

# **The Politics of Ethnicity in Post-Soviet Ukraine: Beyond Brubaker\***

*Volodymyr Kulyk*

Few aspects of Ukraine's post-Soviet transition have interested scholars as much as what most of them call nation building, and few aspects are as controversial. Disagreement over what is being "built," by what means, and with what result, is evident, in particular, in different treatments of Rogers Brubaker's popular concept of nationalizing state. While a number of authors studying ethno-national policies and identities in contemporary Ukraine embrace this concept as a valuable analytical instrument, others insist on its theoretical futility or inapplicability to the case of Ukraine. One obvious problem is that Brubaker's featuring of conflictual relations between the majority-dominated state and non-complying minorities stands in sharp contrast with the mostly peaceful development of post-Soviet Ukraine, which has been accompanied, moreover, by the marginalization of ethnicity as a factor in policy making. This article, therefore, aims not only at providing an overview of Ukrainian state policies with regard to major ethnic and linguistic groups and their responses, but also at suggesting more appropriate categories and directions of analysis. While seeking to explain to what extent Ukraine can be called a "nationalizing state," I also hope to demonstrate the limited analytical capacity of this concept. Accordingly, I shall begin with a brief presentation of Brubaker's and his critics' main terms and arguments, and then discuss their relevance to the Ukrainian context.

---

\* I am grateful to Laada Bilaniuk and Roman Szporluk for their helpful responses to an earlier version of this article.

## The Nationalizing State and Nation Building

For Brubaker a nationalizing state is “one understood [by its dominant elites] to be the state *of* and *for* a particular ethnocultural ‘core nation’ whose language, culture, demographic position, economic welfare, and political hegemony must be protected and promoted by the state.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, such states are conceived as nation-states even though their population is far from ethnically homogeneous and unequivocally loyal, and it is this heterogeneity and mixed and unstable loyalties that make the elites think of their newborn or reborn states as “insufficiently ‘national’ in a variety of senses.”<sup>2</sup> Developments in such states differ sharply from the inclusive nation building portrayed by modernization-inspired theories, according to which “[i]n place of a welter of more parochial loyalties and identities, the citizenry is progressively united, through the gradually assimilative workings of ... state-wide institutions, processes, and transactions, by a common ‘national’ loyalty and identity.”<sup>3</sup> In contrast, the “nationalizing nationalism” of a state hosting a national minority runs counter to the strivings of the latter to assert its national (rather than just ethnic) rights, strivings that are instigated by the “homeland nationalism” of another state that sees the given minority as an inalienable part of its respective nation defined in ethnocultural terms. Nationalizing states, national minorities, and their external homelands (later renamed kin-states) are the three elements of Brubaker’s triad;<sup>4</sup> given their largely antagonistic orientations, the relations between these elements are most likely to be conflictual. According to Brubaker, it is these relations that determine the ethno-political dynamics of the post-Communist space. He believes that dominant ethnocultural perceptions of nationhood inherited from the multinational Communist states (the USSR, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia), which institutionalized ethnicity on both the collective and the individual level, hardly make inclusive nation building in their successor states possible.<sup>5</sup>

---

1. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 103. Author’s emphasis. Hereafter I base my criticism of Brubaker’s theory on this book, which contains the articles, written in 1993–96, on which most interpretations of his theory have been based. In his later article, “Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism,” in *The State of the Nation: Ernest Gellner and the Theory of Nationalism*, ed. John A. Hall (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 272–306, he develops some new arguments that partly undermine older ones and reveal his awareness of oversimplifications in the application of his model to the post-Communist countries. However, the key concepts remain intact.

2. *Ibid.*, 79.

3. *Ibid.*, 80.

4. *Ibid.*, chap. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, 104–6.

Brubaker's theory was enthusiastically embraced by a number of authors and came to inform Western thinking on the ethno-national problem in the post-Communist space, where almost all of the new states, in his view, "will be nationalizing states to *some* degree and in *some* form."<sup>6</sup> But, as Taras Kuzio argues, "scholars have tended to utilise Brubaker's concept to make value judgements about policies they disagree with and thereby selectively choose to which countries they attach the label 'nationalising.'"<sup>7</sup> In particular, the Russian Federation is not described as a nationalizing state, while policies of other post-Soviet states with a sizeable Russian minority are scrutinized for nationalizing tendencies, even if these states pursue rather liberal and inclusive policies on ethnocultural matters. Furthermore, states with sharply different ethno-political orientations (e.g., Latvia and Belarus) are lumped together in one category, while Western countries in which similar processes took place in the last few centuries and, in some cases, still persist or have emerged recently are not included.

Kuzio, so far the most resolute critic of Brubaker's concept, believes that these shortcomings disqualify it as an analytical instrument, all the more so because he does not find the contrast between "nationalizing" and "civic" states persuasive. All states, in his view, are nationalizing to some extent in that they are built on an ethnocultural core and seek to homogenize their population by promoting and implanting the culture and language of that core. Therefore it does not make sense to use terms other than "nation building," which denotes the only possible way to construct a cohesive society.<sup>8</sup>

Notwithstanding these well-taken critical points, one is tempted to conclude that the difference between Kuzio's concept of nation building and Brubaker's concept of the nationalizing state is mostly a matter of values. In the former case, the remedial promotion of the cultures of the titular groups by the new states is accepted as preferable to the preservation of the legacy of their multinational predecessors, which discriminated against those cultures. In the latter case, the new discrimination is believed to be less acceptable than the preservation of the status quo. Moreover, Brubaker and his followers, by constructing an ugly post-Communist "other" to contrast with the democratic states of the West, in my view, lend support to Hans Kohn's dichotomy between "civic" Western and "ethnic" Eastern nationalisms. In Kuzio's narrative, the post-Communist regimes' affirmative policies are legitimized by reference to similar practices by states that are known and widely respected as liberal democracies.<sup>9</sup>

---

6. *Ibid.*, 106. Author's emphasis.

7. Taras Kuzio, "'Nationalising States' or Nation Building? A Review of the Theoretical Literature and Empirical Evidence," *Nations and Nationalism* 7, pt. 2 (April 2001): 137.

8. *Ibid.*, 136–9.

9. It should be mentioned that Brubaker states that he does not support this

Keeping in mind that no scholarly analysis can be free of the author's ideological preferences, I shall try, nevertheless, to bring out the main *theoretical* weakness of the concept of nationalization. In my view, this weakness lies in the definition of the elements of Brubaker's triad, which virtually dooms them to conflict. To be sure, Brubaker claims that conflict is not inevitable. Moreover, a variety of possible developments within the triad seems to be natural in view of his insistence that all three elements are "not fixed entities, but variably configured and continuously contested *political fields*."<sup>10</sup> For example, a national minority should be thought of not as a unitary group, "but rather in terms of the *field of differentiated and competitive positions or stances* adopted by different organizations, parties, movements, or individual political entrepreneurs, each seeking to 'represent' the minority to its own putative members, to the host state, or to the outside world." The competition "may occur not only among those making different claims for the group *qua* national minority, but also between those making such claims and those rejecting the designation 'national minority' and the family of claims associated with it."<sup>11</sup> Two factors, however, make conflictual relations most likely.

