

East–West dichotomy and political conflict in Ukraine – Was Huntington right?

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Abstract

In his work the Clash of Civilizations S.P. HUNTINGTON classified Ukraine as a “cleft country.” In our view, the current discord in Ukraine is rooted in the political divisions that have frequently characterised the post-communist countries. In Ukraine, owing to a history of divergent socio-economic development in the various regions, these divisions are strongly regional. The dichotomic socio-economic framework reflects not only ethnic and religious differences but also such factors as urbanisation, economic development, and even natural elements. The resulting political divide in Ukraine may be traced to the dichotomy of its national identity. The dividing line is between east and west, urban and rural, and Russian-speaking and Ukrainian-speaking Ukraine. Politically, it is between “Maidan-Ukraine” and “Anti-Maidan-Ukraine”. The divide runs along the Uman’–Kharkiv line between the forest zone and the steppe. In the 18th century the steppe – which had once been a corridor for the nomadic peoples – became a frontier territory for the Ukrainians and then for Tsarist Russia. The Russian ties of cities in the region were further strengthened by industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries and by Russification in the Soviet era. The Soviet-made famine (*Holodomor*) and the events of World War II (the actions of the UPA) heightened Ukraine’s political dichotomy. Since independence Ukraine’s political elite has failed to address the problem in an adequate manner. The recent escalation of the conflict is due to a lack of political cohesion in the young state and the gravitational effect of the major powers rather than primarily to some kind of civilizational difference. By accentuating Ukraine’s economic and financial difficulties, the global crisis has made the country even more vulnerable.

Keywords: Ukraine, dichotomy, Uman’–Kharkiv line, ethnicity, society, conflict, HUNTINGTON

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Introduction

In his much-cited work, the Clash of Civilizations HUNTINGTON classified Ukraine as a “cleft country” (HUNTINGTON, S.P. 1993a). Some may regard the events of the spring of 2014 as the fulfilment of his “prediction”. The main line of argument in HUNTINGTON’S work concerns the fault lines between the major civilizations, which, in HUNTINGTON’S view, are determined primarily by religion and culture. Adding to this idea, we note the following in connection with Ukraine: although, at the time of the last census in 2001, only 66.3% of Ukraine’s inhabitants self-identified as Ukrainian native speakers and 77.8% as ethnic Ukrainians (BOCHKOV’S’KA, A. *et al.* 2008), it is also true that 97.2% of the population spoke one of the East Slavic languages (www.ukrcensus.gov.ua) and three-quarters were Eastern Orthodox or Greek Catholic Christians (BYCHENKO, A. and DUDAR, N. 2002). In other words, these people are part of the same (Slavic-Orthodox) major civilization. Ukraine’s 3.2 million Greek Catholics constitute the largest religious minority (BYCHENKO, A. and DUDAR, N. 2002); they are concentrated in Galicia and in Transcarpathia (Zakarpattia). Meanwhile, the country’s 8 million ethnic Russians do not form a majority apart from Crimea and several raions (districts). The main fault line, therefore, is not religious affiliation or ethnicity, but arises from an interaction of factors that we seek to identify in this study by exploring the historical, social and political processes and the spatial and geographical contexts of the present conflict.

The current discord in Ukraine is rooted in the political divisions that have frequently characterised the post-communist countries and have been accentuated by the global economic crisis. Owing to divergent socio-economic development in the various regions of Ukraine, these divisions have deep historical roots and are strongly regional. This regional aspect is not seen in the other post-communist countries. This socio-economic divergence is basically historical in origin, but alongside ethnic and religious aspects we can also identify such influencing factors as urbanisation, economic development, and even natural elements.

In the more than two decades since independence, the political elite of the young independent state has failed, in general, to mitigate the regional differences and strengthen the unity of the country. Indeed, Ukraine’s unity has been due almost exclusively to the interests of the major powers (The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances, 1994) rather than to domestic socio-political cohesion. The absence of socio-economic reforms, policies promoting the Ukrainian language and centralised government rather than regionalisation, and tensions arising in the wake of the global economic crisis have strengthened separatism. In this process the actions of the major foreign powers have been a contributory factor. Ukraine has thus been incapable of responding effectively to the centrifugal forces created by the major powers (NATO/EU vs. Russia). At regular intervals and even amid the

discord of 2014, a majority in Ukrainian society – in both the eastern and western parts of the country – have expressed the demand for an independent and united Ukraine. At present, however, Ukrainian identity means something very different to people in the West Ukrainian L'viv (Galicia) and to their fellow citizens in the East Ukrainian Donets'k (Donbas) (HRYZAK, J. 2002; HARAN, A. 2002).

The aim of this study is to present the Ukrainian dichotomy and then to explore, from a historical perspective, the processes that have led to the current impasse and their effect on the dichotomy, which relates to identity and to such societal factors as ethnicity, language, culture and urbanisation. We seek also to investigate the political dimensions of the dichotomy as reflected in the election results and in the current politico-military conflict. In the course of our analysis, we made reference to historical sources as well as to census and election statistics. Further, when examining the spatial aspects of the present conflict, we performed a media analysis, based on which we compiled a regional database and thematic map of events in Ukraine between November 2013 and May 2014. When collecting the spatial-specific information, we explored not only the classical printed and electronic Ukrainian, Russian and international sources, but also the so-called social media, including place-related news stories shared on Facebook or on Twitter (e.g. #euromaidan) and Tumblr. These latter sources not only play an increasingly important role in mass media, but also, through their reporting, they themselves often become shapers of events, as we saw at the time of the so-called Arab Spring (DELONG-BAS, N.J. 2013).

Following the publication of our atlas *Ukraine in Maps* (KOCIS, K. *et al.* 2008), it is not our purpose in this article to offer a comprehensive account of the historical development of Ukraine, the ethnogenesis of the Ukrainian people, or the social, ethnic and economic processes underway in the country and its spatial divisions. Rather, we focus on the causes of the regional dichotomy and, within these confines, take into account only those factors that influence this dichotomy.

Ukraine as a state and the Ukrainians as a nation

Ukraine's regional diversity (the East–West dichotomy) has three interrelated causes:

(1) On the present territory of Ukraine, there was, in essence, no unified and independent country in the longer term until the mid-20th century. The Ukrainian-Russian boundary began to emerge in the early 1920s under the auspices of the Soviet Union, and the country's present territory was formed by 1954. Further, Ukraine won independence only in 1991 (WILSON, A. 2002; YEKELCHYK, S. 2007).

(2) Owing to the territorial fragmentation, the term Ukraine had a rather broad meaning until the early 20th century. Ukraine was first mentioned in 1187, in the so-called "Chronicle of Ipaty", but the territory to which the au-

thor was referring is still disputed even today (PIVTORAK, H.P. 2004). According to some commentators, the very name of the country – u-kraina – means borderland, periphery or frontier region. Other authors, however, have claimed that u-kraina means “in/inside the country, domestic land” (SKLYARENKO, V. 1991; PIVTORAK, H.P. 2004).

(3) Reflecting the fragmentation and the lack of conceptual clarity surrounding the term Ukraine, identity also exhibits dichotomic features (KHMELKO, V. and WILSON, A. 1998). According to a survey conducted in L'viv and in Donets'k in 2000, 78% of the population of L'viv self-identified primarily as Ukrainians. Meanwhile, in Donets'k, 45% of respondents self-identified as Soviet citizens, with only 23% self-identifying as Russians and 26% as Ukrainians (HRYZAK, J. 2002).

In the eastern half of the country – and especially among the ethnic Russian population – the terms “Ukraine” and “Ukrainian” are connected in people's minds with Russia's periphery. In contrast, the inhabitants of western Ukraine generally possess the strongest Ukrainian national identity (HARAN, A. 2002). In that area, Ukraine means a nation and a country that is distinct from Russia in terms of both identity and language. The origins of this independent national consciousness can be traced all the way back to the Kievan Rus. Meanwhile, the Russians are regarded as a people that developed subsequently, having diverged from the European path of development under Tatar rule. This sharp differentiation from the Russians is also a result of the different path of historical development taken by Ukrainians after the disintegration of the still united East Slavic state, the Kievan Rus. It was this ethnogenesis that gave rise to the independent Ukrainian nation (MAGOCSI, P.R. 1996).

Historical and geographical roots of regional diversity in Ukraine

Steppe and the forest zone, as the dichotomic arena of societal development

The natural landscape of Eastern Europe, including that of Ukraine, exhibits a fundamental duality. The forest steppe and forest region lies to the north-west of the Uman'–Kharkiv line, while to the south-east of this line we find the steppe zone (KARÁCSONYI, D. 2006) (*Figure 1*).

The forest zone is the ancient homeland of the early Slavs who were tillers of the land (ISAEV, D.V. red. 2012a). It was here that the East Slavic Empire of Kiev (Kyiv) arose, to be followed by Muscovy to the north-east. In contrast, the steppe zone to the south was the home of the nomads, sometimes forming part of a great empire stretching from Central Asia to the Carpathian Basin – the Hunnic Empire and the Golden Horde – and sometime becoming

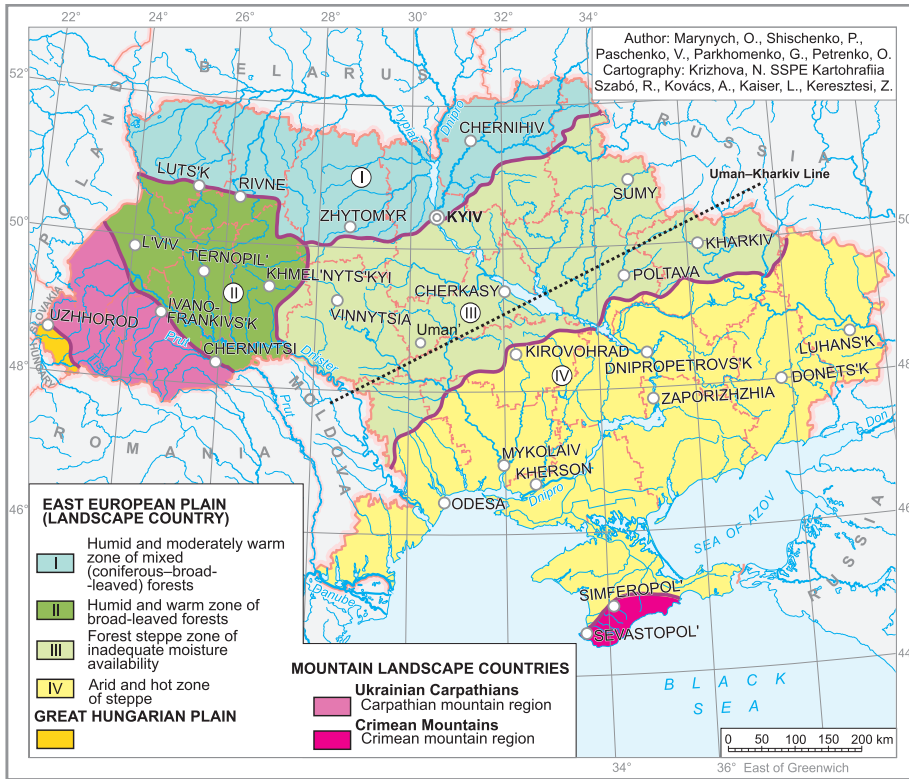


Fig. 1. Physical-geographical divisions of Ukraine

a “highway” for nomadic peoples. The great nomadic empires managed to extend their power to the Slavs living in the forest zone for shorter or longer intervals, but they could not retain control of the forests in the long term.

