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Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians and why Novorossiia failed[☆]



Taras Kuzio

National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, Foreign Policy Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, USA

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses two inter-related issues. Firstly, the factors lying behind Russia's fervent belief that its *Novorossiia* (New Russia) project, aimed to bring back to Russia eight *oblasts* of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhya, Odesa, Mykolayiv, and Kherson in eastern and southern Ukraine and launched during the 2014 "Russian Spring," would be successful. Russian identity misunderstood, and continues to misunderstand, Ukraine and Ukrainians through stereotypes and myths of Ukraine as an "artificial state" and Ukraine's Russian speakers as "fraternal brothers" and Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" (*odin narod*). Secondly, why Ukrainian national identity was different than these Russian stereotypes and myths and how this led to the failure of the *Novorossiia* project. Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians came face to face with the reality of Russian-speaking Ukrainian patriotism and their low support for the *Russkij Mir* (Russian World). The article compares Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians with how Ukrainians see themselves to explain the roots of the 2014 crisis, "Russian Spring," and failure of Russian President Vladimir Putin's *Novorossiia* project.

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1. Introduction

This article argues that Russian-Ukrainian national identity questions lie at the heart of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Russia's annexation of the Crimea and on-going war in the Eastern Ukrainian region of the Donbas (comprising Donetsk and Luhansk *oblasts*). The *Novorossiia* project was based upon Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians exhibiting greater allegiance to the Russian World (*Russkij Mir*) than to Ukraine and Ukrainian patriotism (O'Loughlin et al., 2016).

The Russian World was unveiled in 2007 and allegedly modelled on the British Commonwealth and Organization Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), sometimes called Francophonie which unites countries with large numbers of French speakers and holding an affiliation to French culture. Clearly, an important aim of the Russian World, British Commonwealth

[☆] We should clean up Ukraine from the idiots. The genocide of these cretins is due and inevitable ... I can't believe these are Ukrainians. Ukrainians are wonderful Slavonic people. And this is a race of bastards that emerged from the sewer manholes. ... I think we need to kill, kill, and kill (Ukrainians). Further negotiations should be not attempted. Aleksandr Dugin (2014).

E-mail address: taraskuziophd@gmail.com.

and OIF is to maintain countries that were once part of the USSR, British and French empires within the spheres of influence of the former imperial metropolis.

But the Russian World was always more than just a vehicle to unite those who have affinity to Russian culture and are Russian-speaking *sootchestvennik* (compatriots) because it was an important vehicle in President Vladimir Putin's geopolitical goals and maintaining the unity of the three eastern Slavic peoples. In Soviet and Russian historiography, Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are described as having been born together in the medieval Kyivan Rus' (Russians call this "Kievan Russia" even though "Russia" is from the early eighteenth century) principality, had always striven to remain united in the face of foreign intrigues to divide the "Russian" (understood as the three eastern Slavs) people and should always remain united. The Russian World is therefore in effect a contemporary Kyivan Rus' which would maintain unity of the three eastern Slavs who were the core of the USSR and should become the core of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) launched in 2015 as the successor to the CIS Customs Union.

Another difference of the Russian World with the British Commonwealth and OIF is Russia's return to pre-Soviet views of Ukrainians as not constituting a separate people and Ukraine not representing a sovereign country. Putin, Russian leaders, including also some opposition leaders, such as Alexei Navalny believe Russians and Ukrainians are "one people" (*odin narod*).

Religion plays a minor role in the British Commonwealth and OIF whereas Russian Orthodoxy is a second pillar of the Russian World (in addition to the Russian language). Since 2014, the Russian Orthodox Church in Ukraine has been in crisis split between its loyalty to Putin and popular demand from its congregation to criticize Russia's annexation of the Crimea and Russian military aggression in eastern Ukraine. This came to a head in 2018–19 when the Patriarch of Constantinople, head of the world-wide Orthodox Church, declared Russian Orthodox control of Ukraine since 1686 to have been "uncanonical." Constantinople granted the Orthodox Church in Ukraine autocephaly creating the independent Orthodox Church of Ukraine. Kyiv, the "Mother of Russian cities" for Russian nationalists, was *de facto* removed from the Russian World.

