

# Apart from Russia or Part of Russia: A Sad Saga of Ukrainian-Russian Relations

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In his fall 1999 inaugural speech, Leonid Kuchma, the newly reelected president of Ukraine, unveiled Ukraine's top foreign policy priorities. His most important objectives, he said, would be to deepen the ties with the European Union, to realize the so-called European option of the Ukrainian people, and ultimately bring his country into the exclusive club of rich European nations and the rest of "Euro-Atlantic structures." The other two priorities were combined in a somewhat contradictory endeavor to develop a strategic partnership with both Russia and the United States. President Kuchma christened the entire—and rather shaky—edifice a "multi-vector diplomacy."

Today this glorious construct seems to be lying in shambles. Westerners—Europeans and Americans alike—view Kuchma's Ukraine as an authoritarian and corrupt regime, guilty of violating basic human rights and freedoms and possessing a nearly bankrupt economic system. And the embattled head of state—in light of recent scandalous revelations and accusations of gross abuses of power, complicity in the killing of an opposition journalist, and rigging of the election results—has become almost an international pariah.

Under these adverse circumstances, the needle of the Ukraine's broken foreign policy compass seems to be pointing steadily in only one direction: Moscow. Now only Vladimir Putin's Russia willingly deals with a new "sick man of Europe," hastily trying to bind Kiev closer to its former imperial master. So much for multipolar diplomacy. In this article, I trace the recent zigzags of Ukrainian-Russian relations and try to explain why hapless Kiev has found itself engaged in a glaringly unequal relationship with domineering Moscow.

## Historical Background

In the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse, some analysts argued that the newly independent Ukraine and the Russian Federation were brand new countries with no previous experience of international relations between them and that they would

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start shaping ties and contacts from a “blank page.” Although that was a generally correct assumption *de jure*, it has been an erroneous one *de facto*. These new state formations didn’t suddenly emerge from thin air, although it is hard to deny that the unraveling of the USSR was a quite unexpected and precipitous affair. Russia, both legally and in the political psychology of its elites and masses, claimed a noble pedigree. It solemnly pronounced itself a direct successor to the mighty Russian empire and the formidable Soviet Union. In fact, the State Duma’s recent adoption of a national coat of arms (the Byzantine-Muscovite double-headed eagle), flag (Peter the Great’s tricolor), and anthem (the Soviet-era hymn commissioned by Stalin) is nothing less than an attempt to symbolically mark that political continuum. Ukraine, although lacking such an illustrious lineage, still was a territory where a number of efforts have been made to form a modern nation and build a sovereign state. However, and that’s the point, in the timeframe of modern history, Ukraine—either in its entirety or partially—was absorbed into a Russia in one of its incarnations. Thus, from the historical perspective, the relations between contemporary Ukraine and Russia are the uneasy and bitter relations between former subject and ruler, colony and metropolis, periphery and center. This must affect and permeate every aspect of the tangled intercourse between the two East European neighbors in the last decade.

One might argue that the history of Ukrainian-Russian relations is the all-too-typical story of nationalism in its now almost classical Gellnerian sense. Once there was a boundless Russian empire populated by a host of various peoples united by loyalty to the Romanov dynasty and the sacred person of the monarch. At a certain point, these peoples (Ukrainians included), or rather their elites, decided that they were entitled to have states of their own and to be ruled by their kin. Modern allegiance to one’s nation clashed with the premodern allegiance to an empire. Following scholars such as Roman Szporluk and Alexei Miller, I would argue that in the case of Russians and Ukrainians there began a fierce rivalry of two national projects.<sup>1</sup> Starting in the second half of the nineteenth century, Russian political elites, as the imperial masters, tried to realize the grand project of the “larger Russian nation,” wherein no distinction was recognized between Belorussians, Ukrainians, and Great Russians proper. All three groups were viewed as mere boughs of the one mighty Russian tree. This idea, insisted St. Petersburg nationalist bureaucrats, should be driven home through various communication channels to every single peasant hut all across the Eastern European plains. To this Russian grand design, Ukrainian intellectual elites responded with a concept of a separate Ukrainian nation, completely distinct from the Russians and having its own glorious past, literary language, and high culture.

By the time of the Russian empire’s demise following World War I and the Revolution, both Russians and Ukrainians were nations in the making, with their respective national projects, quite naturally, vigorously competing. The period of 1917 to 1920 saw the zenith of nation-building efforts by the Ukrainians. The establishment of the Ukrainian People’s Republic and a succession of other quasi-independent Ukrainian regimes gave a strong boost to the development of Ukrainian national consciousness. The triumph of the Russian Bolsheviks in the civil

war and the formation of the USSR, however, created a new, and rather contradictory, situation. On the one hand, one would assume that the Soviet federative state—which, at the moment of its emergence in 1922, was nothing other than a political concession to the borderland peoples—should have given more advantages to Ukrainians in their drive to successfully complete their national project. Yet the Soviet Union, as is well known, was not a true federation, and any attempts to shape a separate Ukrainian political identity was simply out of the question. On the other hand, the creation of this same quasi federation adversely affected the nation-building process of the Russians themselves. First, the official recognition, within the USSR's federative structure, of the union national

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republics eliminated any possibility of effectively realizing the project of the “larger Russian nation,” which was abandoned unfinished in the midst of Russia's revolutionary time of troubles. Second, because of the constant overlapping of Soviet and Russian notions throughout the entire history of the USSR, the development of Russian national

consciousness was significantly impeded. What exactly “Russian-ness” means still remains hazy. So, with some oversimplification, one can assert that in 1991, in terms of implementing their national projects, both Russians and Ukrainians picked up where they had left off in the 1920s.