Until the 18th century, the Slavs were similarly unable to control the steppe, as they were preoccupied with their domestic battles – with the break up of the Kievan Rus and with Tatar domination – and then with the rivalry between Poland (Poland-Lithuania) and Russia. It was at this time that the differentiation of the Eastern Slavs began, whereby Ukrainian and Belarusian in the Polish-Lithuanian territories became separated from the Russian language and culture which dominated the areas ruled by Muscovy (the Russian Empire) from its growing base in Moscow (which was a Tatar vassal for some time). This cultural separation was accentuated by the Union of Brest (1596), at which the Orthodox Christians living under Polish rule recognised the authority of the Pope in Rome. During the Lithuanian and later Polish-Lithuanian supremacy (from the 14th century) the Ukrainians were enriched by progressive western European ideas (SMOLYI, V. 2008).

Ukrainians in a power triangle

By the 16th century, the central area of present-day Ukraine had become a marginal zone in the struggle between the power triangle of Muscovy, the Polish Rzeczpospolita (Commonwealth), and the Ottoman Empire with their Crimean Tatar vassals. The historical evolution of Ukrainians is fundamentally punctuated around this time (SMOLYI, V. 2008). On the margins of the steppe, in the “Wild Plains”, there arose a free, semi-military peasant group. Having escaped serfdom, this group – the Cossacks – became a prerequisite and a means for the conquest of the steppe. With the west-east migration of this group, the Ukrainian ethnic territory reached the margins of the steppe in the east between the mid-16th and mid-17th centuries (LOZA, Y. 2005a, 2005b) (*Figure 2*).

The balance of power between Muscovy, Poland and the Ottoman Empire gradually broke down in the course of the 17th century. At that time, the Russian Empire, which had become increasingly powerful, started to push the Poles out of Eastern Europe. In this long process the most important development in relation to Ukraine was the decision of the Cossack state of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi to break away from the Poles and form an alliance with the Russian Tsar (1654, Pereiaslav Agreement) (*Figure 3*).

Although some historians – e.g. HRUSHEVSKYI, M. (1904), the time-honoured Ukrainian historian – trace the emergence of the Ukrainians as far back as Halych, and even to the Kievan Rus, the Cossacks were the first ethnic community that came to reflect the characteristic features of the Ukrainians as an ethnically independent society. They were the only force who would spar with neighbouring states in the name of the Ukrainians, fighting for their right to an existence and economic and spiritual development. In the political field, the Cossacks established a new era of Ukrainian nation-building (SMOLYI, V. 2008).

The Treaty of Andruszów / Andrusovo (1667), which settled the fate of the Cossack territories for a good hundred years until the partition of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795), conserved the east-west division of Ukraine along the Dnieper. The right-bank of the Dnieper (Pravoberezhzhia-Ukraine) remained under Polish rule, while the left-bank (Liovoberezhzhia-Ukraine), the Hetmanschyna (Hetmanate), came under Russian control. Following the final partition of Poland (1795), Ukraine became the Russian Empire’s western borderland. In 1772, the central parts of present-day Ukraine and then, in 1793, the entire country apart from Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia, which had become part of the Habsburg Empire, were integrated into the Russian Empire (*Figure 4*).

Despite being integrated into the Austrian and Russian empires, the Ukrainians managed to significantly develop their culture. The result of this was a phenomenon of cultural and national revival in the middle of the 19th century that further stimulated the development of a national movement at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries (SMOLYI, V. 2008).

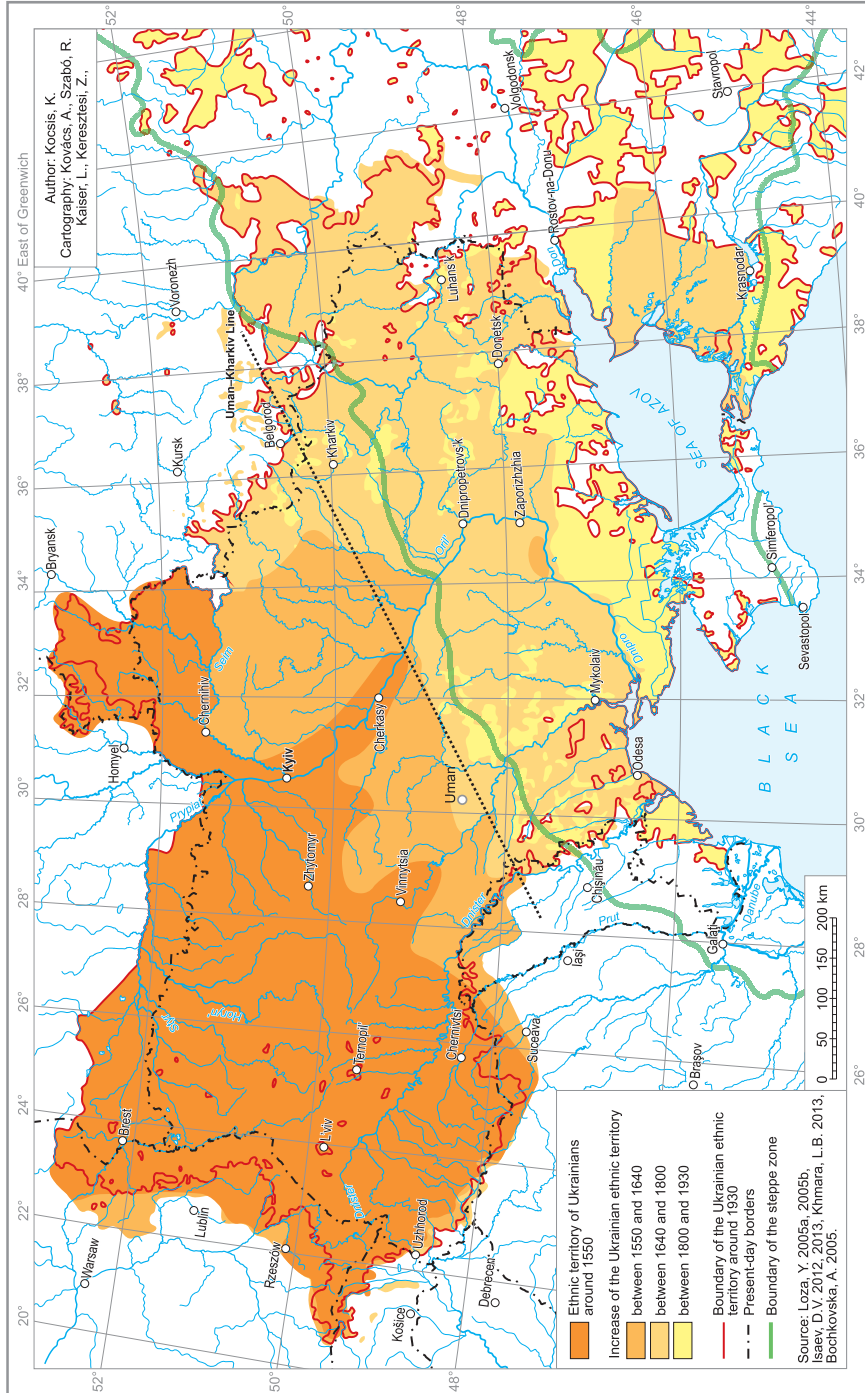
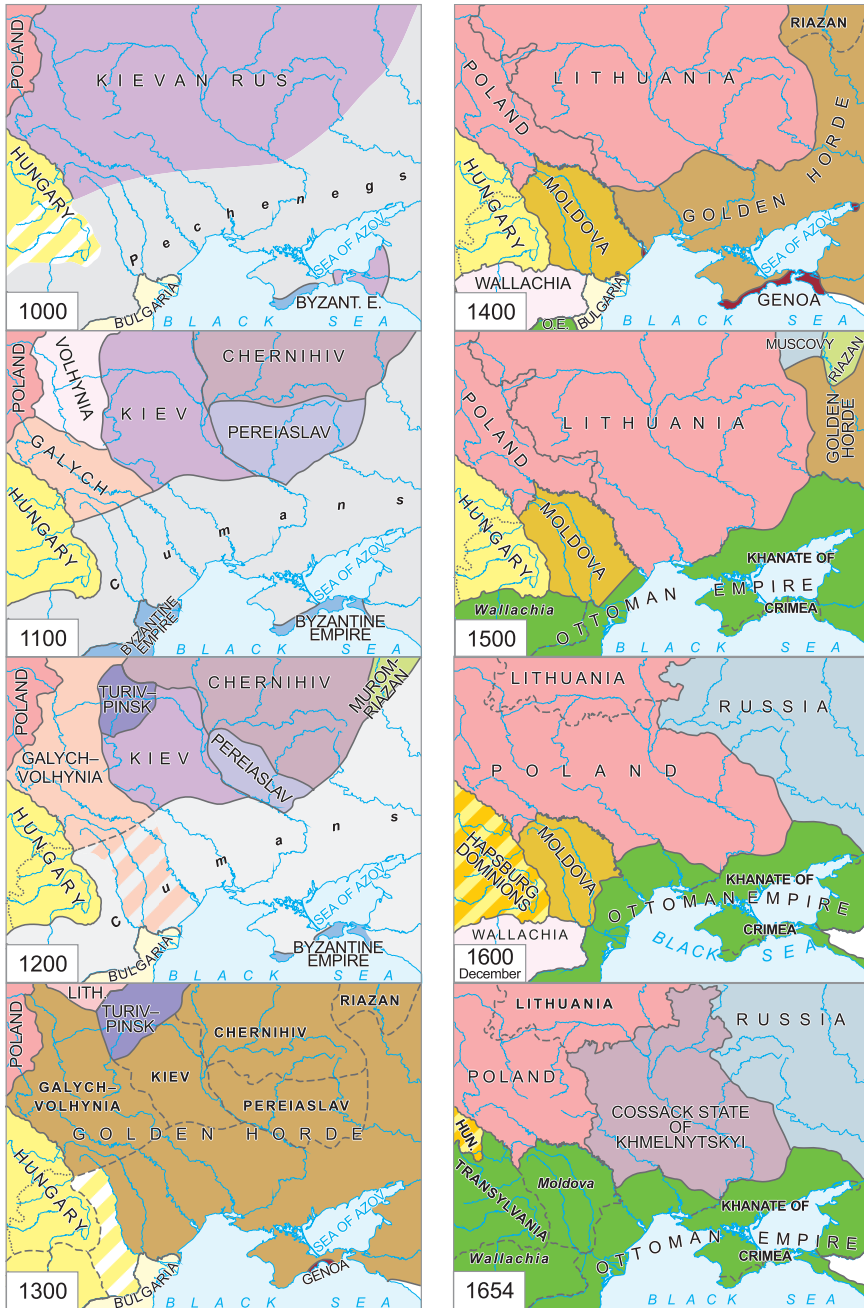
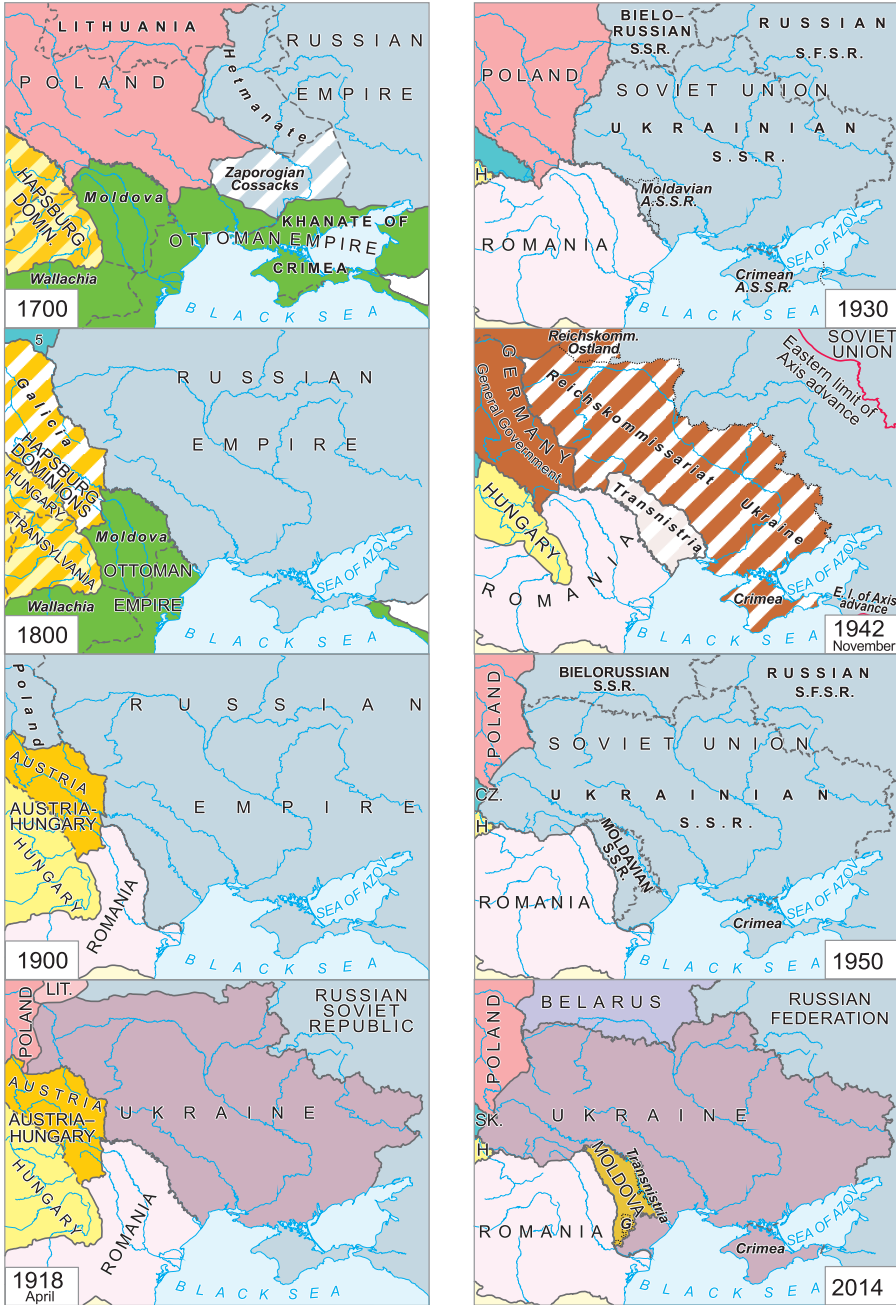