The article is divided into four parts. The first section integrates theories of national identity with Russian identity and its relationship to Ukraine and Ukrainians. The second section provides an analysis of Russian identity and how it influences stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians. The third section discusses how Ukraine and Ukrainians see themselves and their relationship with Russia. The final section brings the previous sections together to provide an explanation as to why the *Novorossiya* project failed.

2. National identity and Russian-Ukrainian relations

National identity "is some sense of political community, however tenuous. A political community in turn implies at least some common constitution and a single code of rights and duties for all the members of the community. It also denotes a definite social space, a fairly well demarcated and bounded territory, with which the members identify and to which they feel they belong" (Smith, 1991, 9). How Russians and Ukrainians see their community (homeland) is quite different. For Russians the community is bigger than the Russian SFSR or Russian Federation and encompasses the entire USSR, Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Russian World, CIS Customs Union and EEU. A common experience living together in a Soviet republic has left an identity and attachment to its borders for Ukrainians but not for Russians whose identity was far greater than the Russian SFSR. For Ukrainians the community was Ukrainian SSR and USSR and since 1991 the Ukrainian Republic. A minority of Ukrainians, including supporters of the Donetsk Peoples Republic (DNR) and Luhansk Peoples Republic (LNR), see their Ukrainian identity as part of the larger Russian World.

National identity is multiple, composed of familial, territorial, class, religious, ethnic and gender components. Mass education and the security forces are two state institutions through which a new loyalty to national identity can be forged. National identity requires an all-embracing recognition of an historic homeland (territory), common myths and legends, a common mass public culture, common legal rights and duties and a common economic space. The sense of "whence we came" is central to the definition of "who we are," Anthony D. Smith (1991, 22) states, emphasizing the role of history, memories, legends and past glories in shaping the new national identity that unites the homeland for future joint endeavours. In the USSR, Soviet nationalities policies sought to remove historical contradictions and frictions between Russians and Ukrainians who had allegedly always lived in harmony. An important feature of Soviet history writing from the late 1930s was the myth of friendship which claimed Tsarist rule had been beneficial or at the very least the lesser of evils compared to rule by Polish, Ottoman and other empires (Tillet, 1969). History writing and school and university textbooks since the late 1980s have opened up deep divisions in how Russians and Ukrainians view their history. For example, Tsarist rule in Ukraine is viewed in completely negative terms by Ukrainians when contrasted with Ukrainian life in the more liberal Austrian-Hungarian Empire. Russians and Ukrainians have completely different approaches to the 1933 famine with the former viewing it as a Soviet-wide phenomenon, and the latter seeing the *Holodomor* (Murder Famine) as a genocide against Ukrainians.

National identity can be based upon citizenship (territorial identity), attachment to ethnic culture and language, common history and religion. Three European democracies, Germany (until 2000), Estonia and Latvia use ethnicity as their determinant of citizenship. Ethnicity, culture, language, common history, religion, food, customs and intermarriage are important factors in identity. Russia has supported separatist movements in former Soviet republics, including Ukraine while Ukraine has always been a supporter of territorial status quo and opponent of border changes.

Russia's information warfare depicts Ukraine as an "artificial state" (EU Disinformation Review, 2018a, b). Some Western scholars have excessively focused on Ukraine as a "fragile" and regionally divided state suffering from a "civil war" between

Ukrainian nationalists and Russian speakers (Sakwa, 2015, 2017; Matveeva, 2018, and Hahn, 2018). Regional and linguistic diversity are not uncommon in some democracies.

Eighty one percent of the population of the Russian Federation consider themselves to be ethnic Russian, a similar proportion of titular nation to minorities as that found in Slovakia, Germany, Serbia and Slovenia. A higher 92 percent of Ukraine's population consider themselves to be ethnic Ukrainians with six percent declaring they are ethnic Russians. Among 18–29-year old Ukrainians, the number of ethnic Russians falls by half to only three percent. The proportion of ethnic Russians in Ukraine has declined from 22 percent in the 1989 Soviet census, 17 percent in the 2001 Ukrainian census and 6 percent in current sociological studies (Razumkov Center, 2017a, 5). With 92 percent of Ukraine's population declaring themselves to be Ukrainian, the country is the fourth most ethnically homogenous country in Europe after Italy (93 percent), Portugal (96 percent) and Poland (98 percent).