First, Brubaker stresses that what determines whether a state is nationalizing or not is not its actual policies or articulated positions, but rather the perception of its policies by the minorities or kin-states.<sup>12</sup> In this situation conflicts become much easier to instigate: it will suffice, for example, for the authorities of the "external homeland" to embark for the purposes of their domestic or foreign policy on a propaganda campaign presenting the host state's policies as discriminating against the respective minority. As we know, some of the kin-states of Ukraine's minorities have resorted to such campaigns. Leaders of the minorities have also repeatedly raised the issue of discrimination to gain support from kin-states or international organizations, or concessions from Ukrainian authorities. But why should their presentations be more persuasive for the (putative) members of a minority than those of the host state, which are usually delivered through much more powerful and institutionalized channels?<sup>13</sup> It seems that Brubaker, or at least those who apply his theory to various cases

---

dichotomy. ("Myths and Misconceptions in the Study of Nationalism," 298). Kuzio argues that Brubaker's limiting the geographical scope of "nationalisation" to the post-Communist space nevertheless encourages scholars to follow in the Kohn tradition ("Nationalising States' or Nation Building?" 136).

10. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*, 60. Author's emphasis.

11. *Ibid.*, 61. Author's emphasis.

12. *Ibid.*, 63.

13. The strong impact of Russia's media, which are often of higher quality and much better understood than those of the host states, on the Russophone population of many post-Soviet countries is rather an exception.

without answering this question, presupposes that arguments of ethnically akin actors always prevail by the very fact of kinship. But that would mean that the minority encompasses not all people who share some socio-cultural characteristics that make them a battleground for “differentiated and competitive positions or stances” on the possible political implications of those characteristics, but only the “nationally conscious,” whose choice among those positions is thus predetermined.

My argument may sound essentialist to Brubaker and his followers, since it seems to imply the existence of a “fixed entity,” which they deny. I should, therefore, stress that I do consider the elements of the triad to be constructed by the competition of various stances. The crucial point, however, is how broadly the fields are defined. And here lies the second limitation of the fields, which is inherent in Brubaker’s theory and contributes to the conflictual nature of relationships within the triad. His definition of a nationalizing state as “a dynamically changing field of differentiated and competitive positions or stances adopted by different organizations, parties, movements, or individual figures within and around the state” limits the variety of actors and positions to those “seeking, in various and often mutually antagonistic ways, to make the state a ‘real’ nation-state, the state of and for a particulate nation.”<sup>14</sup> In the case of the host state, unlike the other two fields, Brubaker does not admit even the possibility that competition could include actors who reject the prescribed nationalistic orientation. Nor does he define the nationalizing state simply as one in which “nationalizers” predominate. But then what about the actors that strive not for a nation-state, but a civic or, say, autocratic state? Either they are excluded from the state simply because of their “wrong” thinking, or there exist a number of “states” as dynamic fields of competitive positions within a limited scope. Now, if a nationalizing state encompasses only actors promoting a nation-state, then we need additional fields for other kinds of states. Hence the theoretical framework has to be expanded to include a much larger number of fields. This would make the theory much more difficult to apply in practice. Instead of complicating the framework, some scholars have misleadingly substituted the conventional notion of state for Brubaker’s state-as-field and deal with a simple framework. In my view, it is this substitution of the first concept for the second that has misled many scholars into applying it to various states and has severely undermined the analytical value of much of their work. With this substitution, the state (body politic) has to be dominated by “nationalizers” who seek to make it a state for the titular nation. The prescribed sense of “ownership” of the state by that nation is structurally fixed by the fact that the latter does not appear as a separate field in Brubaker’s theory, but is equated with the state

---

14. *Ibid.*, 66.

itself. Therefore any participation in the state and any influence on state policies “from within” by a national minority is precluded. By the same token, the positions of the titular nation cannot include a call for the participation of national minorities in the state or for the state’s indifference to ethnocultural factors, to say nothing of support for the dominance of an “alien” language and culture or for the incorporation of the nation and its state into a larger entity. Similarly, the concept of national minority embraces only actors who seek to represent the group, not those who do not care about its cohesiveness or ethnocultural “essence.”

For some of the post-Communist states in which the ethnocultural sense of nationhood and hostility against minorities are deeply entrenched, any other stances may have been only theoretically possible. In other cases, however, other stances have been quite viable and more or less fully realized options. Ukraine certainly belongs in this category. Thus, when scholars consider whether to apply Brubaker’s theory to particular states, they must pay “sustained attention to their formative contexts,” which may differ sharply from those of the states he usually points to as illustrations (interwar Poland and the successor states to Communist Yugoslavia).<sup>15</sup> In particular, the legacy of the Communist institutionalization of ethnicity should not always be taken as the primary determinant of the ideological positions and political influences of majority and minority actors, a step that dooms them to confrontation. Because of the inherent contradictions between territorial and ethnocultural components of ethnic institutionalization (ascribing nationality to both republics and persons who live outside those republics),<sup>16</sup> as well as the increasing deviations from that institutionalization during the late Soviet decades, “nationalizing” attitudes in some successor states have been far from unequivocally shared or politically dominant.

Instead of making ad hoc corrections to Brubaker’s simplistic framework, one should view it as a specific case of ethno-political relations in the newly emergent states that arises from a particular formative context. In other cases, different formative contexts may require different theoretical frameworks for analyzing the relations they engender. At any rate, ethno-politics is part of a more general complex of societal relations that determines the nature of the state, the composition and attitudes of elites, and the identities of the masses.<sup>17</sup> It is

---

15. On the weakness of Brubaker’s theory as an instrument for analyzing “formative contexts,” see Kataryna Wolczuk, “History, Europe and the ‘National Idea’: The Official Narrative of National Identity in Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 28, no. 4 (December 2000): 675.

16. Brubaker is aware of these contradictions. See *Nationalism Reframed*, 36–40.

17. A similar approach is developed by Spyros Demetriou in “Rebuilding after Revolution: State Formation and the Politics of Identity in Ukraine and Tajikistan,” paper presented at the convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia

only by investigating this whole complex that we can estimate the degree of “nationalization” in state policies and the degree of “nationness” in the responses or challenges of (putative) minorities. It may be that other elements should be added to, or substituted for, the three fields suggested by Brubaker. For example, international organizations such as the European Union may be more important containing factors than the respective kin-states.<sup>18</sup> Other minorities must be taken into account if they, no less than the state, determine the behaviour of the minority in question, as has been the case with the competing groups in Crimea. Moreover, the identities of the elites and masses may be influenced more by linguistic, regional, or other factors than by ethnic ones, and this would warrant a reshaping of the political fields along the respective lines. To be sure, “nationalizing” (or, better, simply nationalistic) actors and tendencies will still play an important role, but they will not necessarily prevail over all others.

In what follows, I briefly outline the Soviet legacy in Ukraine and the stances of rival Ukrainian elites on “the national question.” Within this context, it will be possible to access the policies of the state, the preferences of the minorities, and the implications of these policies and preferences for the relationships within the respective Brubaker triads.

## **The Soviet Legacy in Ukraine**

To recapitulate well-known facts, ethnic minorities<sup>19</sup> constitute more than a quarter of the country’s population of almost fifty million inhabitants, and there are ten groups amounting to more than 100,000 each.<sup>20</sup> While many of them have been living in the territory of contemporary Ukraine for centuries, the rapid growth of some others during the Soviet period was the result of the state policy of “the merger of nations.” In particular, there was a massive influx of Russians,

---

University, New York, 13–15 April 2000.