Fig. 2. Change in the Ukrainian ethnic territory, 16th–20th century



Author: Bereznyay, A. (www.historyonmaps.com), Kocsis, K. Cartography: Szabó, R., Kaiser, L.

Fig. 3. States on the present territory of Ukraine, 1000–1654



Author: Bereznay, A. (www.historyonmaps.com), Kocsis, K.

Cartography: Kaiser, L., Szabó, R.

Fig. 4. States on the present territory of Ukraine, 1700–2014

Russian colonisation in the steppe

During the reign of Catherine the Great, the Russian Empire “defeated” the steppe by the end of the 18th century, put an end to the last autonomy of the Cossacks (1775: devastation of Zaporozhian Sich) and advanced as far as the Black Sea (1783: occupation of Crimea), thereby achieving a strategic aim of its expansion. In the newly unified region, the way was open to the colonisation of a sparsely populated part of the steppe that had lain outside the control of the central (former Polish, later Russian) authority (*Figure 2*). The region was organised into a governorate known as New Russia (Novorossiia) (MAGOCSI, P.R. 1996). The Tsarist authorities invited hundred of thousands of settlers to the newly conquered territory. Migration was not spontaneous, as it had been to a lesser or greater extent at the time of the Cossacks (SUBTELNY, O. 2000). Until the beginning of the 19th century, successive waves of migrants – Germans, Serbs, Czechs, Bulgarians and Greeks – arrived in the region, but the Ukrainians and Russians were clearly the largest groups of settlers.

The coastal region became an integral part of the Russian Empire much sooner than did the steppe, which turned into an internal periphery. The late 18th century saw the foundation of Sevastopol, Odesa, Kherson and Mykolaiv on the Black Sea coast and of Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. These towns became bases for the expanding Russian navy and their role in commerce also grew. It was then that the fertile Chernozem soils of the Ukrainian steppe were ploughed to produce grain for export (MAGOCSI, P.R. 1996), resulting in a booming trade in grain. This led to the rapid development of Odesa as the principal grain port in the steppe zone.

Due to colonisation and the founding of new cities, the southern regions of present-day Ukraine increasingly became, in the course of the 19th century, a frontier region for Russians. The increase of population of the four governorates in the steppe zone (formerly “New Russia”) surged after the conclusion of the Crimean War (1856) and the Russian emancipation of serfs (1861). There was a wave of migration from the inner central regions of the Russian Empire to the peripheral areas, including the governorates of New Russia (MAGOCSI, P.R. 1996). Kyiv and the major cities already had a Russian majority during the census of 1897 (CHORNYI, S. 2001). The population of the Black Sea Coastal Lowland (including Odesa and the other major seaports) increased nine-fold between 1810 and 1910, while the inner steppe zone (Kharkiv and Katerinoslav governorates) saw a five-fold population increase (KARÁCSONYI, D. 2008).

The process of industrialisation, which began on the territory of present-day Ukraine at the end of the 19th century, added to the regional polarisation, as the territorial distribution of mineral resources in the country is unequal. The coal and salt of Donets Basin (Donbas) in the East, the iron ore of Kryvyi Rih and Kerch and the manganese ore of Nikopol were the raw materials on which

a significant industrial base could be built. By the end of the 19th century, the increase of population of the coastal governorates began to decline, while the industrialising inner steppe regions moved ahead in terms of the rate of population increase (KARÁCSONYI, D. 2008). In the eastern half of the steppe region, heavy industry underwent rapid growth. Since industrialisation had begun earlier in the Ural Mountains (Russia, 17th century), Russians from that region were overrepresented among arrivals in Ukraine's industrial regions and they made up the skilled workforce (SUBTELNY, O. 2000). Consequently, the share of the Russian population increased further in the early 20th century.

The shaping of Ukraine within the Soviet frame

After a short-lived period of independence (Ukrainian People's Republic, 1917–1920 and Western Ukrainian People's Republic in Galicia, 1918), most of Ukraine's present territory became a part of the Soviet Union (1922) under the terms of the Treaty of Riga (1921). Galicia and Volhynia were a part of Poland until 1939, while North Bukovina (today Chernivtsi oblast) belonged to Romania until 1940, while Transcarpathia was a part of Czechoslovakia in the period 1919–1939 and then again a part of Hungary until 1944.

Ukraine began to emerge in its current form in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. In 1922, the country officially became a "founding" member of the Soviet Union and its precise borders with Russia and Belarus were set out. Concurrently, as a result of the relatively liberal Soviet ethnic and linguistic policy characteristic of the 1920s ("Korenisatsia"), Ukrainian culture and literacy began to undergo a Renaissance, and the authorities attempted to eradicate illiteracy in the entire population.

In the Ukrainian countryside the NEP (New Economic Policy proposed by Lenin, 1921–1928) offered a brief interval for social advancement, but the rural middle class that prospered as a result of this policy (and generally the total peasantry) was destroyed physically by Stalinist terror during the *Holodomor* (man-made famine, Hunger-extermination) (1932–33). About 3–8 million people died due to an artificially engineered famine, particularly affecting the Ukrainian peasantry (KULCHITSKYI, S. 2008; FRANCO, J.E. and CIESZYNSKA, B. 2013). The greatest population losses occurred in the central zone of the country, the Dnieper area, where Ukrainian peasant society, which had considerable political potential and was determined to resist enforced collectivisation, was almost completely liquidated (KULCHITSKYI, S. 2008; VALLIN, J. *et al.* 2009).

Whereas rural society was threatened by political and physical destruction, from 1928, with the commencement of the First Five-Year Plan, industry recovered ("second industrial revolution"). In consequence, there was unprecedented urban population growth in the 1930s in the eastern steppe areas. The

major industrial centres – constituting social support bases for the Soviet Union – took on their present form during this period. The four centres in the process of industrialisation were Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Kryvyi Rih and Donetsk (Stalino). Between 1926 and 1939, the population of Kharkiv doubled to 840,000. This was due not only to industrialisation, but also to the fact that until 1934 the city was the capital of Soviet-Ukraine. On the eve of World War I, rural inhabitants had accounted for around four-fifths of Ukraine's population. Between 1913 and 1939, the number of urban dwellers doubled, as millions of peasant farmers, fearing collectivisation and the man-made famine (*Holodomor*), fled to the growing Soviet industrial cities where they soon lost their rural roots.

The country experienced massive immigration of Russians in the frame of Soviet industrialisation. The Ukrainian-Russian ethnic changes were controlled by the migration flows and assimilation processes arising as a product of the ethnic policy in the Soviet Union. "Ukrainisation" in the early Soviet period (1921–32) had led to an increase in the ratio of Ukrainians from 72% to 74.8%. The following period was characterised by the persecution of Ukrainians and "Russification" (БОЧКОВС'КА, А. *et al.* 2008). The Russian minority's share of the population increased from just 8.1% in 1926 to 22% in 1989. Most of the increase was due to inward migration, and a smaller part to the Russification of Ukrainians and to the ethnic homogenisation that occurred in the 20th century (World War II, Holocaust, deportations), whose principal victims were Jews, Poles, Tatars and Germans (*Figure 5*).

From the 1950s until the 1980s, Russification exerted a lesser or greater effect on ethnic relations (EBERHARDT, P. 1994). The urban population ratio reached 50% in the mid-1960s. The 1960 and 1970s witnessed an annual increase of half a million in the population of the block of flats-cities ("Khrushchyovka-cities"), which lacked all forms of social cohesion. The urban population grew until the 1989 census, when it peaked at around 34.8 million. By the 1980s, apart from in western Ukraine, the most advanced cities tended to be Russian-speaking, while the more backward countryside continued to be Ukrainian-speaking. Such rural areas experienced a fall in population, caused by emigration and – from the 1970s onwards – by the low natural increase rate of an aging society.