This bitter legacy of the erstwhile rivalry helps one understand why “ever since Russia and Ukraine split apart nearly ten years ago, in the disintegration of the former Soviet Union, they have regarded each other with mutual suspicion, if not outright hostility.” The two fledgling sovereign nations have simply returned to historically shaped perceptions of each other. In the words of the *Financial Times* editorial, “Moscow has tended to look on Ukrainian independence, after 350 years of Russian rule, as a temporary aberration. Kiev has responded with renewed determination to go it alone.”<sup>1</sup>

Many a commentator (especially an outside observer) would wonder what exactly the problem is between people so ethnically, linguistically, and culturally similar. The Moscow historian Dmitri Furman, noting that relations between nations and states are in no way more complex than relations inside a family or between neighbors, argues that the relationship between brothers is not always easy or without conflict. After all, Serbs and Croats are brothers, too. “What is it,” he asks, “that divides Ukrainian and Russian brothers as soon as they ‘recall’ that they constitute separate peoples?” In his opinion, “it is the same stuff that normally divides brothers—the struggle over parents, primogeniture, legacy. The wrangling over the necessity for the elder brother to recognize the younger one as an equal and drop the bad habit of obtrusive trusteeship over him, and, con-

versely, over the necessity for the younger brother not to forget his junior place in the family hierarchy and behave accordingly.”<sup>2</sup>

What threats does the Ukrainian national project pose for the Russians? Many Russians seem to be convinced that its successful realization would not only significantly diminish the numbers of the Russian people—imagined in terms of the “larger Russian nation”—but also take away a huge chunk of their putative historical “national lands.” Moreover, adding insult to injury, it would deprive the Russians of the precious and most ancient part of their history, that of the Kievan Rus’. To use Furman’s analogy again, it is as if one suddenly learned that his or her parents have another child, who now starts claiming a good part of the legacy one thought was his or hers exclusively.

Ironically, this very closeness and affinity lie at the heart of Ukrainian-Russian problems. Until now the majority of Russians and of Ukraine’s population (which includes 11 million ethnic Russians) have not seen the difference between the two Slavic peoples and, consequently, have not understood the *raison d’être* of a separate Ukrainian state. Today, as it was ten years ago at the very dawn of Ukraine’s independence, Ukrainians still have to prove both to themselves and Russians that they do represent a full-blooded sovereign and economically viable nation. It is by no means an easy task. First, if the well-known nineteenth-century criteria of an ideal nation (namely, a high level of sociocultural cohesion, a clear-cut national and political identity, and a single national language) are applied to present-day Ukraine, it hardly passes the test.<sup>3</sup> Second, the economic base inherited by Kiev following the Soviet Union’s passing away has proved a too dubious and shaky foundation on which to build a strong and sustainable economic system. And lastly, the very collapse of the USSR—like the unraveling of the Russian empire eighty years ago—has in no way signified the total (or final) disintegration of the “imperial space.” As some commentators have pointed out, there is a certain “logic of imperial space.” If, in the territory in which a mighty Russian core coexists with a multitude of various smaller peoples living on the periphery, there emerges either a single state or a union of states, the Russian core will invariably dominate over the non-Russian periphery, no matter what its ideology. The history of Ukrainian-Russian relations in the past decade is a sad saga of how Ukraine’s political elites have tried, but so far woefully failed, to escape the “bear hug” of their imperial Eastern brethren.

### **Russian-Ukrainian Relations over the Past Decade**

It is now a historiographical truism to say that in 1991 Ukraine obtained its sovereignty almost by default. From the 1960s to the 1980s, Ukraine saw neither a mass-supported independence movement nor an antiimperialist liberation struggle with its heroes and martyrs—the phenomena that temper national consciousness and shape experienced and motivated counterelites who, having come to power, would have a more-or-less clear idea of the policies they intend to implement. When the Communist regime crumbled and the Soviet Union fell to pieces, the newly independent Ukraine (like all other post-Soviet states, with the possible exception of the Balts) found itself with politically atomized and ideologi-

cally disoriented masses at the bottom and the bulk of the old elites at the top. According to the data of the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences, more than 75 percent of Russia's current political elite and 60 percent of business elite are the members of the former Soviet nomenklatura. "Approximately the same situation exists in the other CIS republics, ranging from Belarus, where the ruling elite and the Soviet system in general have remained basically intact, to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where the local ruling class has only absorbed some new representatives of the regional and clan groups."<sup>4</sup>