18. Cf. Wolczuk, “History, Europe, and the ‘National Idea,’” 676.

19. I shall use the term “minority” in the conventional sense of a “real” socio-demographic group, and then analyze stances within the group that determine its ethno-political meaning.

20. The nine groups at the top of the list based on the 1989 census (Russians, Jews, Belarusians, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Poles, Hungarians, Romanians, and Greeks) should be supplemented by the Crimean Tatars, who began returning to Ukraine en masse after the census. When this article was being prepared for publication, the results of the first post-Soviet census of December 2001 were published. However, I have retained references to the 1989 data because it was this data that determined the ethno-political perceptions of the ethno-demographic situation in Ukraine during the period under analysis (the only exception being the strength of the Crimean Tatars). For the 2001 results, see the Web site of the State Committee for Statistics of Ukraine, <[www.ukrstat.gov.ua](http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua)>.

who by 1989 constituted 22.1 percent of Ukraine's population.<sup>21</sup> Thanks to their being the "all-Union" nation, whose cultural demands were to be met in every part of the USSR and whose language was used as a lingua franca, the Russians usually had no incentives either to assimilate to the titular culture or to learn it at the basic level of everyday communication. In Ukraine, unlike in the non-Slavic republics, the similarity of the Ukrainian and Russian languages and the perceived Ukrainian-Russian ethnocultural kinship made inter-ethnic communication easier and, at the same time, facilitated the assimilation of ethnic Ukrainians to the Russian language and culture. Hence, a considerable number of people of the titular nationality regarded Russian as their mother tongue (12.2 percent in the 1989 census), and a much larger percentage spoke mostly Russian in everyday life. As later surveys of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology have shown, Russian has been the language of preference for roughly forty percent of ethnic Ukrainians and, thus, for more than a half (56.1 percent, according to the aggregated data of the surveys between 1991 and 1994) of Ukraine's population as a whole. In the east and south, the dominance of Russian has been overwhelming, with Ukrainian being the language of preference for only 18.7 percent of the respondents.<sup>22</sup> In Crimea, which was transferred to Ukraine in 1954, a decade after the deportation of its indigenous people, the Crimean Tatars,<sup>23</sup> Russians have constituted a clear majority (sixty-seven percent in 1989), while Ukrainians (25.8 percent) have had virtually no Ukrainian-language institutions and thus have been subject to mass-scale Russification.<sup>24</sup> As for the other minorities in Ukraine, they have varied vastly

---

21. In contrast, the Polish and Jewish populations have decreased sharply during the twentieth century. For the changing ethnic composition of Ukraine, see Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s: A Minority Faith* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 22. For a brief history of Russian settlement, see Neil Melvin, *Russians beyond Russia: The Politics of National Identity*, Chatham House Papers (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995), 86–7.

22. Dominique Arel, "Ukraine: The Temptation of the Nationalizing State," in *Political Culture and Civil Society in Russia and the New States of Eurasia*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1995), 169–70. The "language of preference" was defined as the language a respondent chose to use while talking to a supposedly bilingual interviewer. As critics implied, the above data might have exaggerated preference for Russian by neglecting a possible effect of perceived political correctness on the respondents' choice. See a discussion of their arguments in my *Ukrainskyi natsionalizm u nezalezhnii Ukraini* (Kyiv: Tsentri doslidzhen natsionalnoi bezpeky pry Natsionalnomu Universyteti "Kyevo-Mohylianska Akademiia, 1999), 8–9, n. 18.

23. Here indigenous people are not those living in a given territory "from times immemorial," but rather a group that, unlike ethnic minorities, has no external kin-state.

24. Volodymyr Yevtukh, "The Dynamics of Interethnic Relations in Crimea," in *Crimea—Dynamics, Challenges, and Prospects*, ed. Maria Drohobycky (Lanham: Rowman



in degree of linguistic assimilation. While those minorities living compactly in the countryside, such as the Hungarians and Romanians (who also had hundreds of schools in their respective languages in Transcarpathia and Chernivtsi oblasts during the Soviet decades), have overwhelmingly preserved their mother tongue, dispersed and mostly urban minorities, such as the Jews and Belarusians, have increasingly adopted Russian as their native language.<sup>25</sup>

During the post-war decades, the Soviet regime encouraged the language shift towards Russian by promoting its prestige as the de facto official language of the USSR and the dominant language of the cities and by removing institutional barriers to assimilation into the Russian culture for the sake of social mobility. One of the most important measures that undermined the declared policy of institutionalized ethnicity was the principle of free parental choice of the language of instruction for one's children, which was legislated in 1958.<sup>26</sup> Together with some other measures promoting the use of Russian in schools and higher educational institutions, this contributed both to the demotion of the symbolic status of the Ukrainian language and to the undercutting of its communicative function in many areas of social life. These two factors, reinforced by a number of other linguistic practices, clearly undermined the ethnocultural sense of the nation being "built" in the Ukrainian SSR. At the same time, the increasing centralization of Soviet political and economic life challenged the sustainability of "nation building" by promoting a competing project at the all-Union level.

The effect of these developments was far from a straightforward transition from Ukrainian to Russian ethnocultural consciousness. To be sure, the language shift contributed to the discrepancy between the individual's inherited nationality and subjective sense of identity. However, the language of preference did not become by any means the primary determinant of identity; hence, the division of Ukrainian society into Ukrainophones and Russophones (which post-Soviet defenders of the rights of the latter stress in order to deny any grounds and prospects for the nationalizing claims of the Ukrainian-speaking minority) makes no more analytical sense than its division into the titular nation and ethnic minorities. Even the typology based on a combination of language and ethnicity, which divides society into Ukrainophone Ukrainians, Russophone Ukrainians and

---

and Littlefield, 1995), 72.

25. The only group with a large-scale assimilation to the Ukrainian language have been the Poles living mostly in western Ukraine, where Ukrainian has prevailed.

26. See my paper "The Legacy of Brotherhood: The Impact of the Soviet Nationalities Policy on Post-Soviet Nation Building in Ukraine," presented at the conference on Soviet and Post-Soviet Ukraine: A Century in Perspective, Yale University, New Haven, 23-4 April 1999.

(Russophone) Russians, seriously distorts the complicated structure of people's identities.<sup>27</sup>

In this structure, ethnic identification is by no means limited to exclusive categories; instead, it consists of varying degrees of affiliation with two or more groups, as well as weak connections to any one group. According to a nationwide survey conducted in 1993 and 1994, as many as a quarter of all respondents declared themselves to be both Ukrainians and Russians. This share is much larger in eastern and southern Ukraine, first of all in the Donbas, where dual or marginal ethnic identification has been facilitated by a very high rate of intermarriage and urbanization. In a poll conducted in 1991 in Donetsk, more than one-third of the respondents declared a bi-ethnic identity, and more than a half considered themselves to have inherited both Ukrainian and Russian culture.<sup>28</sup> Moreover, there has been no clear linguistic divide, since many people do not equate the language they predominantly use in their everyday life and the language they call their mother tongue (there is a gap of roughly twenty percent between the respective strengths of each language group based on the different criteria). Although some authors view the mother tongue as a fictional indicator with little relevance for the actual linguistic profile of the country, its relative stability in the survey data of the last decade implies that it may shape an individual's identity to no lesser extent than the language of everyday use. Finally, a weak ethnic or linguistic identity or a contradiction between the two usually results in a preference for other forms of identification, most often a civic or territorial one. In the case of the Ukrainian SSR, besides the usual mixture of national and regional or local affiliations, there has also been an affiliation with the all-Union Soviet "nation," which has contrasted with the national or republic affiliation.