The struggle among interest groups in the independent Ukraine

After Ukraine left the Soviet Union, the centralised structures began to fall apart. In the early 1990s, the various regions sought to decouple themselves from the central government in Kyiv along the dividing lines in public administration. During this period, some were already arguing that the newly independent Ukraine needed to become a federal state like Germany (HARAN, A. 2002). Centralising traditions, however, rendered this impossible. The secessionist aspira-

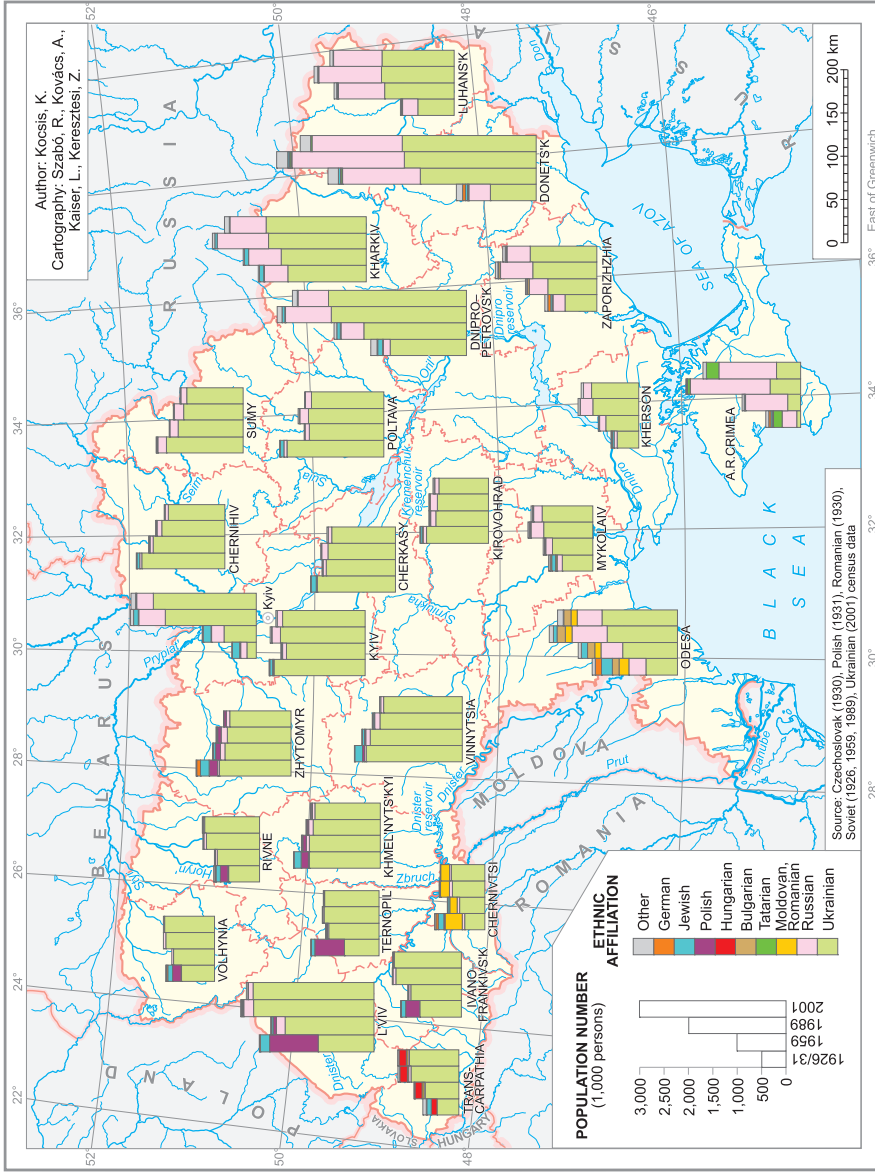


Fig. 5. Change in the ethnic composition of the population on the present territory of Ukraine, 1926–2001

tions of Crimea culminated in a political conflict with Russia. In the end, the peninsula received broad autonomy, becoming the only autonomous republic within Ukraine. Similar ambitions were a factor in the east (in the oblasts (regions) of Donetsk and Luhans'k), in southern Ukraine and also in Transcarpathia (HARAN, A. 2002). In 1991, the "Democratic Union of New Russia" set out its goal of reviving the former New Russia (Novorossiya) and achieving independence from Ukraine (HARAN, A. 2002). Donetsk, Odesa, L'viv and Simferopol became regional power centres alongside the central government.

In post-independence Ukraine, regional "clans" controlled by the so-called oligarchs became a peculiar element in the country's regional structure. The clans were in fact business interest groups (HARAN, A. 2002; ÅSLUND, A. 2005) that had established their economic and political influence in the course of the privatisation process. Their impact was felt on the politics of the various regions, and they dominated the economy. Such groups were "in charge" in the Donetsk Basin as well as in Dnipropetrovs'k and in Kyiv (ÅSLUND, A. 2005). The east-west division of Ukraine has become particularly acute since the country's Orange Revolution (2004) (*Table 1*).

East–West dichotomy today – an ethnic, linguistic, religious, cultural, economic or political dichotomy?

Ethnic Ukrainians versus Ethnic Russians?

The titular nation of the country, the Ukrainians (37.5 million) constituted 77.8%, the Russians (8.3 million) 17.3% of the total population in 2001. Only in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea did their ratio remain below 50% (24.3%) (*Figure 6*). Aside from the Russians, Ukraine's other minorities add variety to the ethnic mix, but they do not influence the country's regional divisions (MOLOCHKO, V.V. 2003).

The Russian-Ukrainian ethnic boundary cannot be precisely drawn, as there is no clear separation between the two groups (KHMELKO, V. and WILSON, A. 1998; WILSON, A. 1998). The Russian share of the population decreases steadily from the south-east to the north-west. Indeed, ethnic Russians live mainly in the industrialised eastern regions of the country (HARAN, A. 2002). Their ratio is especially high in Crimea, the only region of the country where Russians form an absolute majority (58.3%). Urban dwellers account for 86.8% of the Russian minority population. Russians are present in every Ukrainian city, but their share within the urban population ranges from 5–8% in Western Ukraine to 25–40% in Eastern Ukraine. More than half of the urban dwellers in Donetsk Basin and in Crimea are Russians. In rural areas, the Russian presence is limited almost completely to the steppe region, where the share of Russian population in certain raions (districts) makes up 20–30%.

Table 1. Frameworks, characteristic processes and dimensions of regional dichotomy of Ukraine in various historical periods

Period	Framework	Characteristic process	Dimension
Until the 15 th century	Nature - society	Spontaneous processes reflecting the opportunities presented by the natural environment: nomadic pasture farming on the steppe, agriculture in the forest zone	Slavs in the forest – Nomads on the steppe
16 th century	Religious policy, geopolitics	Union of Brest (1596) – Greek Catholicism Emergence of Ukrainian identity in the peripheral regions	Polish (West) – Russian (East)
17–18 th centuries	Geopolitics	The first state formation of the Ukrainian people living in the conflict zone between the power triangle of Poland, Russia and the Ottoman Empire, then the Russian conquest of the East European and steppe areas, the aim of which was to secure access to warm water ports and achieve the defeat/partition of Poland, attempts to impose bondage on the free peasant farmers of the steppe	Old, Slavic areas – new steppe areas
Mid-18 th to mid-19 th century	Geopolitics, urban and economic policy	Establishment of port cities on the coast as military bases or trade gateways, the main period of Slavic colonisation of the steppes – foundation of Cossack (Russian/Ukrainian) stanitsas, Generalissimo Suvorov (Pridnistroviya)	Old, Slavic areas – conquest of the new steppe areas
Mid-19 th century to 1917	Economic and industrial policy	Integration of the region into the capitalist economy, spread of commodity-based agriculture (wheat), traditions of a free peasantry go back much further in Ukraine than in Russia (1861, 1906), prospective mining in inner steppe areas, coal of Donets Basin – arrival of Russian industrialists from Russia's older industrial regions, rise of Ukrainian identity in Austria-Hungary (Galicia) and in Russia – or limitation of this in Russia (Ukrainian=Little Russian)	Old, Slavic areas – new steppe areas West–East

Table 1. continued

Period	Framework	Characteristic process	Dimension
1917–1928	Economic, cultural and language policy	Poland (Polonization) and Czechoslovakia vs. Soviet Union (Korenisatsia – Ukrainization, strengthening the Ukrainian culture), establishment of Soviet borders of Ukraine	West–East
1928–1939	Economic (industrial) and ethnic policy	Poland (Polonization) – Soviet Union (Russification, 1931–32 Holodomor, Hunger-extermination vs. First and Second Five-Years Plans, industrialization in the East – continuous Russian immigration)	West (agrarian) – Middle (disintegrating agrarian) – Southeast (becoming industrialized)
1939–1945	Military policy	UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) vs. Soviet Power (military opposition)	West–East
1945–1991	Cultural, language and urban policy	Integration of regions into the Soviet Ukraine, Russification of changing intensity, industrialization and intensive urbanization 1954 – annexation of Crimea from Russia to Ukraine	Rural West – Industrialized, urbanized East Ukrainian village – Russian city
1991–2004	Cultural, language and economic policy	Ukrainization of varying intensity, slow transition, crisis of eastern industrial areas, transformation crisis, independence aspirations, the struggle between interest groups	Regional ambitions clash with central authority
2004–2014	Cultural, language and economic policy	Growing dominance of the east-west split, permanent political crisis, global economic crisis	West–East

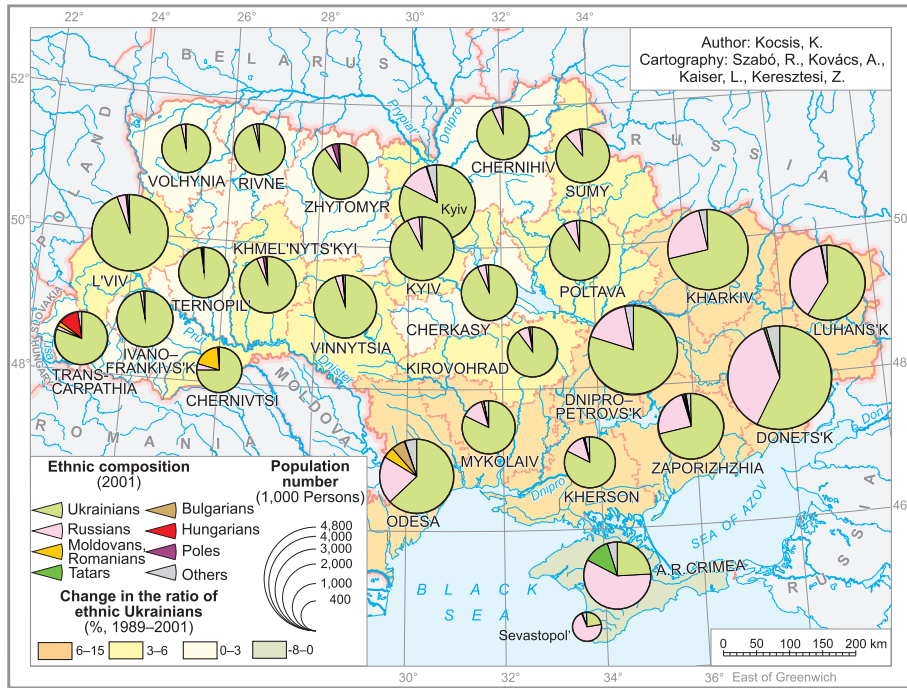


Fig. 6. Ethnic composition of the population in Ukraine, 2001

Despite the large population number, the share of Russian minority is not of such magnitude to explain the east-west dichotomy that characterises Ukraine. A further nuance, however, is that in view of their cultural proximity the Ukrainian and Russian ethnic groups have historically intermixed with one another. The Russian minority's share within Ukraine's population fell from 22% to 17% between 1989 and 2001, owing in part to assimilation and in part to people repatriating to Russia. As a result of the measures taken by the state (e.g. declaring Ukrainian to be the only official state language), masses of Russians, people of mixed (Russian–Ukrainian) origin and Russian-speaking Ukrainians in the eastern and southern parts of the country (excluding Crimea) began to assume a Ukrainian identity (Bochkov's'ka, A. *et al.* 2008).