A person's national identity cannot be reduced to language alone. There are many countries which speak the same language as their larger neighbour; for example, Austria and Germany, Ireland (although Gaeilge is an official language, English is a second official language and is mostly used) and the UK, Scotland and the UK and Canada (largely except for French-speaking Quebec) and the US. Apart from Brazil, the majority of countries in Latin America speaks Spanish. Seymour Martin Lipset (1969) compared major differences in political cultures in the US and Canada which are both primarily English-speaking. Tension and even antagonism between Ukrainophones and Russophones have been low and language is not the sole or main indicator of national identity and allegiance with most Ukrainians move between both languages on a daily basis.

Language is a sensitive issue in most countries; for example, in Canada's province of Quebec and in Belgium. Language questions and alleged threats to Russian speakers were used by Moscow to justify its annexation of Crimea and support for Russian proxies in the Donbas. These claims of discrimination had no basis in reality. Opinion polls in Ukraine have always shown that only a small number of Ukrainians have witnessed or felt discrimination against Russian speakers. Only 4.8 percent in 2017 and 11.1 percent in 2019 agreed that violation of the rights of Russian speakers was one of the causes of the war in eastern Ukraine (Razumkov Centre, 2019, 203). On the other hand, religious and language discrimination is rife in Crimea and the DNR and LNR, not Ukraine, and these are the subject of a Ukrainian criminal case against Russia in the United Nations International Court of Justice in The Hague (Ukraine v. Russian Federation. Memorial Submitted by Ukraine, 2018).

National identity can be multi-layered with citizens holding social, regional, territorial, and ethnic identities. Some eastern Ukrainians possessed a mixed Ukrainian-Russian identity, at least until 2014. The Donbas was similar to other border areas which exhibited mixed identities, such as Trans-Carpathia, Silesia, Alto Adige (South Tyrol), Trieste, and Sicily. In the Donbas and Crimea, Ukrainian identity competed with Soviet nostalgia, regional identity and the Russian World.

Separatism was weak in Ukraine and there was no ethnic conflict in the 1990s that mirrored what took place in Russia (Chechnya), Moldova (Trans-Dniestr), Georgia (South Ossetia, Abkhazia) and Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh). Prior to 2014, separatism did not have majority support in any Ukrainian region, including Crimea and the Donbas. Pro-Russian political groups, such as the Party of Regions and Communist Party of Ukraine, did not support separatism. Ukrainian parliamentary votes in denunciation of Crimean separatism always obtained a greater than two thirds constitutional majority.

Religion is an important marker of identity in many countries. To be Polish or Greek is to be Catholic and Orthodox respectively. Although in Western democracies large numbers of citizens identify with religious confessions, such as the Church of England, this is far higher than the number who actually attend Church which has been declining since World War II. Ukraine is a country of religious pluralism which, unlike Russia, has not supported the idea of elevating a single confession to that of a "state Church." Alongside Ukrainian and Russian Orthodox there are Ukrainian Greek-Catholic and Protestant Churches, Jewish synagogues and Crimean Tatar Muslim Mosques.

An important misperception in scholarship and Western media is that of Ukraine divided between a "Catholic west" and an "Orthodox east." In fact, the majority of Orthodox parishes are to be found in central and western Ukraine. Four (Volyn, Rivne, Chernivtsi, Trans-Carpathia) of the seven western Ukrainian *oblasts* annexed by the USSR have Orthodox majorities while only three (Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk, Ternopil) have Catholic majorities. The Donbas did not have a large number of Orthodox parishes and this void was filled by Protestant faiths; by 2014 Protestant parishes were equal in number to Russian Orthodox. The influx of Russian nationalist and Orthodox fundamentalist mercenaries to fight alongside Russian proxies is therefore paradoxical because the Donbas was never a bastion of Russian Orthodoxy, a central motif of the Russian World (Laruelle, 2016).