Varying relative strengths of ethnic, linguistic, and territorial identifications shape the multi-dimensional structure of individual identity; hence, a group defined in terms of any single factor will consist of very different subsets. The particular social, religious, and historical profiles of regions add to this diversity. It is widely acknowledged that Ukrainians in overwhelmingly Ukrainophone,

---

27. Andrew Wilson, while recognizing that "none of the three main ethno-linguistic categories can be considered a real social 'group,' with a clear identity and fixed boundaries," nevertheless believes that "it is still possible to write of the three as distinct entities" (Wilson, *Ukrainian Nationalism in the 1990s*, 23).

28. Paul S. Pirie, "National Identity and Politics in Southern and Eastern Ukraine," *Europe-Asia Studies* 48, no.7 (November 1996): 1087. Using the data of post-Soviet surveys to draw conclusion about (late-) Soviet identities is, of course, problematical, since the data also reflect the impact of the breakup of the USSR and of the policies of the independent Ukrainian state. I refer only to those indicators that, I believe, have not been significantly influenced by the transition.

largely rural, and traditionally nationalist Galicia are very unlike their ethnic “brethren” in the predominantly Russophone and heavily urbanized and Sovietized Donbas. However, the same can be said of the Russians of these two regions and even the Russians of two mostly Russophone parts of Ukraine, such as the Donbas and Crimea. During the late- and the first post-Soviet years, when mass identities began to influence political developments, the Crimeans had a clear ethnic consciousness, felt little connection to Ukraine, and identified strongly with both the USSR and Russia, while the Donbasers cared much less about their ethnicity and felt as much part of Ukraine as of the USSR.<sup>29</sup> Such diversity has virtually ruled out strong cohesion inside ethnic (or ethno-linguistic) groups and inter-group confrontation. Indeed, as Neil Melvin argues, “the particular configuration of linguistic, hereditary, cultural, and economic elements that constitute ethnicity in different forms across the country serves to reinforce diverse geographical identities more than genealogically defined ethnic ones. Regional competition rather than ethnic polarization forms the substructure of Ukrainian politics.”<sup>30</sup>

### **Ukrainian Elites: “Nationalists” and “Statists”**

In order to check Melvin’s conclusion on the elite level, we should look at how various groups that became salient in the political processes in the late 1980s and early 1990s and might initiate a “nationalizing” course viewed the Soviet legacy and the possible ways of dealing with it. In doing so, we have to keep in mind that the elites’ views were shaped by their experience within the Soviet system.

The elites of the Ukrainian SSR were products of the institutionalization of ethnicity to very different degrees and therefore evaluated ethnicity very differently. The humanistic intelligentsia, particularly the writers, whose very existence depended on retaining the ethnocultural foundations of the republic, resisted, as actively as was possible in any given period, deviations from what they portrayed as “the Leninist norms of the nationalities policy.” At the beginning of perestroika, these elites called for an end to practices that, contrary to the policy of institutionalization, undermined the prescribed correspondence between an individual’s ethnicity and language, such as the parental choice of the language of instruction, or between the territorial and individual “nationality,”

---

29. Compare the analysis of similarities and differences between Russians of the two regions in David J. Meyer, “Why Have Donbas Russians Not Ethnically Mobilized Like Crimean Russians Have? An Institutional/Demographic Approach” in *State and Nation Building in East Central Europe: Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. John S. Micgiel (New York: Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, 1996), 319–20.

30. Melvin, *Russians beyond Russia*, 80.

such as the large-scale immigration of non-Ukrainians to Ukraine.<sup>31</sup> As the writers moved from appeals to the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR to unequivocal opposition, their discourse blended with that of dissidents, who joined them in a new popular movement called Rukh, and acquired elements of Western human-rights language. Still, Rukh's position on the nationality issue was oriented mostly toward "Leninist norms" of institutionalized ethnicity practiced in the 1920s. While propagating a "national revival" of Ukrainians and minorities, the "national-democratic" (i. e., anti-totalitarian and moderate nationalist) opposition aimed at establishing a national state in which the language and culture of the titular group would dominate in all areas of societal life and the minorities would "freely develop" their languages and cultures within regions of compact settlement and pursue some cultural activities outside such regions. To "restore" this nation-state norm, which had allegedly been violated by the Stalinist and later regimes, Rukh envisaged a "de-Russification" of Russophone Ukrainians and members of minorities.<sup>32</sup> This nationalizing programme would require a "truly" Ukrainian state to implement it; hence, its proponents came to call for independence and the removal of the "pro-imperial" nomenklatura. This call could not be supported by the majority of Russian speakers, whose customary linguistic rights and identities were denied. Even for many Ukrainophones, a programme featuring one element of their ambivalent identity and suppressing or neglecting others was hardly attractive.

To the nomenklatura, the ethnocultural essence of the Ukrainian SSR or of the independent state that most of it finally came to support was not a crucial issue. First, its function as an elite was not limited to "its" republic, particularly since Khrushchev had promoted, alongside the rapid growth of the ethnic Ukrainian element in the Party and state apparatus of the Ukrainian SSR, the elevation of Ukrainian leaders to prominent positions in the all-Union power structures.<sup>33</sup> Secondly, the upward mobility of its members within Ukraine did not depend on their fluency in the titular language or even, at least as far as East Slavs were concerned, on their ethnic origin. Therefore, the Ukrainian nomenklatura became increasingly Russophone during the last few decades. Thirdly, its success depended on its ability to follow instructions from the centre and, at the same time, ensure stability in the territory it ruled, that is, its ability to take into account the interests of the local population. To be sure, most members of the

---

31. Volodymyr Kulyk, "Pysmennytske vidrozhennia: Ukrainska derzhavna ideia v dyskursi 'opozytzii vseredyni rezhymu' pershykh rokiv perebudovy," *Suchasnist*, 1998, no. 1: 54–79.

32. Kulyk, *The Legacy of Brotherhood*.

33. Robert S. Sullivant, *Soviet Politics and the Ukraine, 1917–1957* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), chap 7.

Communist Party and the state apparatus were not hostile to the Ukrainian language or to policies favouring it. Therefore they accepted Gorbachev's call for "respect for the national feelings of the Soviet people" without much difficulty, all the more so because this course helped to counter the opposition's claim to power and, at the same time, to wrest more power from the centre. The Ukrainian nomenklatura did not hesitate to follow the example of leaders in other republics in upgrading the official status of the titular language and in declaring Ukraine's sovereignty within the USSR and then her full independence.<sup>34</sup> However, instead of treating Ukraine's failure to meet the criteria of a nation-state as a *distortion* that had to be corrected, the ruling elite viewed it mostly as a *fact* to be taken into account in policy-making. The "multinational nature" of Ukrainian society became one of the most important postulates of the mainstream public discourse. This meant that one had to be very careful in trying to change the inherited ethno-linguistic profile or, according to many, give up such attempts altogether. While recognizing the state's obligation to enhance the role of Ukrainian as the state language and to support groups that had been repressed by the Soviet regime, such as the Crimean Tatars, the authorities nevertheless stressed that the state would treat all citizens equally and refrain from any forcible Ukrainianization. This sensitive approach was rewarded by overwhelming support for independence in the December 1991 referendum by members of all ethnic groups, including ethnic Russians who felt neither alien nor endangered in an independent Ukrainian state.<sup>35</sup>

The presidency of Leonid Kravchuk clearly demonstrated this "non-nationalizing nationalism" of the former Communist nomenklatura. In securing equal social and political rights for all citizens, the Ukrainian state has fully kept its pre-referendum promises. Not only has there been no discrimination in granting citizenship,<sup>36</sup> employment, and education, but the representation of

---

34. See the texts of the Declaration of the State Sovereignty of Ukraine adopted in July 1990 and the Act of Proclamation of the State Independence of Ukraine passed in August 1991 in *Natsionalni protsesy v Ukraini: Istoriia i suchasnist. Dokumenty i materialy*, ed. I. O. Kresina and V. F. Panibudlaska, part 2 (Kyiv: Vyshcha shkola, 1997), 574–8, 603.