Native Ukrainians versus Native Russians?

The relation of the native language to ethnic affiliation is an important indicator of ethnic–national development. The percentage of Russian speakers in Ukraine is significantly higher than the Russian ethnic ratio. The percent-

age difference stems from the fact that 14.8% of ethnic Ukrainians (22% of urban dwellers and 3% of rural inhabitants) identified Russian as their native language (mother tongue) in the 2001 census. In the eastern regions and in Crimea, the percentage was much higher: 50–60% of ethnic Ukrainians in the Donets'k and Luhans'k oblasts and in Crimea identified Russian as their mother tongue (*Figure 7*).

Although Ukrainian is the official state language in Ukraine (Constitution... 1996, Law... 1989), the share of Ukrainian native speakers increased by only 2.8% between 1989 and 2001 (whereas the Ukrainian ethnic ratio increased by 5.1% in the same time interval).⁵

Russian was indicated as the mother tongue by 29.6% (14.3 million) of the population. Only 67.5% of the country's inhabitants declared Ukrainian

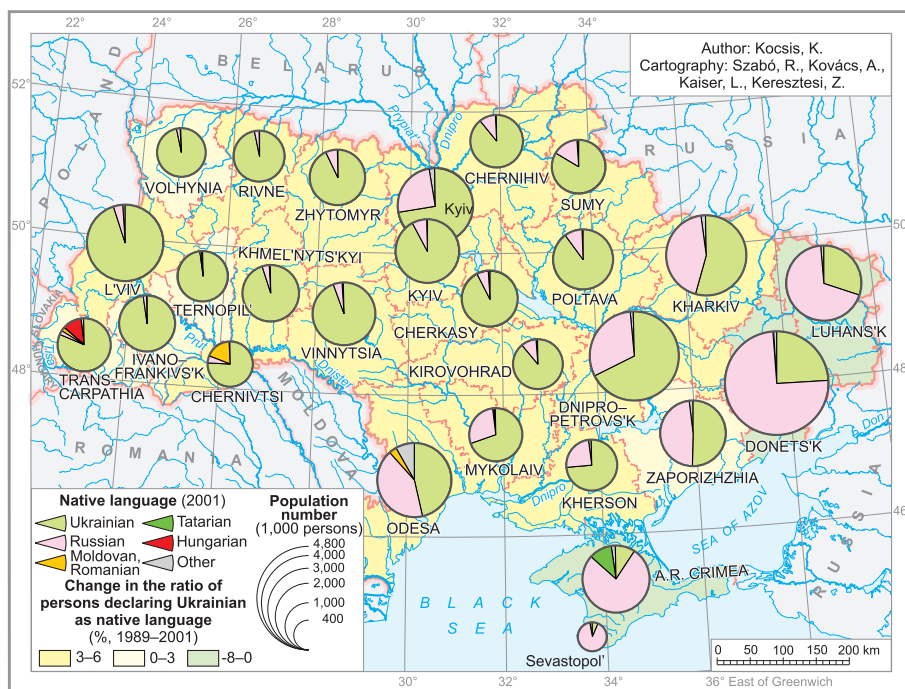


Fig. 7. Native language of the population in Ukraine, 2001

⁵ The status of Ukrainian as the national state language was confirmed by the Language Law of 2012, a piece of legislation that was much criticised by Ukrainian nationalists. The pretext for the scandal was the “regional language status” granted by the Language Law to the languages of the national minorities, as well as some associated rights. An exaggerated concern for the future of the Ukrainian language led some people to interpret the measures as statutory backing for Russification efforts.

as their native language in 2001. Native Russian speakers account for half of the population to the East of the Uman'–Kharkiv line and as much as three-quarters of the population of the Donets Basin, the coastal region of the Sea of Azov, and Crimea. The dominance of Russians in the eastern oblasts (regions) is concentrated almost exclusively in the major cities, which differ significantly in demographic terms from the surrounding, dominantly Ukrainian speaking, sparsely populated, rural areas. In the eastern regions, therefore, we find Russian-speaking cities surrounded by Ukrainian-speaking rural areas, whereas in the western half of the country Russian is spoken as a native language mostly by the Russian minority in the major cities (*Figure 8*).

Ukrainian is used less frequently in the southern and eastern regions among Ukrainian native speakers. Following 1991, large amounts of the Russian-speaking population of mixed ethnic origin declared Ukrainian as a mother tongue, even though remaining practically Russophone (BOCHKOV'S'KA, A. *et al.* 2008). In the regions dominated by Russophones (Crimea, Donets'k and Luhans'k oblasts) a continuing decrease in the ratio of Ukrainian native speakers could be observed.

The linguistic picture is rendered more complex by the use of various mixtures of Russian and Ukrainian – the Surzhyk sociolects – in everyday life (BERNSAND, N. 2001; BILANIUK, L. 1997). Surzhyk has low prestige; its speakers tend to be poorly educated with insecure identities (BILANIUK, L. 2004; CSERNICKSKÓ, I. 2011a, 2011b, 2013; FODOR, GY. and CSERNICKSKÓ, I. 2013). It is the primary language of 10–15% of Ukraine's population (KHMELKO, V.Y. 2004), with the highest ratio of speakers in the central-eastern part of the country.

Kyiv versus Moscow Patriarchate?

Depending on geographical location, historical development, and the socio-demographic structure of the population, there are striking differences in the religiosity between the western and eastern regions of the country (similar to the ethnic features and political attitudes of the local population). The share of those who identified themselves as believers is 86.6% in the West, whilst this figure is only 50.5% in the East (BYCHENKO, A. and DUDAR, N. 2002).

The higher degree of religiosity (and lower degree of secularisation) in the western territories incorporated into Soviet-Ukraine between 1939 and 1945 can be attributed to the shorter period of aggressive and atheistic Soviet authority over these territories (ca. 45 years vs. 70 years in the East), and it also reflects the massive presence of the centralised and particularly active Catholic churches in the West. This religious-geographic difference (together with the ethnic, cultural and political factors) is one of the major determinants of the future of Ukraine (*Figure 9*).