Yet despite very similar post-Soviet societal structures, Russia and Ukraine differ dramatically in terms of their current geopolitical situations. A number of sociologists point out that in Russia, the newly acquired statehood doesn't occupy a prominent place either in the elite or mass consciousness. On the contrary, it is being associated with the loss of "space of national self-realization," and with the "phantom pains" caused by the loss of the parts of the former union state. Unlike in the other post-Soviet countries (save Belarus), where the significance of national independence has found its proper place among the basic political values of the "old new" elites, in Russia the first euphoria caused by the "liberation from the imperial Center" has been replaced by a painful political hangover. Ever more popular is the understanding that the Soviet Union was in no way an obstacle to state self-determination but, on the contrary, provided a much broader space for this same self-determination than the newly baked Russian Federation. All this explains why, in the minds of the Moscow political class, the value of Russia's acquired "state sovereignty" is being eroded.<sup>5</sup>

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As for ordinary Russians, they never faced the problem of self-determination within the framework of the USSR, where they always regarded themselves as the national majority, regardless of their concrete place of residence. That is why most of them tend to associate the Russian Federation not so much with the acquisition of "their own state" as with its collapse. Thus, analysts argue, a specific ideology has emerged in Russia in which the political elites' nostalgia for the lost superpower status is being reinforced by the masses' nostalgia for the lost territory, in terms of both the physical space and the space of the free and unimpeded social contacts.

In Ukraine one can perceive a quite different trend: For Ukrainian elites, state sovereignty has become a dominant value, for it was Ukraine's political independence that overnight turned a petty provincial Kiev elite into a social group equal, in its political significance, to the elites of the leading European states. This steadily growing international prestige and the keen interest that influential forces

in Western Europe and the United States have in Ukrainian political novices make Ukraine's independence attractive for its elites.

In Ukrainian mass consciousness the value of independence was fairly high only when the sovereign state had just been born—first of all, because of a pragmatic, although unfounded, idea that political independence would immediately lead to material prosperity. Of late, the Ukrainian public attitude has become rather ambivalent. On the one hand, the disintegration of the USSR continues to be viewed positively as an event that prompted the emergence of “their own state” with its own historical path and ways of development. On the other hand, Ukraine's independence is ever more associated with the losses caused by mass impoverishment, economic instability, the breaking of social ties, and so forth. The results of the recent opinion polls are eloquent: only 15 percent of Ukrainian citizens would like their country to be in close association with the West, whereas 42 percent support some sort of integration with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Russia.<sup>6</sup>

The other important factor strongly affecting Ukrainian-Russian relations is quite mundane but no less powerful. It is Ukraine's economic dependence on Russia. The Ukrainian economy greatly depends on imports in general and on imports of energy carriers in particular. With its own oil Ukraine can meet only 10 percent of its economic demand; with its own natural gas, only 15 to 17 percent of its needs. Kiev imports 90 percent of energy carriers from Russia.<sup>7</sup>

After the USSR ceased to exist and independent Ukraine emerged, Kiev became a foreign consumer of Moscow's natural riches, with all that that means, including the need to buy at world prices.<sup>8</sup> Reciprocally, all pipelines running across Ukrainian territory westward, underground gas storage facilities, and other important infrastructure became foreign property for the Russian companies exporting energy to Western markets. Approximately 95 percent of Russian gas bound for Western Europe goes through the Ukraine's transit network.

This postimperial development has tied Russian-Ukrainian relations in a tricky and painful knot. Each country tries both to exploit mutual dependency for its own ends and to eliminate or at least diminish it. Unable to pay for Russian oil and gas either in cash or in kind, Ukraine has been accumulating debt with impunity, siphoning gas from the transit pipe, and, to Russia's dismay, even reexporting it to other countries. Simultaneously, Kiev has been looking desperately for alternative sources of energy, as far away as Turkmenistan and Iran. For its part, Russia has been ready to put up with Ukraine's chronic insolvency and other “irregularities” to be able to convert gas debt into political leverage. Moscow has also been looking, however, for alternative export routes for its gas. Recently, Gazprom, Russia's giant gas monopoly, stated its intention to build a new pipeline through Poland and Slovakia, bypassing Ukrainian territory and leaving Kiev unable to charge its hefty transit fees or easily steal Russian gas.<sup>9</sup>

To offset all the aforementioned factors making Russia an indisputably stronger partner in the relationship, Ukraine badly needed a political counterbalance. Here the West in general and the United States in particular have come into play. From the beginning, the Clinton administration stated that managing the

consequences of the Soviet Union's collapse would be one of its foreign policy goals. One of the cornerstones of the U.S. strategy became "preservation of the geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space," an objective coined by the renowned geopolitical guru Zbigniew Brzezinski. This nicely phrased political euphemism means that it is in the best interests of the West to prevent any kind of integration of Eurasian borderlands under the Russian umbrella. With such a goal in mind, the significance of Ukraine, a country the size of France, which borders on Russia and sits on the Black Sea's northern coast, could not go unnoticed. Its geostrategic location right between the expanding NATO and EU, on one side, and Russia on the other, has turned Ukraine, to borrow the title of Sherman Garnett's recent book, into a "keystone in the arch" of European security structure.<sup>10</sup>

What Washington persistently tried to convey to its new allies in Kiev was that "the Ukraine's destiny depends on its transformation, in the nearest future, into a true Central European state. . . . Such orientation will provide Ukraine with its own geopolitical identity and discontinue its traditional bond with Eurasia through [its relationship with] Russia."<sup>11</sup> To make the arguments more persuasive, the United States quickly turned Ukraine into the largest recipient of U.S. financial aid among the CIS countries and the third-largest in the world, behind Israel and Egypt.