35. On the Russians' views, on the eve of the referendum, of independence, inter-ethnic relations in Ukraine and their place in a future state, see Evgenii Golovakha et al., "Russians in Ukraine," in *The New Russian Diaspora: Russian Minorities in the Former Soviet Republics*, ed. Vladimir Shlapentokh et al. (Armonk: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 59–71.

36. Even a simplified procedure for former residents and their descendants who are willing to come back to Ukraine from other countries of the former USSR, which was introduced by successive amendments to the citizenship law of October 1991, has given no privilege to ethnic Ukrainians. See my *Revisiting a Success Story: Implementation of the Recommendations of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to Ukraine, 1994–2001* (Hamburg: Centre for OSCE Research, Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, 2002), chap. 3. Available at

minorities in Parliament and local councils has been, in some cases, higher than their share in the population,<sup>37</sup> and non-Ukrainians have held prominent positions in the executive and judiciary. At the same time, the Ukrainian leadership has consistently avoided the ethnicization of politics, which, it has been believed, could impede social stability and integration. There has been no fixed representation of ethnic groups in the power structures,<sup>38</sup> and the law has prevented the formation of political parties based on ethnic (or regional) criteria. On the other hand, the state's attitude towards cultural diversity has been quite favourable. The law on national minorities, adopted in June 1992, has ensured them the right to national-cultural autonomy, including the learning of minority languages in educational institutions run either by the state or ethnic associations, as well as the funding of various cultural activities from the state budget. The law, which has been highly approved by Western experts, recognizes both the individual rights of citizens choosing to belong to non-Ukrainian ethnic groups and the collective rights of minorities. Despite insufficient funding and bureaucratic obstacles, the cultural life of many ethnic groups has expanded significantly, and the Ukrainian-Russian dichotomy of the last six Soviet decades has been replaced by something like the cultural diversity of the 1920s. Contrary to Brubaker's expectations, the state made virtually no attempt to impede minority contacts with their respective kin-states.<sup>39</sup>

In search of political support for his institution-building efforts, President Kravchuk tried to make an alliance with Rukh and other moderate nationalist parties without allowing them to set the political agenda or giving them key positions in his administration, which he reserved for the old nomenklatura.<sup>40</sup> In particular, he took over much of Rukh's ethnocultural programme and offered

---

<[www.core-hamburg.de](http://www.core-hamburg.de)>.

37. In this regard, minorities living compactly have been in a privileged position, while those dispersed often have appeared to be under-represented. See Viktor Stepanenko, "A State to Build, a Nation to Form: Ethno-Policy in the Ukraine," in *Diversity in Action: Local Public Management of Multi-Ethnic Communities in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Anna-Maria Biro and Petra Kovacs (Budapest: LGI Managing Multiethnic Communities Project, 2001), 335–6.

38. The only exception was granting quotas for the Crimean Tatars and other formerly deported ethnic groups in the 1994 election to the Crimean Parliament. In spite of resolute demands by the Crimean Tatar leaders, supported by some international institutions (most notably the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE), the quotas were not extended to the next elections. See my *Revisiting a Success Story*, chap. 3.

39. Ibid., sec. 1.4. Compare V. B. Ievtukh [Yevtukh], *Etnopolityka v Ukraini: Pravnnychi ta kulturolohichni aspekty* [Kyiv, 1997], 42–50.

40. Compare Alexander J. Motyl, "The Conceptual President: Leonid Kravchuk and the Politics of Surrealism," in *Patterns in Post-Soviet Leadership*, ed. Timothy J. Colton and Robert C. Tucker (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 118.

executive posts to some prominent national-democrats to oversee its implementation. But he did not fully support their nation-building ambitions, the all-embracing realization of which might have provoked an inter-ethnic conflict. Most notably, Kravchuk refrained from rapidly introducing Ukrainian as the dominant language in all public areas. He did not even demand that state officials switch quickly to Ukrainian in their oral or, at least, written communication.<sup>41</sup> Instead, he focused on promoting policies that would reinforce the state's independence rather than its ethno-national character. First of all, as Alexander Motyl argues, "Kravchuk quickly identified Russia as 'the other' against whom the inhabitants of Ukraine might define themselves as Ukrainian. Kiev's conflict with Moscow over the troops stationed in Ukraine, the Black Sea Fleet, the Crimea, foreign assets, and many other things, though above all a clash of two postimperial sovereignties, provided ideal opportunities for such nation building."<sup>42</sup> To anchor this effort in arguably more substantial material, the president encouraged the elaboration and implanting in public consciousness of nationalist myths, traditions, and symbols, particularly those relating to the history of Ukraine in its allegedly incessant resistance to Russia's imperial policies and struggle for independence. While directed against Russian imperialism rather than the Russian people, this propaganda could not but affect the ethnic feelings of Ukraine's Russians, undermining their sense of belonging to the inclusive "people of Ukraine" (the formula used in official discourse in preference to the potentially divisive "Ukrainian people" favoured by nationalist parties).<sup>43</sup> Similarly, the widespread presentation in the state-controlled media of Russian-speaking Ukrainians as *perevertni* (traitors) and *ianyachary* (Janissaries) weakened their support of the new state, while the discursive rejection of the Soviet past (although it was not matched by institutional changes) alienated even many Ukrainophones.

More nationalizing and, thus, provoking of anti-nationalist sentiment were two other endeavours initiated by the national-democrats and supported by Kravchuk. First was the attempt in June 1992 to establish a "national" church (using Ukrainian as the language of worship, autocephalous, uniting all of Ukraine's Orthodox believers, and hence state-favoured) by means of an administrative merger of the Ukrainian part of the Moscow Patriarchate with the newly "restored" Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church. The attempt failed

---

41. Kulyk, *Ukrainskyi natsionalizm*, 30–2. Cf. Dominique Arel, "Language Politics in Independent Ukraine: Towards One or Two State Languages?" *Nationalities Papers* 23, no. 3 (1995): 601–3.

