses the social and psychological consequences of such actions.

Crime is also growing in the army. According to the annual report of the Chief Military Procurator and the Federal Border Service, in 1995 the level of crime in the armed forces rose by 24 percent over 1994. The number of serious crimes increased by 1.6 times. It is significant that the growth of crime is reflected by practically every indicator: group crime grew by 8 percent; crime against civilians by 13 percent; crimes committed under the influence of alcohol or narcotics,

by 180 percent; crimes committed while on duty, by 122 percent; crime associated with hazing, by 74 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Specialists have determined that the growth of crime in the army precedes growth of crime in society by approximately a year. Thus, it seems possible to predict these tendencies and to employ precautionary measures. Violent crime in the whole country and in the army is now increasing in essentially equal measures. Moreover, crime in the army affects crime in the country, for the armed forces often are called upon to solve political problems (for example, in the political upheaval in 1991, at the shooting of the "White House" in Moscow in 1993, and in the war in Chechnya).

Young people who are dismissed from the army are often unable to find jobs in civilian life. They hire themselves out to various criminal groups, which use their experience of violent conduct gained during their service in the army. Individuals associated with this negative phenomenon were previously referred to as "Afghans"; now they are called "Chechens."

The pool of draftees declines in number each year because of the steady decline in the birth rate in Russia. Also, the overall health of the younger generation is worsening. For example, of 140,000 draftees in Moscow in 1994, 90 percent received deferments because of poor health and family circumstances; 86.7 percent of the young people drafted into the army in fall 1996 had health problems.<sup>11</sup> And 50 percent of them use alcohol, narcotics, or some equivalent substance. The number of youth attracted to criminal activities at an early age grows steadily. Among youth convicted of illegal activities, 30 percent have psychological problems.

One of the most unfortunate indicators of the contemporary criminal situation in Russia is the growth in crime among teenagers. In 1995, 209,777 crimes, or 12 percent, were committed by teenagers.<sup>12</sup> Some informal youth organizations to which teenagers belong are connected with the criminal world (for example, the "Kazanskie motalki," the "Luberetckie kachki," the "Skinheads," the "Satanists," and the like). Many young people have committed crimes before they reach draft age; in 1996, 3 percent were not drafted into the army in 1996 because of former convictions.

On 1 April 1996, the armed forces were at 85 percent of required strength (the ground forces, at only 60 percent).<sup>13</sup> The army has become criminal and ungovernable. It exerts a negative influence on the character formation of young people.

The decision of the State Duma about deferments from the draft for youth graduating from institutions of higher learning seems to be humanitarian. On one hand, the army will be deprived of intellectual potential. But on the other, the young people would maintain moral and physical health and would be able to exert a positive influence on the fate of Russia.

### **The Demographic Crisis and the Future of Youth**

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the demographic development of the Russian federation has taken a critical turn. The crisis of the economy and national relations, the difficult sociopolitical situation, and ecological catastrophes in several regions of Russia have affected the demographic dynamics. Negative tendencies

that first appeared sixty to eighty years ago are growing stronger. The tendencies include the following:

- Fluctuations in the birth rate related to the Second World War. The number of births before the war exceeded 3.5 million per year. During the war years the birth rate decreased by a factor of two. A quarter of a century later, during 1967–70, the birth rate was 1.8–1.9 million per year. After another quarter of a century, the number of births was 1.4 million per year during 1993–96.
- The aging of the population. The number of people beyond the working age grew from 11.8 percent in 1959 to 20 percent in 1997, and the number below working age decreased from 29.8 percent in 1959 to 21 percent in 1997.<sup>14</sup>
- The decrease in the life expectancy of Russians, with a large gap between the life expectancies of men and women.
- A high child mortality rate.
- Along with the decrease in the birth rate, a transition from the traditional patriarchal family with three or more children to families with one or two children.
- A decrease in the number of marriages and a high rate of divorce.

Russia has become a country of gradual depopulation. Since 1992, the population of the Russian federation has decreased by 1.2 million people. In 1997, the population numbered 147.5 million.<sup>15</sup> Today, according to data from the United Nations, Russia occupies one of the last places in terms of natural growth,  $-0.6$  percent per year, and has joined the ranks of countries with the lowest birth rates, such as Belgium, Bulgaria, Holland, Spain, and Italy. The fundamental factor in depopulation is the natural death rate, which is determined by the rise in the number of deaths compared to the number of births.