A favorite theme in Russia's information warfare is the domination of "fascism" and "anti-Semitism" in Ukraine, building on Soviet ideological tirades against "bourgeois nationalism" in Ukraine and "neo-Nazi" collaborators in the Ukrainian diaspora (Kuzio, 2019). In Ukraine, anti-Semitic attacks in the media and physically on buildings and persons is one of the lowest in Europe; in 2017–18, not a single anti-Semitic attack was recorded. Vyacheslav Likhachev (2019a, b), Ukraine's leading researcher on anti-Semitism concluded "there is simply no anti-Semitic violence in Ukraine. Ukrainian Jews are not in immediate physical danger." Anti-Zionism, a camouflaged form of anti-Semitism inherited from the former USSR, is found in Crimea and the DNR and LNR (Kuzio, 2017a, 118–140).

In summer 2019, Ukraine was the only country in the world outside Israel which had a Jewish president (Volodymyr Zelenskyy) and Jewish prime minister (Volodymyr Hroysman). Ukraine hosts the largest Jewish celebration outside Israel attended by an average of 30,000 foreign visitors. They gather in Uman ahead of Rosh Hashana as part of an annual pilgrimage to the grave of Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, the founder of the Breslov Hasidic movement.

National identity is always in the process of transformation and a dynamic process where identity and the distinctions between 'Us' and 'Others' are changing. Smith (1981) writes that war is one of the chief forces that has shaped ethnicity and

identity. Prolonged war strengthens national consciousness and weakens the cohesion of multi-national empires, as was the case for the Irish and Ukrainians at the end of World War I. Wars have traditionally moulded high levels of ethnic consciousness and served to harden national identity and its attachment to a certain territory (Williams and Smith, 1983). In Russia, identity has regressed during Putin's presidency from a civic to a great power nationalist identity since 2000 which has negatively impacted upon Russian views of Ukraine and Ukrainians. Ukrainian identity has undergone radical changes since 2014 that we would expect during times of war (Kuzio, 2017a, 314–357; Razumkov Center, 2016a, b, 2017a, b).

Changes in Ukrainian identity have been profound, and it is difficult to imagine they can be reversed. Ukrainians were lukewarm towards the Russian World even before 2014 (Wawrzonek, 2014) and these feelings have intensified since 2014. 71 per cent of Ukrainians do not support their country adopting the Russian model of development, including 56 per cent of Russian speakers (Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018, 183–184). Widespread opposition to Ukraine adopting the Russian model of development is an outgrowth of Russia associated with aggression (65.7 per cent), cruelty (56.9 per cent) and dictatorship (56.9 per cent) (Razumkov Center, 2018).

Between 68 per cent (Rating Group, 2019) and 72 per cent (Democratic Initiatives, 2018; Democratic Initiatives, 2019) of Ukrainians view Russia as an “aggressor country” making participation in Russian-led integration projects such as the Russian World and EEU unpopular in Ukraine. 47 per cent in Russian-speaking eastern and 62 per cent in southern Ukraine believe Ukraine and Russia are at war (Democratic Initiatives, 2019). 64 per cent of Ukrainians no longer see Russians as their “brothers” (as understood in Soviet nationalities policy as being very close and always united in one union), 62 per cent do not support Ukraine participating in Russian-led integration projects in Eurasia and 59 per cent believe Ukraine's European integration is irreversible (Razumkov, 2019). For the last five years, 70–80 per cent of Ukrainians view Putin negatively and do not see an end to Russian military aggression against Ukraine as long as he remains in power.

3. Russian views of Ukraine and Ukrainians

The history and geography of Russia forged a national identity built around empire and Great Power Tsarist and Soviet nationalism (Hoskings, 1998; Rowley, 2000). Russian and Soviet identities were integrated in the USSR. The USSR was constructed in a different manner to communist federations in Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia with the Russian SFSR not possessing republican institutions, such as a Communist Party, republican security service, Communist Youth League (*Komsomol*) and Academy of Sciences.