42. Motyl, "The Conceptual President," 114–15.

43. Volodymyr Kulyk, "The Search for Post-Soviet Identities in Ukraine and Russia and Its Impact on Relations between the Two States," *The Harriman Review* 9, nos. 1–2 (Spring 1996): 21–2.

owing to the resistance of most bishops and clergy and the reluctance of many regional officials to follow the president's "unifying" line.<sup>44</sup> The campaign to bring the language of instruction in schools "into optimal concordance with the national composition of the population in each region,"<sup>45</sup> which was launched by the national-democratic leadership of the Ministry of Education in the fall of 1992, had an even greater impact on the people and was more disruptive of state cohesiveness. It was designed primarily to "de-Russify" education and therefore society. While it was quickly implemented in the western and central oblasts, it met with considerable resistance in the east and south, most of all in the Donbas, where virtually no progress was made.<sup>46</sup> Nevertheless, the ministry's initiative was used as an important issue in an effort by the local elites to mobilize the population against Kyiv's "nationalist" policies, which were identified with Kravchuk.<sup>47</sup>

These policies, which were portrayed as "forcible Ukrainianization" and the "breaking of economic ties" with Russia and other post-Soviet states, were directly opposed by the local elites and authorities of eastern and southern Ukraine. They called for granting official status to the Russian language, closer integration within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and greater autonomy for Ukraine's regions. These issues were prominent in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1994 and played an important role in Leonid Kuchma's victory over Kravchuk. The geographical polarization of the Ukrainian electorate (the north and west voted mostly for Kravchuk and the south and east for Kuchma) led some foreign analysts to predict that the country might split in two and lose its independence.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, the survey-proven correspondence between the geographical and the linguistic polarization (Kravchuk was supported by an overwhelming majority of Ukrainophones and Kuchma by an even more impressive majority of Russophones) seemed to demonstrate the paramount importance of the above-mentioned tripartite division of Ukrainian society. Some authors took that division to prove Brubaker's

44. Viktor Ielensky, "Tserkva i polityka u posttotalitarnomu sotsiumi: Ukraina," *Prava liudyny v Ukraini*, no. 13 (1995): 46–7.

45. Decree of the Ministry of Education issued in September 1992. Quoted in Arel, "Ukraine: The Temptation of the Nationalizing State," 174.

46. *Ibid.*, 174–7; Jan G. Janmaat, "Language Politics in Education and the Response of the Russians in Ukraine," *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 3 (1999): 482–7.

47. Meyer believes that it is legitimate to explain the developments in the Donbas by the mobilization effort by the local elites, since his research "discovered no evidence that grass roots mobilization has spontaneously occurred" ("Why Have Donbas Russians," 319).

48. See, for example, "Ukraine: The Birth and Possible Death of a Country," *The Economist*, 7 May 1994.



conflictual prediction, albeit for somewhat differently defined “fields.”<sup>49</sup> Little attention was paid initially to the fact that the elites that won the election, although overwhelmingly Russophone, perceived themselves as representing not the Russian-speaking population, but their respective regions, and wanted not to secede from Ukraine or even reunite it with Russia, but to build the new state according to their version of Ukrainian identity.

Their identity,<sup>50</sup> while similar to that of the part of the former nomenklatura led and exemplified by Kravchuk, was much more opposed to any “nationalization.” The administrative, economic, and cultural elites of the east and south had used mostly Russian throughout their lives and felt a rather strong attachment to Russia, where many of them either had been born or had close relatives, had obtained their higher education, had once worked, or had maintained business contacts. Even those who fully supported Ukraine’s independence saw their Ukrainian and Russian loyalties and identities as quite compatible and strongly disagreed with nationalists’ claims to the contrary.<sup>51</sup> While they were not hostile to the Ukrainian language and culture, most of them had little knowledge of and respect for them and did not want to give up the more familiar and supposedly superior Russian language and culture. It is little wonder that they did not want to see Ukraine as a nation-state and opposed any signs of Ukrainianization, all the more so because Kravchuk’s nation-building effort and alliance with Ukrainian nationalists gave an advantage to Ukrainophones from the western and central oblasts, making the elites from the east and south, which traditionally prevailed in the leadership of the Ukrainian SSR, feel discriminated against. These elites were not ethnically divided or strongly attached to their respective “nationalities.” Nor, unlike the dominant Russians in Crimea, could they afford to mobilize the population in their regions with its ambiguous identities along ethnocultural lines.<sup>52</sup> Instead, as David Meyer

---

49. For instance, Arel tried to apply Brubaker’s theory to the situation in Ukraine, arguing that the “nationalizing intent of the Ukrainian state” was directed against “the group that, irrespective of ethnic background, primarily identifies with the Russian language and culture” (“Ukraine: The Temptation of the Nationalizing State,” 158–9).

50. Assigning those elites a single version of Ukrainian identity is, of course, also an analytical simplification, since identity varies across regions, elite groups, “nationalities,” etc.

51. Stephen Shulman, “Competing versus Complementary Identities: Ukrainian-Russian Relations and the Loyalty of Russians in Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 26, no. 4 (December 1998): 620–4.

52. The data of a survey conducted in 1994 indicate that there was a considerable difference between the attitudes of ethnic Ukrainians and Russians within a given region towards independence. In contrast, language appeared not to be an independent variable influencing a respondent’s political orientation. See Lowell Barrington, “The Geographic Component of Mass Attitudes in Ukraine,” *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics* 38, no.

argues, they felt “a need to mobilize as a general political movement or as a region against another region and its political movement: the nationalist West and Central Ukraine.”<sup>53</sup> In the parliamentary election of March–April 1994, this mobilization featured leftist opposition to both “bourgeois” (that is, market reformist) and “nationalist” distortions of the alleged popular will, and the Communist Party gained a persuasive victory in the east and south. In the presidential campaign later that year, Kuchma combined calls for reform and the “restoration of broken ties,” the latter being more audible to his voters.<sup>54</sup> Having won because the leftists supported him as the “lesser of two evils,” the new president soon disappointed them with his approach not only to the economy, but also to “the national question.”

Kuchma’s failure to meet his electoral promises has been seen as a vivid demonstration of the inevitable nationalist or even nationalizing implications of the post-Communist state building. Indeed, while a lukewarm response to most integration initiatives by Russia or other members of the CIS can be explained by the natural desire of a leader of an independent state to retain as much power as possible, Kuchma’s reluctance to grant the Russian language official status seems to reflect just as nationalist a view of the state as Kravchuk’s. No wonder that many scholars, after initial predictions of radical changes, have been disappointed and pointed out “the large degree of continuity in the nation-building policies” between the two presidencies.<sup>55</sup> This view is supported by the continuous, albeit slower, progress in the Ukrainianization of education, as well as by the gradual progress toward the use of the official language in the (written) work of state institutions, including those of the predominantly Russophone regions. But perhaps the crucial nation-building achievement of the Kuchma regime has been the adoption, in June 1996, of the first post-Soviet constitution, which has confirmed the status of Ukrainian as the sole official language and other attributes of a nation-state (not merely its “nationalist” symbols but even the official division of “the Ukrainian People” into the titular nation, indigenous peoples, and national minorities, which many minority activists disagreed with).<sup>56</sup>

It is no less important, however, to note a difference between the policies of the two presidents. Not only has nation building become less salient as a

---

10 (December 1997): 610–1.

53. Meyer, “Why Have Donbas Russians,” 327.

54. Dominique Arel and Andrew Wilson, “The Ukrainian Parliamentary Elections,” *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1 July 1994, 11–15; and Arel, “Ukraine under Kuchma: Back to Eurasia?” *RFE/RL Research Report*, 19 August 1994, 1–12.