Over the last ten years, the life expectancy for Russian men has fallen by 6.6 years and for women by 2.8 years; in 1996, the average life expectancy was 65.9 years (for men 59.8 years, and for women 72.5 years).<sup>16</sup> By this indicator, Russia diverges from developed countries by 11–13 years. First among causes of death is cardiovascular disease. The second-most-frequent cause of death in the 1980s was cancer. But since 1993, the number of deaths from accidents or violent incidents has surpassed deaths by cancer. In 1996, 209.2 people of every thousand in Russia perished as a result of homicide, suicide, or other such incidents (in the United States, the corresponding figure was 54.7 for every thousand people). Of all deaths in Russia, 30 percent are people of working age, and five times as many men as women. These figures include deaths of men as a result of armed conflicts.

Infant mortality is an important social indicator. The mortality rate remains high, and its decrease in recent years has been insignificant: for infants up to the age of one, in 1996 there were 17.0 deaths for every 1,000 children born, while in 1993 there were 19.9 deaths. These numbers exceed the corresponding numbers in developed countries by a factor of 3 or 4. According to researchers, the decrease in the number of children in the population will continue for another ten years, even if some growth resumes.<sup>17</sup>



The alarming fact of the low birth rate in Russia was revealed in 1989 by a census of the population. Of 40.2 million families, there were only 23.5 million with children under the age of eighteen. Of these, one-child families constituted 51 percent of all families with children, two-children families constituted 39 percent, and families with three or more children were only 10 percent of the total. In 1991, the Center for the Study of Population Problems at the Moscow State University conducted a selective survey of young Moscow families. The results of the survey indicated that difficult socioeconomic conditions exerted a significant influence on the values and preferences of young people. Young families expected to have only 1.36 children (136 children per 100 families).<sup>18</sup> A mini-

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census of the population in 1994 confirmed the alarming data from the census of 1989, in terms of a decrease in the number of children in families.<sup>19</sup> The reluctance to have children because of the rapidly falling standard of living has become a mass phenomenon since the middle of the 1980s.

The number of marriages is also falling. This trend also began in the early 1990s. In 1990, 1,320,000 marriages took place; in 1993, the number had fallen to 1,107,000; and in 1996, to only 867,000. The decrease in the number of marriages is related to two factors: the number of people aged 20–25 is smaller, and marriage is often postponed because of the economic difficulties associated with supporting a family.

A rise in the number of divorces is accompanying the decline in the marriage rate. In 1991, there were 467 divorces per 1,000 marriages; in 1993, there were 599; and in 1996, there were 644. These numbers indicate an instability in family relations and a decline in perceived value of the family.

It is estimated that the size of Russia’s population will continue to decrease. From 1996 to 2010, the population of the country is expected to fall by 7.3 million. Depopulation will define the socioeconomic situation in the country.<sup>20</sup> The decreasing birth rate will lessen the demand for maternity homes, kindergartens, and schools, which will discourage investment and employment in various branches of the demographic infrastructure.

The decrease in the birth rate influences the professional orientation and gender of the unemployed. The overwhelming majority of workers in the “demographic infrastructure” are women, for whom demand in the work force is gradually declining. There also may be a decrease in the quality of the work force (especially with regard to ability, qualification, and education level) as a result of the aging of the workers. The decrease in the population level suggests that changes in social insurance and pension security will be necessary.

Aging of the population is characteristic of economies in developed countries or those undergoing an economic transition. It demands that attention be paid to development of the work force and to problems of professional mobility. An additional consideration is that, according to specialists of the Ministry of Labor, Russia has taken an interest in cultivating conditions favorable to migrant workers, which may aggravate ethnic and national problems characteristic of contemporary Russia.

### **Ukrainian Youth: The Parting of Political Ways**

Specific to Ukraine is the dual nature of the modern mentality of many Ukrainians—both pro-national and pro-Russian. According to a case study conducted several years ago by the European Commission, Ukraine has the largest regional divergence in mentality and in geopolitical orientation of any country in Europe.

Such a situation necessarily has an impact on the younger generation. When the Soviet system collapsed, for example, youth from western Ukraine became more active politically than were youth in the eastern regions. A specific indicator of this was the large number of young people from Lviv and other western regions who traveled to Kyiv to stimulate the national consciousness of those living near the capital. Then the situation changed. If we compare the role of youth several years ago and their role during the latest parliamentary elections, the radical decline in activism is evident.

One of the most vivid examples occurred during the period of perestroika, when a group of Kyiv students staged a hunger strike for several days on the central square of the city (Independence Plaza; formerly known as October Revolution Square), forcing Prime Minister Vitalij Masol (whom they considered a Communist hardliner) to resign. In 1990, hunger strikes were widely used for different political purposes, including personal protest. The greatest political impact was achieved by youth: In 1990, about 100,000 young people, mostly students, using that form of protest eventually forced parliament to adopt several bills to meet some of their demands. Such political activities were a sign of the new generation entering Ukrainian social life and demonstrating its ability to quickly replace the “old” generation that had been raised under communist traditions. It seemed that the replacement of the “old” generation would secure the victory of pro-European, pro-market, and pro-Western tendencies; the only real task was to gain Ukrainian sovereignty.