True, the Western impact on the course of Ukrainian-Russian relations and particularly on Russia's policies toward Ukraine should not be overestimated. It is difficult not to agree with the Moscow expert Arkady Moshes, who points out that "Western influence is important in terms of setting well-known limits for what Russia should not do, rather than affecting decision-making on what it should."<sup>12</sup> But even this was enough for Kiev to sometimes rather effectively play the "Western card" against Moscow's purported "imperial designs."

Thus, Ukraine's weakness vis-à-vis Russia and its advantageous geopolitical position, which in the eyes of some influential Western circles have made Kiev a potential counterweight to Moscow, basically made a multipolar diplomacy with two main strategic partners—the United States and Russia—the Ukrainian elites' only choice. Indeed, otherwise it would be hard for them to preserve their coveted role of independent actors on the world stage, keep the national economy afloat, and be treated by Russians (if not very sincerely) as equals. Why didn't this seemingly sound scheme work?

### **Kiev's Internal Policies and Relations with the West**

From a purely theoretical perspective, Ukraine probably could walk the fine line, preserving neighborly relations with Moscow and, at the same time, moving slowly but steadily westward in terms of both internal democratic transformation and external geopolitical orientation. Such an objective was formulated as early as 1993 by a team of Ukrainian political scientists grouped around the journal *Politychna dumka*: "Neither Ukraine's security nor favourable conditions for her development as a nation are possible without deep and sincere neighbourly relations with Russia. . . . Therefore Kiev faces the tremendous task of rebuilding its centuries-old relationship with Moscow on a qualitatively new basis while also acquiring the means to defend its own interests. . . ."<sup>13</sup> It would seem that Brzezinski

ski referred to the same theoretical possibility in his *Grand Chessboard*, clearly emphasizing Ukraine's "Western vector." "Sometime between 2005 and 2010," he writes, "Ukraine, especially if in the meantime the country has made significant progress in its domestic reforms and has succeeded in becoming more evidently identified as a Central European country, should become ready for serious negotiations with the EU and NATO."<sup>14</sup>

In its fullest and most refined form, this vision of harmonious and well-balanced Ukrainian foreign policy can be found in the writings of Alexander Dergachev, one of the leading Kiev political analysts. He argues: "Ukraine is destined to become a full-blown European state. . . . Russia has similar civilizational, yet significantly different, and

more complicated, geopolitical prospects." According to Dergachev, Ukraine's immediate foreign policy priorities include the "diminishing of the one-sided dependence on Russia," and "re-orientation of external economic and humanitarian contacts aimed at the development of cooperation mostly with the countries of

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Western and East Central Europe." To sum up, Kiev needs "normal cooperation with both Russia and the West, for the necessity to choose between these two poles might undermine Ukraine's national interests."<sup>16</sup>

For some time, a good number of observers believed that such a vision was successfully being implemented. Ukraine became a member of the Council of Europe ahead of Russia; was the first of the CIS countries to join the Partnership for Peace, a kind of NATO "apprenticeship course"; and signed a special charter with the alliance on the model of the Russia-NATO Act. Also, because of Poland's lobbying, Kiev acceded to the Central European Initiative. In the Eurasian realm, Ukraine attempted to balance Moscow's domineering stance within the CIS and together with Georgia, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, formed a loose grouping—GUUAM—to facilitate economic cooperation and energy deliveries between its participants. This initiative received Washington's full endorsement.

And in 1997, after long and painful negotiations, Ukraine and Russia finally signed the "big" Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership, whereby Ukraine's sovereignty and international borders were formally recognized and bitter disputes over the Black Sea fleet were temporarily suspended. The following year a large-scale Treaty on Economic Cooperation between Ukraine and Russia for the period 1998–2007 was signed during President Kuchma's official visit to Moscow.

Yet by the end of 1999 it became clear that despite all these seemingly positive developments, Ukraine had botched its relations with both West and East.