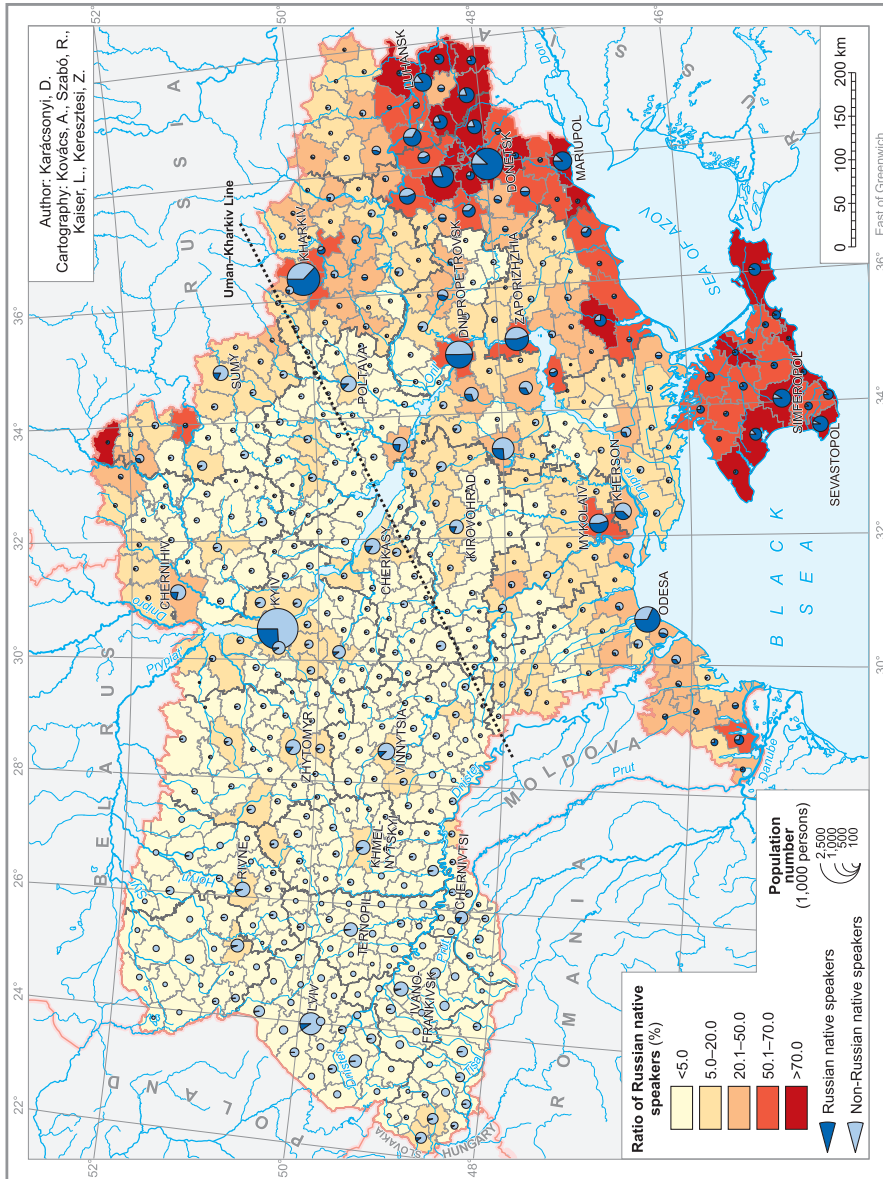


Fig. 8. Russian native speakers in the districts of Ukraine, 2001

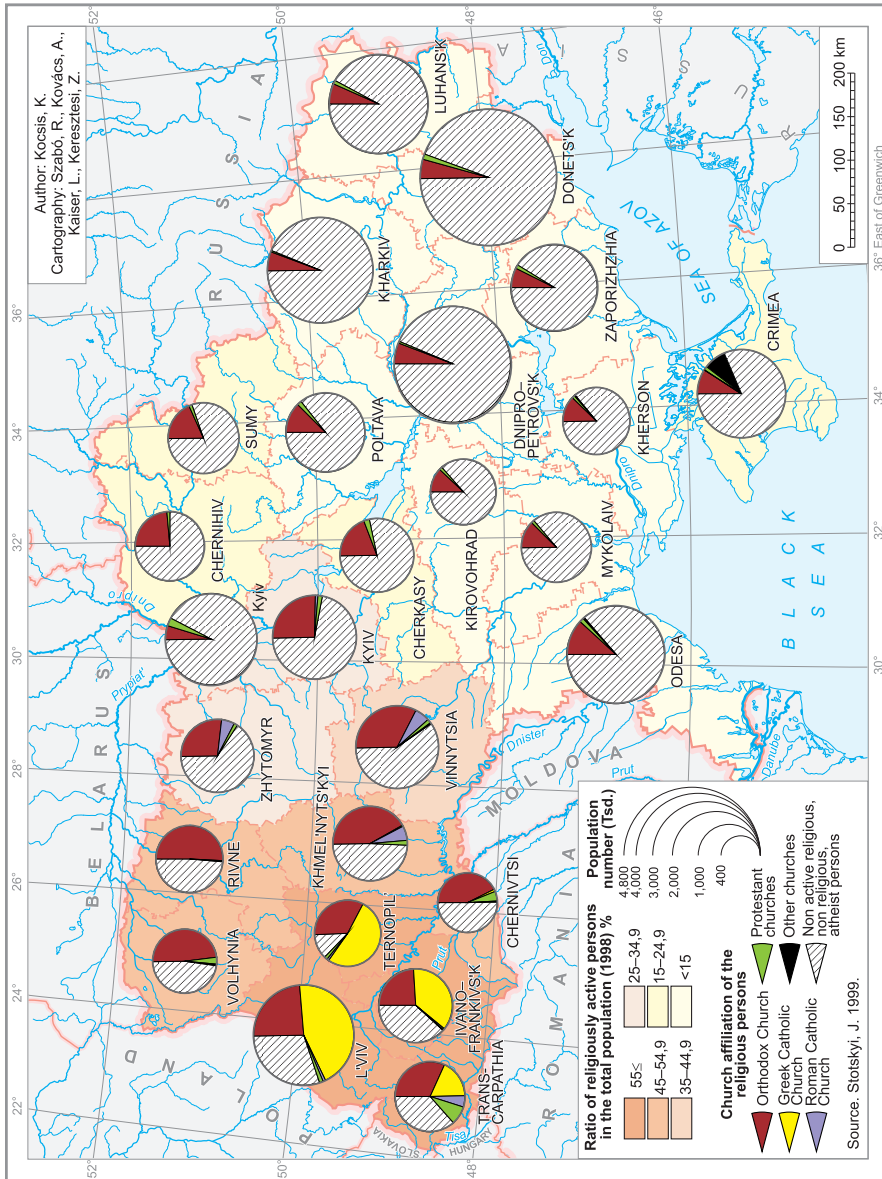


Fig. 9. Religious activity and denominations in Ukraine, 1998

The overwhelming majority (68.8%) of Ukrainians are Orthodox Christians. In 2002, out of the Orthodox population polled, 53.2% declared itself “simply Orthodox”, 23.8% as affiliated with the Kyiv Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, 14.8% with the Moscow Patriarchate of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church and 2.4% with the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church (BYCHENKO, A. and DUDAR, N. 2002). Before 1990 all Ukrainian Orthodox communities were united in the Ukrainian Exarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church. Its legal successor, the Moscow Patriarchate, which remained linked with the Russian Orthodox Church, has the allegiance of two-thirds of the Orthodox communities and controls the overwhelming majority of the Orthodox religious infrastructure. The “heartland” of the pro-Russian Moscow Patriarchate is the eastern and southern, mostly Russophone part of the country.

The most important hinterlands of the Ukrainophone Kyiv Patriarchate are the western (first of all, Volhynian) territories with their dominant ethnic Ukrainian character. The majority of the adherents to the relatively weak Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church live in the areas mentioned above (mainly in Galicia). The Greek Catholic churches were also closely related to the Ukrainian national and independence movements. Following their rehabilitation they remained as regional churches with their main hinterlands in Galicia and Transcarpathia.

Urban versus Rural Ukraine?

The line Uman’–Kharkiv is not only a divide between steppe and forest, eastern and western Ukraine, but also between urban and rural Ukraine (KARÁCSONYI, D. 2009). The rural population distribution is uneven: 65% of rural inhabitants live in the western part of the country, where the share of rural population is 44%. An even more nuanced picture emerges if we exclude Kyiv’s 2.8 million inhabitants. In this case, urban dwellers account for only a half of Western Ukraine’s population. In contrast, urban dwellers account for 78% of the population in the eastern part of the country. In regions comprising the major industrial centres, for instance, in the Donets Basin, the inhabitants live almost exclusively in urban areas (*Figure 10*).

In the East, the development of the settlement network has only impacted the higher levels of the settlement hierarchy, in particular those cities founded in the 18th and 19th centuries by Russian settlers on the sparsely populated steppe. In contrast, in western Ukraine – mainly in Galicia – the settlement hierarchy is much more balanced, because in this area the dense network of small towns and villages was formed over the course of centuries as part of an integral development (DNISTRIANSKA, N.I. and DNISTRIANSKYI, M.S. 2013).

Industrial East versus Agrarian West?

The western part of Ukraine is a region dominated by agriculture and forestry, whereas the eastern part is well known for its industrial specialisation and is characterised by mining and heavy industries. Western Ukraine was not greatly affected by industrialisation, because there was a lack of mineral resources that would have been needed to achieve significant industrialisation. Moreover, the industrialisation of the region and the development of its infrastructure was neglected for strategic reasons – the proximity of the western border. Here, traditional Ukrainian rural society could survive until the most recent times (SKRYZHEVSKA, Y. and KARÁCSONYI, D. 2012). During the economic crisis of the 1990s, the eastern part of Ukraine experienced the most dramatic decline in population and quality of life compared to other regions. The transformation was survived more easily by the industrial area near the Dnieper and the environs of Donetsk City. The industry of the cities upon the Dnieper is high-tech (missile and aerospace technology – MRINSKA, O. 2004). There are multiple links with the Russian defence industry within the framework of technological cooperation among production plants. Donetsk has become the economic-financial and political-administrative centre of the region. Most Russian investment has come to this city. Ukraine's most developed regions lie in the eastern part of the country, and this is linked with urbanisation. It is the reverse of what we see in other parts of Eastern Europe, where the level of economic development generally decreases from West to East.

Yanukovich versus Maidan?

Ukraine's population is regionally divided not only in terms of ethnic ties, religious affiliation, the urbanisation rate, and economic development. The regional factor is also a strong determinant of political activity and party affiliation (KUBICEK, P. 2000). In the 1990s, Ukraine moved inexorably towards the political division that has been a feature ever since the presidential elections of 2004. In fact, this division could be observed as early as the 1994 presidential elections (Kravchuk and Kuchma) (ТИХОМИРОВ, D.I. 2013). In the elections of December 2004, the western part of the country supported Yushchenko, the presidential candidate seeking an alliance with the West. In Galicia more than 90% of voters gave their support to the "Orange Revolution", while in the west-central region the corresponding figure was 70%. Meanwhile, in southern and eastern Ukraine – excluding Crimea and Donetsk Basin – 60% of voters supported the pro-Russian candidate Yanukovich. In Crimea and in the oblasts (regions) of Donetsk and Luhans'k, the pro-Russian side received 90% of the votes (ÅSLUND, A. 2005).

Indications of Ukraine's social, political, and geographic divisions were also apparent in the results of the 2010 presidential elections and of the 2012 parliamentary elections. The spatial distribution of votes cast for the two candidates in the second round of the 2010 presidential elections (Yulia Tymoshenko – 45.5% and Viktor Yanukovich – 49.0%) shows a clear decrease in support for Tymoshenko from northwest to southeast, and a clear increase for Yanukovich (*Figure 11 and 12*).

The percentage of votes cast for Yanukovich correlates – at the level of the regions (oblasts) – more closely with the share of Russian native speakers (according to the 2001 census) than with the percentage of persons of Russian ethnic affiliation (the correlation coefficient of the former is 0.896, while that of the latter is 0.812). An even closer correlation ($r = 0.927$) could be observed, however, between support for Yanukovich at the regional (oblast) level and the share of urban dwellers with Russian native language. This latter trend underlines the significant role of cities – among other factors – in shaping political opinion.

At the level of the raions (districts), the correlation between native language and the election results was less striking: for instance, the correlation coefficient between Yanukovich voters and the Russian native speakers was just 0.715. A far stronger correlation was observed for cities of oblast (regional) significance ($r = 0.871$) than for predominately rural raions (districts) ($r = 0.655$). In the raions of Transcarpathia, Chernivtsi oblast (North Bukovina) and Odesa oblast (South Bessarabia), inhabited also by non-Russian minorities (Hungarians, Romanians, and Bulgarians etc), a higher proportion of votes were cast for Yanukovich, the candidate with a more permissive stance on the language issue.

Evidently, the close correlation merely indicates that native language was a factor influencing the election results; it does not show that people voted on narrow ethnic lines. In the knowledge of the census data on native language, we can see that Yanukovich needed the votes of many non-Russian-speaking Ukrainians in order to win the election. This was especially so in the mostly Ukrainian-speaking rural raions of the south-east administered by Russian-speaking oblast centres. In the southeastern (steppe) areas of Ukraine, there are historical traditions of Russian social dominance. In the Tsarist era, the majority of local nobility was Russian native speaker, as were the Orthodox priests in these areas. In the Soviet era, the same Russian dominance characterised the Bolshevik and Communist Party elites.

The country's northwest–southeast division could also be observed at the time of the 2012 parliamentary elections in the regional distribution of votes cast for parties committed to the Ukrainian national ideal and for parties with a Russian or ex-Soviet orientation (ТЮМОКОВ, D.I. 2013). The geopolitical division highlighted by the election results has been a constant underlying factor in Ukraine's domestic political crisis of 2013–14.