However, for many Ukrainians, the process of psychological adaptation to market realities has not automatically followed the national liberation victory. Many Ukrainians, especially the elderly, tend to associate present difficulties with the process of national recovery, displaying nostalgia for the Soviet past. This is an important feature of the present political context in Ukraine. For example, in the recent elections to the Supreme Rada (Ukrainian parliament), leftists constituted the largest factions among all parties and political groupings.

Such a “leftist wave” is quite common within the FSU and other countries in transition. But in Ukraine the movement took on a more political form when communists managed to raise their representation from 80 seats of 450 in the former

parliament, to 123 seats after the last elections. The success of the leftists was achieved largely because of the widespread passivity of young people during the elections: Most of them failed even to go to the polls; the more politically disciplined older people thus secured the victory of the communists. However, the communists, even the whole leftist bloc, do not exercise effective control over the parliament; they do not have even a simple majority of votes. And even among the members of the communist faction, not all can be considered hardliners. About thirty of the faction's seats belong to businessmen who obviously have little to do with communist ideology.

Cynicism appears to be inherent in modern Ukrainian political life: Many people consider it prestigious to be a member of parliament, or to have a new and nonsensically expensive Mercedes, or simply to buy a seat from a party that is likely to win in the elections, buying the right to be included in the party's leadership on the list for the countrywide party vote.

Because of the complexity of the election process and the inadequacy of the demographic constituency of active voters, the new Ukrainian parliament does not represent public opinion in the country. Also, many of the numerous small parties that were supported by younger sections of the population failed to overcome the 4 percent threshold necessary for representation in the parliament.

Besides the communists, the successful parties were the following:

- Rukh—46 seats
- Socialist and Peasant parties' bloc—34 seats
- Popular Democratic Party—28 seats
- Hromada—23 seats
- Green Party—19 seats
- Progressive Socialist Party—16 seats
- United Social Democratic Party—16 seats

Only three parties have managed to attract the younger voters: the Rukh because of its national and pro-market orientation; the Greens because of their "alternative force" image; and the United Social Democrats because of the active role in its election campaign of the country's most popular soccer club, Kyiv "Dynamo." Some interpret the results of the parliamentary elections as a defeat not only of democratic forces in Ukraine, but also of the nation's youth. From the demographic analysis, elderly people become the most politically active part of Ukrainian society during election campaigns, and youth the most passive part.

To understand the situation in Ukraine and the major tendencies in the nation's development, it is important to have a clear answer to the question, How did this situation transpire? As the communist system collapsed, the economic and social status of elderly Ukrainians dropped. The income of most older Ukrainians is now much smaller than it had been under the communist regime. It is therefore not surprising that the elderly considered elections a prime occasion to voice their negative attitude toward the grim and contradictory realities in the country, exemplified by poverty, corruption, and social insecurity. The poor economic situation

and the cynicism and corruption among the Ukrainian ruling political elite are also reasons for the political passivity of the younger generation.

With regard to the March 1998 parliamentary elections, it is apparent that young people, along with other demographic strata of society, had grown tired of politics and politicians. But the difference between the generations lies in traditions and in the method of self-manifestation. Unlike retired persons, or as they are called in the FSU, pensioners, who have a strong tradition of going to the polls and demonstrating their “political consciousness,” for young people a widespread form of protest is not to vote at all. They are acquainted with neither communist political discipline nor with Western-type democratic voting traditions. Youth are also more concerned with their private lives—either work or studies, or increasingly, both—than are retired people.

The younger generation in Ukraine has faced the same problems as democratic groups in society as a whole. One problem is fragmentation of forces. For example, even the nationalistic students’ movement was split into two major bodies—the Ukrainian Student League and the Union of Ukrainian Students. Among other youth organizations in Ukraine are the Young Ukraine Association, the Young Republicans, the Popular-Democratic League of Youth, the Ukrainian Students Union, the Arts Association “500,” the Ukrainian Liberal Youth, the Ukrainian Socio-Democratic Forum, and the Ukrainian Socio-Democratic League. There are also some organizations for young children. The organization that probably best characterizes Ukrainian national distinctions is Plast, a scouting-type organization that operates primarily in the western region of the country.