The main reason for this failure lies in the peculiar sociopolitical system that emerged in Kiev from the rubble of the Soviet Union. The leaders of independent Ukraine—mainly former communists turned “nationalists”—were not interested in deep and serious economic and political reforms; instead they had a keen interest in unbridled self-aggrandizement. The results of the decade-long, gross mismanagement of the Ukraine’s postcommunist elites have become too obvious to be ignored by Western policymakers. The current Ukrainian society—with its faulty and nearly bankrupt economy, a sham of a parliamentary system, a controlled judiciary, muzzled media, and all-pervading corruption—is a far cry from so-called European standards. Ukraine is still predominantly a post-Soviet country. That is why, one observer argues, “though it tries to distance itself from Russia, strategically Ukraine is not approaching the West. Ukraine’s western border is the line where the first wave of NATO enlargement stopped. The division will deepen in the case of EU enlargement, which will bring new economic regulations, visa and other restrictions.”<sup>17</sup>

Precisely because the EU is less than convinced by Kiev’s attempts at economic and political reform, it left Ukraine out of the circle of candidates. Now, according to Michael Emerson, an analyst at the Brussels-based Center for European Policy Studies, the EU simply doesn’t have enough time for Ukraine. “I would read the EU policies towards Ukraine as being in sympathetic but ‘holding’ mode,” he says.<sup>18</sup> This polite diplomatic pronouncement means that in the foreseeable future the border between the emerging greater Europe of the enlarged EU and what can roughly be defined as Eurasia will run along the Polish-Ukrainian frontier.

“How did things get that bad?” asks Stephen Handelman, author of the well-received *Comrade Criminal*. In his view, the West bears part of the blame for turning a blind eye to the less-than-encouraging internal developments in Ukraine. “The US, along with Europe, has tacitly acquiesced in the plundering of Ukraine for most of the decade, in hope of maintaining the stability in a crucial buffer state between Russia and the West,” argues Handelman. But this policy backfired. “Now Ukraine’s weakness is raising doubts in Europe about its reliability as a potential NATO ally or trade partner, which could have the paradoxical result of pushing it closer to Moscow anyway.”<sup>19</sup>

What is significant, though, is that now Ukraine is ready to embrace Russia not as Russia’s equal neighbor but as a subservient client. The same mismanagement, corruption, and lack of reform that disillusioned the West also prevented Ukraine from building neighborly and mutually beneficial relations with Russia. Moscow has four main complaints about Kiev:

- Ukraine doesn’t pay for deliveries of Russian gas, thus turning Russia into its involuntary major economic donor. According to Russian estimates, Ukraine’s total energy debt has reached \$3.5 billion.
- Ukraine keeps stealing Russian gas, thus disrupting the deliveries to Western markets. Annual siphoning of gas is said to amount to between 2 and 3 billion cubic meters.

- Ukraine is carrying out language, education, and information policies aimed at broadening the use of the state language in all spheres of society at the expense of Russian, thus infringing on the rights of the its millions of ethnic Russian citizens.
- Ukraine is flirting with Euro-Atlantic security organizations instead of participating in the Russia-led CIS defense structures, thus allegedly demonstrating its “anti-Russian” orientation.

These political irritants have angered Moscow for a long time. Until relatively recently, however, Ukraine managed to withstand Russian pressure. Of late, two developments have affected the situation: a change of heart in the West and a changing of the guard in the Kremlin. The West’s second thoughts concerning Ukraine’s “democratic transition” and Putin’s ascension to power in Moscow make a bad combination for Kiev.

One important factor that should be taken into account with regard to Putin’s policies toward the former Soviet periphery is that he, unlike his predecessor Boris Yeltsin, is not personally responsible for the disintegration of the USSR. Thus Putin does not feel obliged to prop up the image of the CIS as a happy commonwealth of brotherly republics, as Yeltsin had to do to justify his actions in December 1991. As a result, Putin has much more space to maneuver in dealing with the “near abroad.” He feels free to both bully and cajole his partners in the CIS depending on the situation, and can be much tougher in setting forth claims and negotiating deals.

The new foreign policy that Russia unveiled in July 2000 already marked the shift toward bilateral relations with the CIS countries, in contrast to the numerous but mostly fruitless summits of heads of state popular during the Yeltsin era. “Practical relations with each [member of the CIS] should be built mindful of the reciprocal openness and readiness to duly take into account the interests of the Russian Federation,” asserted the authors of the strategic policy blueprint.<sup>20</sup> This trend was confirmed by the recent pronouncements of Sergei Ivanov, the head of Russia’s powerful Security Council. He told a defense conference in Munich that Russia had conducted “a review of the main directions” of its CIS policies “brought about by the realisation that accelerated development of the Commonwealth into a fully fledged international association is not possible in the near future.” Instead, Russia would pursue its interests “first of all through the development of bilateral relations with CIS countries.”<sup>21</sup>

Those are the new rules of the game. In the meantime, Russian public opinion of present-day Ukraine seems to have become more negative. An October 1999 opinion poll found 41 percent of respondents agreeing that Kiev pursued an unfriendly policy toward Moscow (23 percent disagreed). That demonstrates, as the analyst Moshes notes, a growing popularity in Russia of the “no-more-free-lunches-for-Ukraine” policy.<sup>22</sup>

As Russia’s prime minister, Putin immediately responded to this public sentiment and focused on all major points at which Ukrainian policies were perceived to go against Russian “national interests”: Kiev’s unpaid debts, gas siphoning, the

rights of Ukraine's Russians, and its too close relations with Western defense and security institutions. Since the end of 1999, Moscow has been exerting steady pressure on Kiev to force it to change its "unfriendly behavior" in all four disputed areas.