55. Kuzio, “‘Nationalising States’ or Nation Building?” 140.

56. Kulyk, *Ukrainskyi natsionalizm u nezalezhnii Ukraini*, 52–3.

discursive concept under Kuchma, it has also ceased to be a political task valuable in itself and a precondition for viable statehood. Instead, nation building has become merely an instrument for achieving the president's main goal of building a strong state and consolidating his personal power. While it has used some nationalist myths and symbols to help legitimize Ukrainian independence, the regime has not hesitated to give up those motifs of its predecessor's propaganda that might impede state building by alienating sections of the population or elites or impair relations with foreign "partners." The above-mentioned anti-Russian and anti-Russophone propaganda has disappeared from the official discourse, and the Soviet past has been embraced as an "inseparable part of our history." Contentious issues have been largely avoided or presented in different ways in different regions of the country.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, even the mentioned moves, which were seen as continuing Kravchuk's line, have been partly or primarily elicited by imperatives other than those of nation building. As is widely believed, Kuchma has refrained from elevating the status of the Russian language, primarily in the hope of getting the nationalists' parliamentary support for his state-building and reform initiatives, which have been vehemently opposed by the leftists. Similarly, the adoption of nation-state provisions in the constitution was made possible not only by an explicit bargain between the pro-presidential forces and the leftists, but also by a tacit compromise between Kuchma and the nationalists, in which the president accepted the nationalizing aspirations of the latter to obtain their support for broad presidential powers. As soon as he secured their support, the president began to ingratiate himself with other parts of the population who wanted non- or even anti-nationalizing messages; for example, on the eve of the presidential election of 1999, he decided to allow entrance examinations to higher educational institutions to be taken in Russian as well as Ukrainian, and he appeared at the celebrations of the Day of the Russian Navy in Sevastopol beside Mayor Iurii Luzhkov of Moscow, a notorious anti-Ukrainian.

The deliberate ambiguity of the official discourse on ethno-linguistic issues, which has been, perhaps, best demonstrated by Kuchma's formulae "there is only one state language in Ukraine" and "the Russian language should not feel itself foreign here," has made it possible for the authorities to stress whatever they need in a given situation without evoking much protest on either side. To be sure, the regime's policies have given both the supporters of a Ukrainian nation-state and the champions of official bilingualism solid grounds for discontent. However, the ambiguity, moderation, and regional modulation (usually favouring a local majority) of these policies and their public presentations has confined consistent opposition to them to the ranks of nationalist parties and organizations.

---

57. *Ibid.*, 48–50; Wolczuk, "History, Europe and the 'National Idea,'" 680–2.

Perhaps the best evidence for the non-conflictual relationship between the state and the two dominant ethnic and linguistic groups is the fact that the relationship became virtually a non-issue in the parliamentary and presidential elections of 1998–99 and the parties that raised it in their campaign scored very poorly.<sup>58</sup>

## The Minorities

Since members of minorities other than the Russian one have not constituted a significant part of the elites on the national level, it is appropriate in an analysis of ethno-political relations in Ukraine to treat these minorities as “outside” actors in their interaction with the state.<sup>59</sup> In this section, I will briefly outline the prevailing stances of several salient minorities that, supported by their kin-states, could render the relationship within their respective triads a conflicting one.

The Russians warrant a special approach, since they have lacked influential ethnic organizations and have promoted their interests (often not perceived in ethnic terms) through general, non-ethnic political and other institutions. The only exception is Crimea, where local Russian-dominated elites have managed to mobilize considerable support for their irredentist stance, which not only unequivocally excludes the peninsular Russians from the Ukrainian nation (however broadly defined) but also challenges their belonging to the new Ukrainian state. Supported (at least rhetorically) by the Russian Federation, the challenge has provoked the most serious (ethno-)political conflict in the first decade of Ukrainian independence. However, this has not been—at least, not primarily—a conflict between a (majority-dominated) government and a minority asserting its rights. Not only have the Crimean Russians not suffered any social or political discrimination, but they have been able to protect their cultural rights to a much higher degree than Russophone citizens in other parts of Ukraine. While Crimea’s territorial autonomy has few parallels among post-Communist states and could only be dreamed of by many minorities, for a long time the Crimean elites (lacking a clear distinction between Russians and Ukrainians) rejected autonomous status. What they have striven for is sovereign statehood similar to that attained by the Union republics of the USSR in the late 1980s.

---

58. Both the National Front coalition, which called for “truly Ukrainian authorities” for the Ukrainian state, and the Social-Liberal Association, which called for the preservation of the Russian language and culture in Ukraine, failed to clear the four-percent electoral barrier to Parliament. See Paul Kubicek, “What Happened to Nationalists in Ukraine?” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 5, no. 1 (Spring 1999): 29–45.

59. The Russian minority is an “inside” actor in relation to the state because Ukraine’s elite has included ethnic Russians who have seen themselves as representatives of regions or parties, not of their minority. It is in their capacity as members of the elite that they have influenced state policies.

Given that the demands of the regional elites enjoyed considerable mass support for some time and that Russia probably would have intervened had there been large-scale violence, the Crimean conflict would have proved Brubaker's worst predictions had the central authorities resorted to resolute measures to put an end to separatist activity (for example, in May 1992, when the Crimean Parliament declared independence). Instead, Kyiv has attempted to secure the rebellious elites' loyalty by giving them more powers and financial support from the central budget, hardly the actions of a nationalizing regime. When the attempt failed and the newly elected overtly separatist Crimean leadership began to threaten Ukrainian sovereignty over the peninsula in early 1994, the centre still preferred negotiations to force. Kyiv reasserted its control over Crimea only in spring 1995, when it was clear that Moscow would hardly take serious political, to say nothing of military, steps to defend the Crimean authorities who by then were split and had lost much of the initial support of the population. Although Kyiv's measures proved successful, the controversy over the delineation of powers was settled only after the separatists had been replaced by more pragmatic and less nationalist-minded politicians in the parliamentary election of spring 1998. Given the considerable ethnocultural alienation of most Crimeans from Ukraine, the potential for a nationalist mobilization and a Brubaker-type conflict remains. But it will hardly be realized unless Kyiv changes its non-nationalizing policy, which so far has allowed the peninsula to be, in effect, a Russian cultural domain in which there is discrimination against the Ukrainian language and culture.<sup>60</sup>

A minority whose ethno-political preferences perhaps corresponded to Brubaker's patterns to the highest degree might have substantiated his expectations, but it was prevented from doing so by the lack of a kin-state capable of supporting its non-complying stance. Having suffered the most flagrant violation of the principle of ethnic institutionalization; that is, social discrimination on the basis of nationality and the abolition of "their" quasi-national republic, the Crimean Tatars returning to the peninsula after decades of deportation have been eager to get back what they believed had been taken from them. Their maximal goal has been the "restoration" of their "national" republic within Ukraine. In addition to institutions intended to meet the cultural demands of the Crimean Tatars, a political arrangement had to be made to ensure the domination of the "indigenous people."<sup>61</sup> In view of the hostile attitude of the Russian majority in the peninsula and the Ukrainian authorities' usual siding with the stronger and

---

60. Kulyk, *Revisiting a Success Story*, chap. 2.

61. Andrew Wilson, "Politics in and around Crimea: A Difficult Homecoming," in *The Tatars of Crimea: Return to the Homeland*, ed. Edward Allworth, 2d ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 281–97.

more dangerous (potentially destabilizing) group, the Tatars have been left with no special rights in autonomous Crimea. Moreover, they have been denied much of what others have possessed (citizenship, housing, jobs, schools in their native language).<sup>62</sup> Therefore, they have had to struggle for equal social and political rights; at the same time, their leadership has pushed for the creation of institutions capable of “reviving” and sustaining their ethnocultural identity.