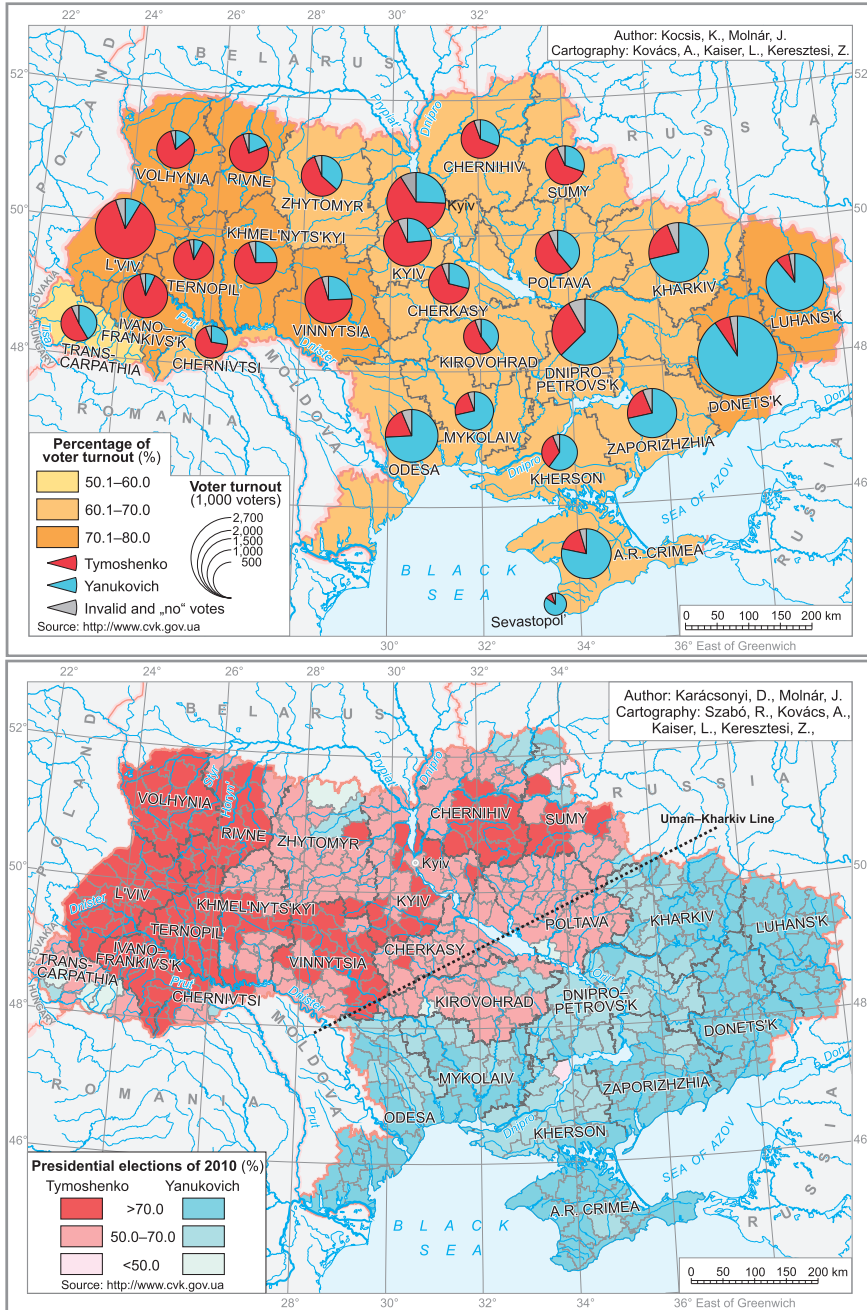


Fig. 11–12. Results of the second round of the presidential elections of 2010 in the regions and districts of Ukraine

Geography and space in the current conflict

The East–West division, which has been evident in all Ukraine’s parliamentary and presidential elections since 2004, led to armed conflict in 2014. In November 2013, protests began in Kyiv (*Euromaidan*) in response to the Ukrainian leadership’s decision – taken under Russian political and economic pressure – to withdraw from an association agreement with the EU just one week before its planned signature.

For some time the conflict was concentrated in a narrow area, the Maidan (Maidan Nezalezhnosti – Independence Square), a central square in the Ukrainian capital. Maidan became, after the Orange Revolution of 2004, a symbolic place of Ukrainian protest culture; the demonstrators prepared for a long and peaceful struggle for their goals. From the end of November 2013, the authorities tried on successive occasions to end the initially peaceful protest with its limited demands. These actions led ultimately to overt armed violence. In late February 2014, President Yanukovich left the country, and on 21 February an interim political coalition took control of Ukraine.

A survey⁶ conducted by the Fund "Democratic Initiatives of Ilka Kucheriv" together with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology gauged the social composition of the Maidan protestors. The proportion of people not affiliated to any political party was 92%, while 61% of the protestors had been spurred to action by violence on the part of the authorities. The findings showed a strikingly high proportion of non-Kyiv residents (88%) among the protestors in the capital city. The regional distribution of arrivals from other regions reveals both the country’s division in terms of political activity (West Ukraine 55% and Central Ukraine 24%) and the fact that all parts of the country were represented at the epicentre of the conflict (East Ukraine 21%). The linguistic data support this impression: 59% of the demonstrators at Maidan were Ukrainian-speaking, while 24% were bilingual.

In January the conflict began to spread to western Ukraine (Lviv) and central parts of the country (*Automaidan*). In a symbolic break from the Soviet past, dozens of Lenin statues were toppled (the so-called *Leninopad*) in the second half of February. The toppling of statues took place mainly in central parts of the country, because in West Ukraine the statues had been removed back in the early 1990s, while in East Ukraine local counter-demonstrations (e.g. in Kharkiv) now prevented their removal – apart from some smaller towns (*Figure 13*).

After Yanukovich’s flight, the direction of the conflict changed (*Figure 14*). In late February, the “epicentre” of the conflict switched to the dominantly Russian-inhabited Autonomous Republic of Crimea and City of Sevastopol, a part of Ukraine

⁶ <http://euro-revolution.org/news/novini-gromadskogo-sektoru/the-maidan-what-has-changed-from-december-to-february>

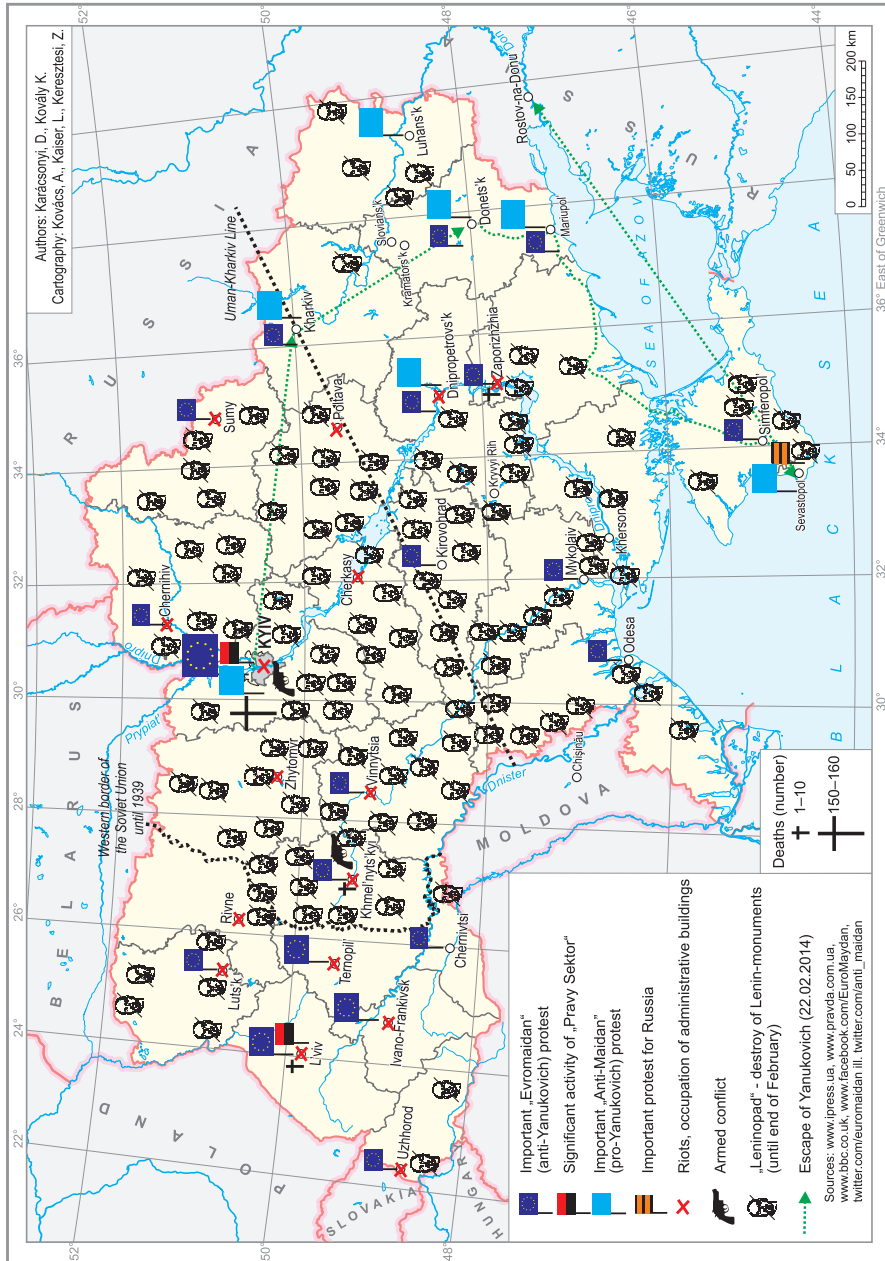


Fig. 13. Geography of the conflict in Ukraine, 21.11.2013–21.02.2014

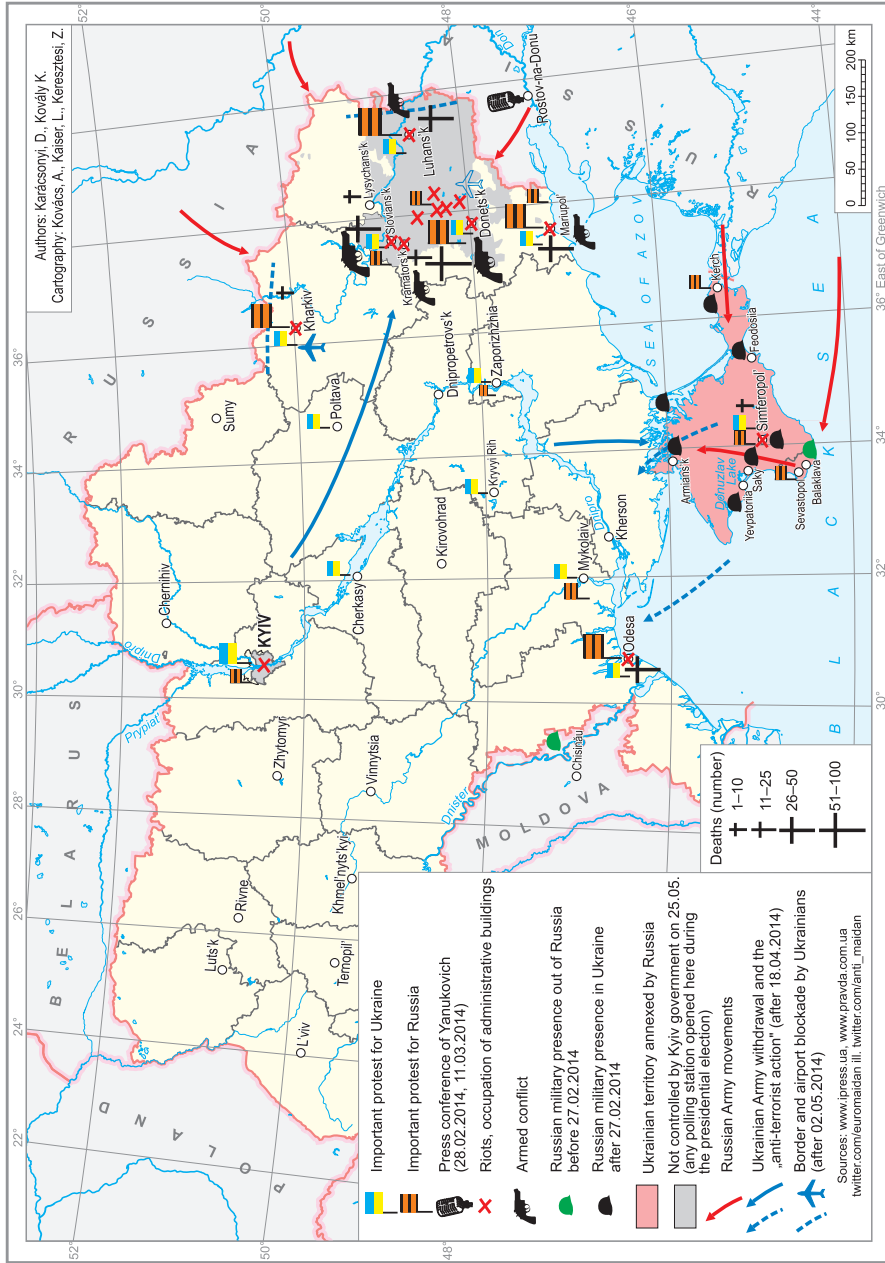


Fig. 14. Geography of the conflict in Ukraine, 22.02.2014–25.05.2014

only since 1954. Concurrently, a counter protest group launched intense protests in the south-eastern half of the country (*Anti-Maidan*). In March, events in Crimea transformed a domestic conflict into an international one.