For the time being, Ukraine seems unlikely to resolve its energy problem. An attempt at obtaining gas from Turkmenistan in early 1999 ended in a sorry failure. Several years ago, after Turkmenistan had resumed deliveries after stoppage because of Ukraine's failure to pay, it had to stop deliveries again because of the same problem. The idea of building a pipeline to bring Iranian gas to Europe through Ukraine, raised at the recent talks in Tehran by Ukraine's premier Viktor

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Yushchenko, does not look very promising either. According to experts, "the plan faces numerous hurdles, including the need to cross Russian territory and Ukraine's bad record of diverting transit gas."<sup>23</sup> At the same time, Russia's Gazprom continues to threaten Kiev with rerouting up to 70 billion cubic meters of its gas exports of the total

110–120 billion currently going through Ukraine. According to officials of Russia's major gas trader, the construction of a new pipeline through Poland and Slovakia is being seriously considered, and the Blue Stream project, a pipeline to Turkey, is already being implemented.

Given the shabby state of Ukraine's finances, the likelihood of Russia's getting the gas money back seems slim. Moscow, however, is persistently working on the other option, namely, to turn Kiev's energy debts into leverage in Ukraine's privatization program. Viktor Sorokin, head of the Ukraine department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told *Financial Times* that "Russia was seeking to convert a \$2.2 billion gas debt into bonds which could convert into shares in Ukrainian state enterprises."<sup>24</sup> To be sure, Russia's Gazprom is especially interested in gaining control of Ukraine's pipeline system transporting Russian gas exports to Europe. Even before this debts-for-shares deal is reached, however, Russian businesses are aggressively buying up some of the most attractive Ukrainian assets. Russia's powerful Alfa Group seems to be in the lead. Last year Alfa Bank bought 76 percent of Kievinvestbank, and Tyumen Oil Company, part of the Alfa Group holding company, acquired 67 percent of LiNOS oil refinery. Alfa Group also controls a Ukrainian TV channel and a radio station. Also last year, a subsidiary of Russian Aluminium bought Mykolayiv alumina refinery, and Russian oil giant Lukoil obtained a controlling interest in Odessa oil refinery.<sup>25</sup>

Western experts differ in their assessment of this "new Russian expansion." Anders Åslund, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, sees nothing wrong in Russian businessmen buying out Ukrainian com-

panies "in competitive if not open privatization deals." In Åslund's opinion, these Russian businessmen should not be viewed as agents of the Russian state: "They don't act like that, and they don't see themselves as such."<sup>26</sup> Other observers, however, are more apprehensive. According to Charles Clover, the *Financial Times* Kiev correspondent, some Ukrainians and Western diplomats "privately express the fear that Russia may have a hidden geopolitical agenda in supporting the movement of its capital into Ukraine, a step that undoubtedly will increase Moscow's control over its former imperial subject."<sup>27</sup> Serhiy Tyhypko, Ukraine's former top banker and vice premier, agrees that there is a certain risk: "If any particular country owns too much of our economy, or dominates an important sector, then it will very likely also involve itself in our politics."<sup>28</sup>

A significant change is evident in Ukraine's defense policies as well. When Russian defense minister Igor Sergeev was in Kiev in mid-January, Ukraine and Russia signed a 52-point military cooperation program. The accord allows Russia to take part in the planning of all multinational military exercises on Ukrainian territory. It also envisages the formation of a joint Russian-Ukrainian naval unit and the "joint production of a variety of weapons." Some Western commentators believe the new Ukrainian-Russian agreement may "signal a gradual shift of Ukraine's security policies, away from the West and towards Russia." After all, it was in November 1998 that Ukraine declared a program of cooperation with NATO, among the goals of which was "Ukraine's integration into European and Euro-Atlantic structures which guarantee stability and security on the continent."<sup>29</sup>

In February, at the last Kuchma-Putin summit in Dnipropetrovsk, the presidents of Ukraine and Russia signed a number of agreements to expand their cooperation in civil space research and aviation. Obviously, for Putin, who is seeking to rebuild Russia's military-industrial complex by connecting it to traditional Soviet hardware markets in China, India, and the Middle East, it is important to restore the industrial network, which was disrupted by the Soviet Union's collapse. In the opinion of Patrick Tyler of the *New York Times*, however, "in Ukraine, Mr. Putin's strategy carries additional significance. Moscow hopes that by strengthening economic and political cooperation, a new commonality of purpose in the technology of space and aviation might slow the pace of Ukraine's strategic alignment with the United States and NATO."<sup>30</sup>