Another feature of the pragmatic cynicism and the superfluous politicization in Ukraine is the strong desire of “adult” political parties to create youth organizations that would constitute their younger affiliations or wings. Many of the youth organizations listed above have strong political and organizational links to various political parties in Ukraine (the Ukrainian Socio-Democratic Forum is a younger wing of the Ukrainian Socio-Democratic Party; the Ukrainian Liberal Youth is considered to play the role of an advocate for youngsters of the Liberal Party, and so on). However, and perhaps fortunately for Ukraine, these youth affiliations are not popular in the country. For example, the Ukrainian Liberal Youth, which claims to be one of the largest youth organizations in Ukraine, has only 11,500 members in the whole country. In other words, there is a decline in the interest of youth in the future of Ukraine. This is due partially to a failure of the government to adequately address the interests of young people in shaping reform policy in general.

Under the present conditions in Ukraine, there simply is no place for youth in the country’s political life. Under the first president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, the communist nomenklatura retained all of the regional and local authority positions in the newly independent country. Although the Communist Party was formally declared illegal, almost all regional leaders remained in their positions.

Returning to the idea that Ukrainian youth face problems similar to those of society as a whole, it is useful to mention the prime demographic indicators

related to the living standards and health of the younger generation. Like Russia and some other post-Soviet states, Ukraine is a country whose population is declining. For several years, the mortality rate has exceeded the birth rate. At the beginning of the 1990s, the population of Ukraine was 52 million; now it is only 50.5 million. In addition, only 28 million Ukrainians are considered to be of working age. The percentage of young people under the age of eighteen is very small—only one-fourth of the population. And only 2.5 million are under the age of five.

The crude death rate in Ukraine is now about 14, while the crude birth rate is only 10 (in comparison, in the United States the corresponding figures are 9 and 14). Life expectancy in Ukraine decreased to 69 years; in the United States it is 76 years.

The future of Ukraine appears to be negative in light of these indicators. According to experts, Ukraine's population will dwindle within two decades to 40 million. The majority of the population is expected to be outside of working age.

There is a strong connection between poor demographic tendencies and the country's economic and social indicators. Ukraine suffered for several years from hyperinflation (in 1993, the inflation rate was 10,000 percent). In 1994, the decline in GDP was 23 percent, while industrial output fell by 27 percent. In the following years, production declined more than 60 percent, which was extraordinary for a country not engaged in war.

The environment is also a factor in Ukraine's decline: air pollution and the lingering effects of the Chernobyl disaster have resulted in a very poor living environment, from which the youngest segment of the Ukrainian population suffers the most. Another consequence of the poor living conditions is the high rate of emigration of youth: 41 percent of those under 20 years, 60 percent of students, and 43 percent of professionals claim that their main motive for leaving the country is the lack of opportunities to realize their potential.

### **Conclusion**

The lives of Russian and Ukrainian youth are very difficult. Because of shared ethnic, historical, and cultural roots that began in the pre-Kyivan period and were enhanced by more than three centuries of existence within a unified state, we can discern many commonalities in mass consciousness and individual psychology.

The complicated social situation in the former Soviet Union influences living conditions of the younger generation and deprives it of illusions that the elder generations had. Youths absorb the experience of democracy and the free market very rapidly. Contemporary youth is less naive and demonstrates more initiative, purposefulness, and more capacity for work. They understand that their future depends on their own efforts. They have to think more about their daily bread than about politics. They are tired of politicians who cannot solve the problems created by sociopolitical and economic crises in their countries.

The opportunities for youth self-realization depend on contemporary government policies. Unfortunately, neither the Russian nor the Ukrainian government pays attention to the needs and problems of young generation. This is unfortunate, for it indicates that they do not think about the future of their countries.

## NOTES

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8. S. S. Soloviev, "Transformatsiya tsennostei voennoy sluzby," *Sotsiologicheskiye issledovaniya* 9 (1996): 23.
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10. The changes evident in the structure of crimes committed are also a cause for alarm: the number of premeditated homicides increased by 200 percent; the number of premeditated crimes involving severe bodily injury, 250 percent; and the number of rapes, 150 percent.
11. "Priziv - eto katastrofa," *Moskovsky komsomolets*, 13 September 1996, 2.
12. Sostoyaniya prestupnosti v Rossii. Moscow, *Yuridicheskaya literatura*, 1996.
13. "Do svidaniya, mam, ne goryui, ne grysti," *Itozi*, 26 May 26 1996, 8–10.
14. People of working age are considered to be men between ages 16 to 59, and women between ages 16 to 54.
15. *Rossiisky statistichesky ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Goskomstat, 1997), 67.
16. *Ibid.*, 66.
17. In comparison, the average life expectancy in Japan is 79 years; in Italy, Canada, the Netherlands, Norway, France, and Sweden, 78 years; in Australia, Austria, and the United States, 77 years.
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