A very high level of political mobilization and an authoritative leadership have been important strengths of the Crimean Tatars and, at the same time, potentially conflictual factors in the ethno-political situation. So far the Tatar leaders have been able to contain that mobilization below the point at which a compromise with the state and the majority group would have become almost impossible. Although unequivocally loyal to the Ukrainian state in its conflict with the Crimean separatists, for a long time the Tatar leadership could not persuade the central authorities that Tatar returnees were Kyiv’s arm in the peninsula and deserved its support. The Ukrainian leadership has not only been afraid of provoking stronger opposition from the peninsular Russians, but also has not accepted the ethnicization of politics that the Tatars have suggested. Therefore, the main demands of the latter—guaranteed representation of the Tatars (and other formerly deported ethnic groups) in the Crimean Parliament and local councils, recognition by the state of the representative status of the Mejlis (a standing body elected by the Kurultai, the national assembly of the Crimean Tatars), and granting a status to the Tatar language in Crimea equal to that of Ukrainian and Russian—were ignored for a long time. It took Kyiv until 1998 to solve, at least partly, the pressing problem of the citizenship of the former deportees by concluding an agreement with Uzbekistan (where most of them had lived and automatically received citizenship after the break-up of the USSR) regarding a simplified procedure for changing citizenship. Lately, however, the Ukrainian authorities have been more inclined to meet the Crimean Tatars halfway, all the more so because the separatist mobilization of the Russians has virtually dissipated. With increasing support for the Tatars from international organizations, the preconditions for solving their problems are good,

---

62. Roughly forty percent of the Crimean Tatars returned to Ukraine after her citizenship law came into force in November 1991; hence, they have not been granted Ukrainian citizenship automatically. Not only has the restitution of the former deportees’ property been out of question, but also the authorities have raised numerous obstacles to their purchase of houses and grants of lots for building. The unemployment rate of the returnees has been several times higher than the peninsular average. Finally, there have been virtually no schools with instruction in Crimean Tatar (nor in Ukrainian, for that matter), even after it was declared one of the state languages of the autonomous republic, but without any rights of actual use being entailed by this status. See my *Revisiting a Success Story*, chap. 3.

although the current maximal goal of the Mejlis leadership—the legalization of the indigenous status of the Crimean Tatar people and, therefore, the institutionalization of their special rights—remains hardly achievable.<sup>63</sup>

The two other salient ethnic minorities are the Hungarians and Romanians, most of whom have lived compactly in Transcarpathia and Chernivtsi oblasts. Notwithstanding their similar demographic parameters and ethno-political conditions at the beginning of Ukrainian independence, these groups have pursued rather different paths. The Romanian one has been much more conflictual mainly because, as Susan Stewart explained, the policies of their kin-state have been different from Hungary's. While Hungary has effectively co-operated with Ukraine on minority issues and rendered financial support for solving the problems of its diaspora, Romania has undermined inter-state and intra-state co-operation by failing to renounce unequivocally its claims to parts of Ukrainian territory and by charging Kyiv with discrimination against the Romanian minority. The minority activists of each group have also behaved rather differently: the Hungarians have set modest goals and looked for compromise with the Ukrainian authorities, while the Romanians have pursued maximal goals and interpreted the authorities' resistance as discrimination.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, the potential for conflict in the Romanian case is rather low, since minority representation in the regional and local power structures has secured the necessary channels for co-operation with the state and the Ukrainian majority. Much depends on developments in Romania: her orientation towards European integration will encourage the authorities to follow the Hungarian pattern of dealing with the diaspora, while the strengthening of nationalizing tendencies will exacerbate Bucharest's conflicts with Kyiv and the problems of Ukraine's ethnic Romanians.

As for Ukraine's Russians, most of them have rejected not only the designation "national minority," but also the claims associated with it. They have not needed a fixed political representation, special media for the Russian audience, or the other things that minority activists are usually preoccupied with. Unlike other groups, the Russians have been confronted with the problem not of creating or expanding opportunities for reproducing their particular ethnocultural identity, but of retaining a vast array of such opportunities inherited from the Soviet period. At the moment, their exceptional position seems endangered primarily in education; hence, education has become the main focus of concern for Russian organizations in Ukraine and their supporters in the Russian

---

63. *Ibid.*

64. Susan Stewart, "Nationality Policy as a Means of Conflict Regulation: The Case of Ukraine," paper presented at the convention of the Association for the Study of Nationalities, Columbia University, New York, 13–15 April 2000.

Federation.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, defenders of the rights of the Russian minority face the difficulty of defining the object of their concern. As I have argued, a clearly ethnic Russian identity is rarely dominant in individual identifications, at least outside of Crimea. Therefore ethnic Russians cannot be distinguished sharply from Russophones and even from Ukrainophones who use mostly Russian in some social practices, such as the media. As long as the bilingual or mostly Russian-speaking individual with a vague or mixed ethnic identity constitutes the predominant type of Ukrainian citizen (re)produced by state policies, a conflict within the Russian triad is hardly possible.

## Conclusion

The above analysis of the ethno-political situation in Ukraine demonstrates that avoidance of violent conflicts and majority-minority polarization has been possible mainly because of the non-nationalizing attitudes of the ruling elites. These attitudes have reflected both the Soviet formative context of the elites, among whom members of the former nomenklatura have been predominant, and their perception of the ethno-political preferences of the masses, which were determined by the ambiguous Soviet policies on the nationality question. By the end of the first decade of independence, a tacit consensus seems to have been reached, both at the level of the elite and of the population at large, that Ukraine cannot be a state “of and for the Ukrainian ethnocultural nation,” and most of those who had dreamed of such a state have accepted this fact. It is true that some political forces would like to have a “more Ukrainian” Ukraine, and their resoluteness and influence may increase as a result of their opponents’ attempts to establish a binational state in which the Russian language and culture, because of their privileged starting position, would actually dominate. However, even if

---

65. The national share of pupils in Russian-language schools dropped from fifty percent in 1991 to thirty-four percent in 1998. Still, this share remains much higher than the percentage of ethnic Russians in Ukraine’s population (22.1 percent in the 1989 census) and even somewhat higher than that of persons who declared Russian their native language (32.8 per cent). Moreover, instruction in Russian still predominates in the east and south. At the same time, the Russian language has strengthened its position in the media and book publishing during the independence decade. See Roman Solchanyk, “Russians in Ukraine: Problems and Prospects,” in *Cultures and Nations of Central and Eastern Europe: Essays in Honor of Roman Szporluk*, ed. Zvi Gitelman et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, 2000), 542–6. Nevertheless, Russian activists in Ukraine and politicians and officials in Russia have complained that the Russian language is being gradually forced out from Ukraine. Since Vladimir Putin’s election as Russia’s president in early 2000, Moscow has significantly increased its pressure on Kyiv to put an end to this policy and has used this issue largely as a means of wresting concessions from Kyiv on political and economic issues. For details, see my *Revisiting a Success Story*, chap. 4.



nationalizing tendencies re-emerge or grow more powerful as the political situation changes, they will not lead to discrimination against the minorities and will therefore not provoke mass protest. Most probably, the current ambiguous and inconsistent policy will persist, at least in the short run. While it contributes to social integration, this policy impedes the formation of a democratic state and society, because it discourages social actors from articulating specific ideological and political positions and fails to develop mechanisms for reconciling them. This problem is not limited to ethno-political relations, however: it is a general problem for contemporary Ukraine.