With regard to language, Putin's team has been equally aggressive. Russia's new foreign policy doctrine states that Moscow will seek to "obtain guarantees for the rights and freedoms of compatriots [residing outside Russia]" and "to develop comprehensive ties with them and their organizations." The Russian State Duma has drafted a bill on the status of the Russian language in the CIS countries. Last summer the State Duma accused Ukraine of having violated the provisions on national minorities in the 1997 Russian-Ukrainian treaty. It went on to demand that Putin adopt the necessary measures to stop the alleged discrimination. In Ukraine, a country that has a Russian population of eleven million and where at least half of the citizens consider Russian their native tongue, Moscow's policies are destined to find popular support. According to a poll conducted by the Kiev International Institute of Sociology in March 2000, 39 percent of respon-

dents wanted Russian to be given the status of the second state language, and the same percentage spoke in favor of the official status of the Russian language in Ukraine. Only 17 percent believed that the use of Russian should be banned from Ukraine's public life. According to Taras Kuzio, a research fellow at the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, "Moscow sees the continued use of the Russian language in the former Soviet states with large numbers of Russophones as ensuring its continued influence over these countries."<sup>31</sup>

Perhaps the most symbolic move marking "Ukraine's turn to the East" was last year's replacement of the young and openly pro-Western minister of foreign affairs, Borys Tarasyuk, by the veteran diplomat Anatoly Zlenko. It was no secret that the Moscow security community, which hated Tarasyuk, an architect of Ukraine's alignment with the United States and NATO, was actively lobbying for his resignation. In his first big interview with Kiev's influential weekly *Zerkalo nedeli*, Zlenko gave his interpretation of the current state of Ukrainian-Russian relations: "For a certain period of time the relations with Russia were not normal, and now these relations are normalising. So it may seem as though we are sharply strengthening the eastern vector of our foreign policy."<sup>32</sup> Be that as it may, many Ukrainian analysts tend to believe that because Kiev has been excluded from the EU and now receives little support from the West, turning toward Russia is the only rational choice, given that Ukraine's shaky economy depends heavily on trade.

### The Role of the West

What should be the West's reaction to the latest developments in Ukrainian-Russian relations? There currently seem to be two main schools of thought: "radical" and "conservative." A representative of the radical approach, Frank Gaffney, president of the Washington-based Center for Security Policy, strongly believes that "the Russia of Vladimir Putin is exhibiting behavior that is ever more problematic," and that is why "the necessity of strengthening Ukraine as a counterweight to Russia is increasingly apparent." Specifically, U.S. President George W. Bush "should immediately set about forging a strategic partnership with Ukraine aimed at establishing a strong U.S. commitment to the latter's independence, sovereignty and economic growth." To be sure, insists Gaffney, the United States should not limit itself to words but support them with deeds: provide political support, deepen military cooperation, broaden trade opportunities, encourage U.S. investment in Ukraine, and push for Ukraine's integration into Europe. Then, he writes, "the signal would be unmistakable: Russia can no longer feel free to engage in intimidation, coercion and other predations against its erstwhile colony."<sup>33</sup>

The other approach to Ukraine's geopolitical plight seems to be more realistic. In response to numerous statements about Kiev's commitment to integration with the West, the Carnegie Endowment's Anatol Lieven points out that there is an obvious "yawning gap" between Ukraine (as well as other CIS countries) and those states that are on track to enter the EU. Thus, according to Lieven, the question of Ukraine's full integration into Western institutions "has now receded beyond the limits of policy debate." All the West can do for the foreseeable future is concen-

trate on the management of Ukraine's problems and try to shape developments there positively, albeit "conservatively," without illusions or too much optimism. Lieven's overall conclusion is as follows: what we are facing in Ukraine today is "neither a renewal or a triumphant march towards integration with the West nor a relapse into full union with Russia." America and Europe should abandon hopes of integrating Ukraine into the West and instead seek to shape developments there so that they do not lead to a destabilizing internal conflict.<sup>34</sup>

#### NOTES

1. See Roman Szporluk, "Ukraine: From an Imperial Periphery to a Sovereign State," *Daedalus* 126, no. 3 (1997): 85–119; Aleksei Miller, "Rossiya i Ukraina v XIX – nachale XX v.: nepredopredelennaya istoriya," in *Ukraina i Rossiya: obshchestva i gosudarstva*, ed. by D. Furman (Moscow: Prava cheloveka, 1997), 71–87.

2. Editorial, "Kiev's Plight," *Financial Times*, 13 February 2001.

3. Dmitrii Furman, "Russkie i ukrainsy: trudnye otnosheniya brat'ev," in *Ukraina i Rossiya*, 4, 5.

4. In 1905, Ivan Franko, one of the greatest Ukrainian authors and public figures, wrote about a formidable task "to create, out of the huge ethnic mass of Ukrainian people, the *Ukrainian nation*, a cohesive cultural organism, fully prepared for independent cultural and political life." See Ivan Franko, "Otvertyi lyst do halyts'koi ukrains'koi molodezhi," in vol 45 of *Zibrannia tvoriv u p'iatydesiati tomakh* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1976), 404. This task is yet to be fulfilled in post-Soviet Ukraine.

4. Yu. Oganis'yan, "Sotsial'no-politicheskiye struktury v SNG" in *Politicheskiye protsessy v natsional'noi i regional'noi sfere* (Moscow: Forum-2000, 1997), 52.