Following a Russian-supervised referendum on 16 March and Russia's subsequent annexation of Crimea, the confrontation turned into armed conflict in April and continued in the south-eastern part of Ukraine, in the Donets Basin. Odesa was also the scene of deadly clashes. In April, based on the Crimean model, people's republics were declared in Donets'k, Luhans'k, Kharkiv and Odesa. On 11 May, the two former regions (oblasts) held "independence referendums", which were followed by what the Kyiv authorities termed "anti-terrorist" actions. These self-proclaimed state formations have not been recognised by any other states, including Russia. Questions surround the extent and popular acceptance of their power.

The traditional west-east "gradient" is evident once again in the voter turnout figures for the Ukrainian presidential election, held on 25 May 2014, and in the percentage of voters supporting Petro Poroshenko, the candidate who won the election (*Fig. 15, 16 and 17*). The low turnout in the southeast reflects primarily the decision of former Yanukovich supporters to stay away.

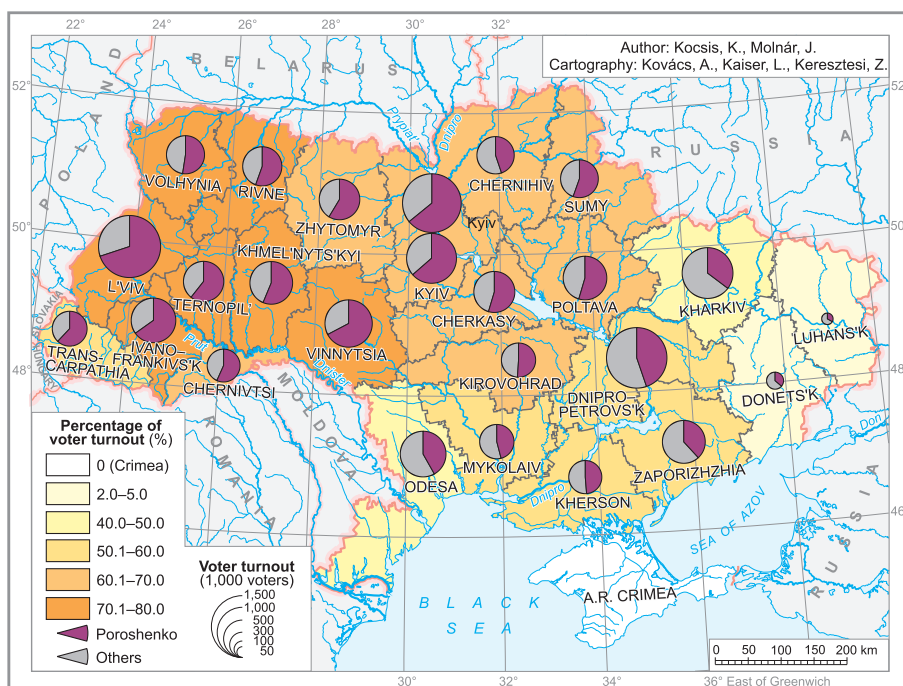


Fig. 15. Results of the presidential elections of 2014 in the regions of Ukraine

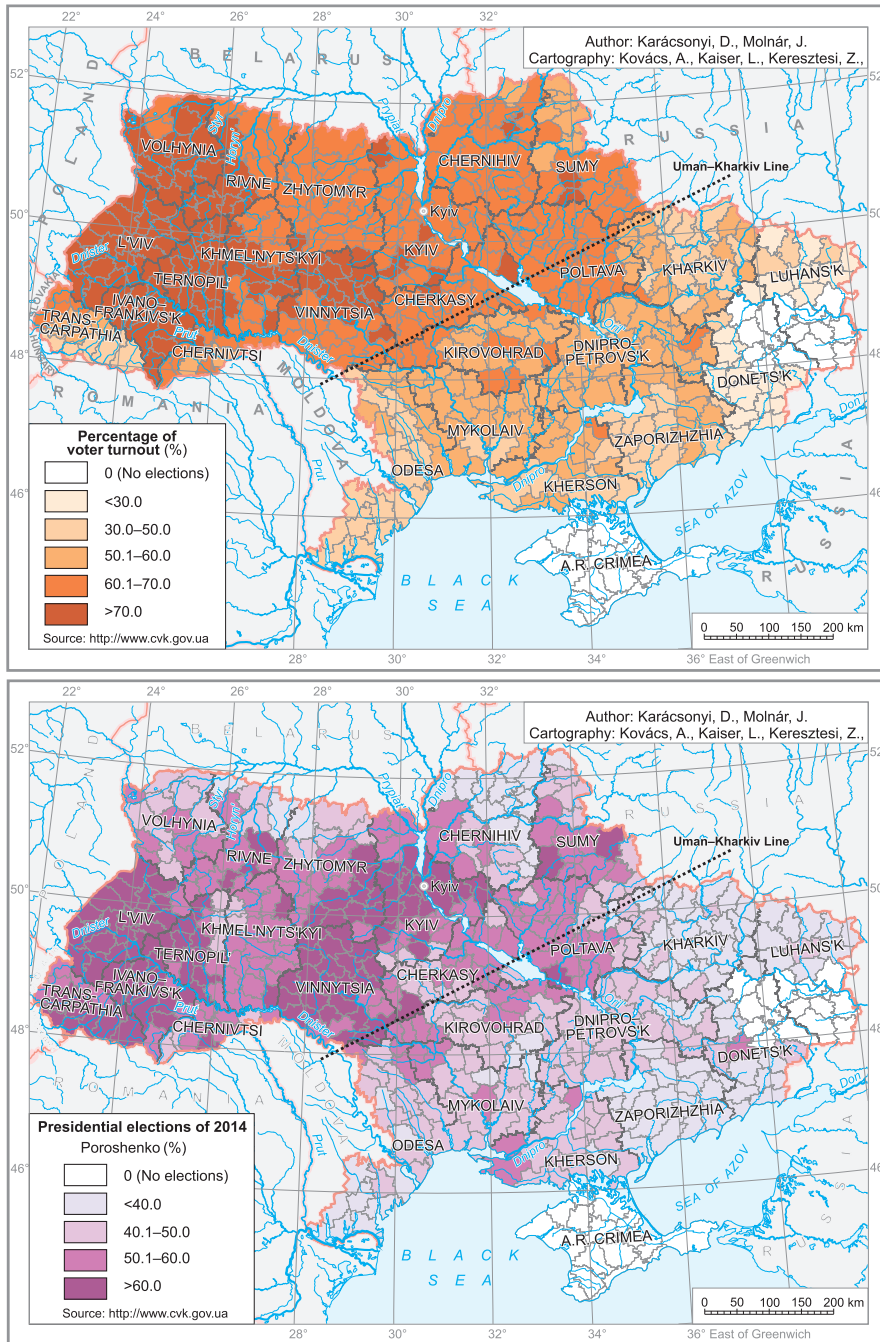


Fig. 16–17. Results of the presidential elections of 2014 in the districts of Ukraine

The effect is magnified in the Donets Basin, where separatists prevented, in some places, the proper functioning of the various election committees and the vote took place in a general atmosphere of intimidation. The armed conflict in Ukraine has deepened to an unprecedented extent the discord between the eastern and western halves of the country, but the fact that Poroshenko won in all of Ukraine's regions – albeit by a different margin of votes – indicates a possible reduction in the divide. Perhaps this development may be viewed as the emergence of an east–west consensus on the desirability of a peaceful solution.

Conclusions

Ukraine's east-west divide does not stem from a conflict between ethnic Russians and ethnic Ukrainians or between Orthodox and Western Christianity. Rather, the country's divisions exhibit a multilevel regional structure formed in the course of a long historical development and reflecting the nation-forming attitudes of Ukrainians. It is important to distinguish between the separatist ambitions of the Russian minority (e.g. Sevastopol, the towns of Donets Basin) and the dichotomy of Ukrainian identity, coupled with the associated conflict. Eastern Ukrainians believe that they differ both from western Ukrainians and from Russians: they view the West with suspicion and look to the Russians as partners. Even so, they do not want to accede to Russia at any cost. Indeed, it is questionable whether there is any desire for such a move. The escalation of the conflict is due to the lack of domestic political cohesion (reflecting Ukraine's youth) and to the gravitational effect of the major powers rather than primarily to some kind of civilizational difference.

Several authors have sought to criticise HUNTINGTON'S theory of the clash of civilizations (HUNTINGTON, S.P. 1993a) based on a quantitative analysis of events in the recent past (RUSSET, B.M. *et al.* 2000; HENDERSON, E.A. and TUCKER, R. 2001). HUNTINGTON had argued that the complexity of the post-Cold War world order could best be described in terms of the fault lines between civilizations (HUNTINGTON, S.P. 1993b), but the critics showed mathematically that the number of inter-civilizational conflicts had actually decreased since the Cold War (GURR, T.R. 1994).

We now see that most of the conflicts in Europe in the early 1990s (the conflicts in Yugoslavia, Karabakh, Abkhazia) were rooted in ethnic tensions that had remained unresolved in the Cold War. These conflicts did not presage some kind of global struggle between civilizations. Seen from this angle, the conflict over Crimea was the belated conflagration of a trouble spot. We may apply HENDERSON'S argument (HENDERSON, E.A. 1997) – which is diametrically opposed HUNTINGTON'S – to Ukraine: ethnic and linguistic similarities (!) also increase the potential for strife between countries. In his opinion (HENDERSON,

E.A. 1998), the form of government (democracy vs. dictatorship) and the distance between or proximity of states are far stronger explanatory factors in international conflicts than religious or ethnic differences. Both findings are borne out by the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

Ukraine will not split of its own accord, but the extent to which it becomes a battleground for the major powers in the short term will depend on whether the current conflict deepens and whether the long-term damage can be reversed. It is crucial for Ukraine to strengthen domestic political cohesion and to create an effective and functional state. In place of forced centralisation, the means for this may be a policy of regionalisation that respects regional differences. A historical opportunity for such a policy could arise after the presidential election in May.

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