6. This attitude is well reflected in the recent article by the well-known Moscow political analyst Aleksandr Tsipko. In his opinion, the state entity called the "Russian Republic" is a "mere splinter of the Russian Empire, mainly a union of Great Russians, Turkic peoples and Ugro-Finns." He continues: "In fact, a re-establishment of the union of Slavic republics of the former USSR would lead to the creation of a true [Russian] nation state, similar to the present-day Federal Republic of Germany." (See *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 20 February 2001).

7. See Yevgenii Golovakha, Natalia Panina, "Rossiisko-ukrainskie otnosheniya v obshchestvennom mnenii Ukrainy i Rossii," in *Ukraina i Rossiya*, 259–277; M.I. Beletsky and A.K. Tolpygo, "Natsional'no-kul'turnyye i ideologicheskie orientatsii naseleniya Ukrainy," *Polis*, no. 4 (1998): 74–89.

8. See Robert Ya. Yevzerov, *Ukraina: s Rossiei vmeste ili vroz'?* (Moscow: Ves' Mir, 2000): 28–29.

9. Interestingly, it would seem that this simple fact was not properly understood by Ukraine's new leaders. In the summer of 1999 the first president of Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, made a characteristic statement: "When I was writing my [electoral presidential] program, oil and gas cost almost nothing. When I became president, Russia established world prices [for its exported resources]. Could I envisage such a situation in my program?" See Leonid Kravchuk, "Pro vybory ta realii prezidentstva," *Romyr Report* (Kiev), no. 4 (Summer 1999): 14.

10. This trend has been registered by one Russian analyst. He explains that, "already by 1995, there were not so many spheres where Russia would be interested in cooperation [with Ukraine]. . . . The only sphere where the potential for cooperation is still relatively high is communications." However, even its significance "will diminish when Russia completes the construction of two new gas pipelines running through Belarus and Poland, and a sea port in Leningrad region." See Arkady Moshes, "Konfliktnyi potentsial v rossiisko-ukrainskikh otnosheniyakh. Vzgl'yad iz Rossii," in *Etnicheskie i regional'nyie konflikty v Yevrazii. V 3-kh knigakh. Kn. 2. Rossiya, Ukraina, Belorussiya* (Moscow: Ves' Mir, 1997), 23–44.

11. Sherman Garnett, *Keystone in the Arch: Ukraine and the New Political Geography of Eastern and Central Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1996).
12. Zbignev Bzhezinskiy [Zbigniew Brzezinski], "Vyrishal'na rol' Ukrainy na postradyans'komu prostori," *Polityka i chas*, no. 9 (1997): 26, 27.
13. Arkady Moshes, "Russian Policy Towards Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic States in the Putin Era," *PONARS*, 2000, memo no. 123.
14. Quoted in Anatol Lieven, *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1999), 8–9.
15. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. (New York: HarperCollins, 1997), 84.
16. Aleksandr Dergachev, "Ukraina v sovremennykh geopoliticheskikh preobrazovaniyakh," *Polis*, no. 3, 1998, 124-132.
17. Arkady Moshes, "Russian-Ukrainian Relations After Ukraine's Elections," *PONARS*, 1999, memo no. 82.
18. See Ahto Lobjakas, "Ukraine: European Union Expected To Put Kiev in Hold," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, 13 February 2001.
19. Stephen Handelman, "West Needs To Face Scary Prospects of Chaos in Ukraine," *Toronto Star*, 13 February 2001.
20. See my "Putin's Russia Defines Its Foreign Policy Agenda," *Eurasia Insight*, 28 July 2000.
21. Robert Cottrell, "In Search of a Policy," *Financial Times*, 20 February 2001.
22. Moshes, "Russian Policy."
23. Michael Lelyveld, "Ukraine: Talks Continue With Iran On Gas Pipeline For Europe," *RFE/RL Weekday Magazine*, 8 February 2001.
24. Charles Clover, "Good Neighbour Or Great Power?" *Financial Times*, 22 January 2001.
25. See Charles Clover, "The New Russian Expansion," *Financial Times*, 5 February 2001.
26. See "Kuchmagate: Political Crisis in Ukraine?" *Carnegie Endowment Russian and Eurasian Program Meeting Report 3*, no. 3, 14 February 2001.
27. Clover, "The New Russian Expansion."
28. *Ibid.*
29. See Charles Clover, "Ukraine Looks East," *Financial Times*, 21 January 2001.
30. Patrick E. Tyler, "Russia Offers a Motherly Embrace for Ukraine Industry," *New York Times*, 13 February 2001.
31. Taras Kuzio, "Language and Nationalism in the Post-Soviet Space," *RFE/RL Newslines*, 3 August 2000.
32. Yulia Mostovaya, "Anatoly Zlenko: 'Vneshnyaya politika dolzhna rabotat' na vnutrennyuyu'," *Zerkalo nedeli*, 20 January 2001.
33. Frank Gaffney, "Redefining Our Ukraine Policy," *Washington Times*, 26 December 2000.
34. See "Kuchmagate: Political Crisis in Ukraine?"