Fourteen non-Russian republics of the USSR – similar to republics within Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia – possessed their own republican institutions. With 3.5 million members, the Communist Party in the Soviet Ukrainian republic was therefore the largest in the USSR until 1990 when the Russian SFSR began creating a republican communist party.

Russian nationalism could be compared to English nationalism in being submerged within unionist identities because both peoples never developed separatist movements. Applying the term “nationalism” to describe Russian and English unionism is therefore a misnomer. The Russians and English were different to the Irish, Scots, Welsh and Ukrainians who created separatist political forces seeking their own independent states. If Russian nationalism is understood as seeking to build an independent state it is therefore a “myth” (Motyl, 1990).

During the Russian civil war, all Russian political forces – monarchists, liberals, and Bolsheviks – sought to either maintain or re-fashion the Tsarist Empire. The first two rejected any prospect of Ukraine receiving autonomy (let alone independence) while the latter agreed to the creation of a Soviet Ukrainian republic within the USSR.

In Fall 1991, Russian President Boris Yeltsin did not seek independence and the Russian SFSR never declared independence from the USSR in August 1991 after the failed coup d'état by communist hardliners. Russia became an independent state as a consequence of non-Russian republics declaring independence and three eastern Slavic leaders meeting and dissolving the USSR and replacing it with the CIS. Each year, the Russian Federation celebrates its “Independence Day” (officially called “Russia Day”) on the anniversary of its June 1990 Declaration of Sovereignty. Ukraine declared independence in August 1991 and celebrates its Independence Day on August 24 as the continuation of a “thousand-year tradition of state development in Ukraine”; clearly a reference to the origins of modern-day Ukraine in Kyiv Rus’.

In the 1990s, President Boris Yeltsin was a reluctant Russian nation-state builder who found little popular support for a civic definition of Russian identity (Tolz, 1998; Brudny and Finkel, 2011). President Yeltsin backed Russian state building and the continuation of a surrogate USSR through close political, economic and security integration of the CIS. In the 1996 presidential elections, when Yeltsin's main opponent was Communist Party leader Gennadiy Zyuganov, he supported a new union state of Russia and Belarus.

In the 1990s, Russians discussed five variations of identity (Tolz, 1998, 995–996). The first is where “the Russians are defined as an imperial people or through their mission to create a supranational state,” whether the Tsarist Empire, the USSR or EEU. “Decades and sometimes centuries of existence within one state (common history) is supposed to be the basis for the continuation of a multi-ethnic state within the borders of the former USSR” (Tolz, 1998, 995). This identity sees Russia at the center of large multi-national empires or union's that span across Eurasia rather than a smaller Russia confined to ethnic Russians.

Following the disintegration of the USSR, the CIS failed to re-unite Soviet republics in a new union. The EEU (based on the former CIS Customs Union established in 2010) seeks to be more successful in re-uniting former Soviet republics around Russia with the Russian World as its core. In 2013, Russia applied inordinate pressure on Armenia and Ukraine to drop their pending signing of Association Agreements with the European Union (EU) which was part of the Eastern Partnership

launched in 2009 for former Soviet republics. Russia succeeded in pressuring Armenia to drop the EU Association Agreement and join the CIS Customs Union/EEU. In Ukraine, President Yanukovich also agreed to drop the EU Association Agreement but instead of Ukraine following Armenia this step provoked the Euromaidan Revolution and eventually Yanukovich's ouster from power. Russian nationalists could not envision a Russian World or CIS Customs Union/EEU without Ukraine which Yanukovich was meant to deliver after his re-election in 2015 which, of course, never happened.

A second identity that Russians discussed in the 1990s is where “The Russians as a nation of all eastern Slavs, united by common origin and culture. Ethno-cultural similarities and a common past are viewed as the main markers of national identity” (Tolz, 1998, 995). This identity has become central in Russian leaders' attitudes towards Ukrainians who are viewed as a branch of the “Russian” people. A third is where “The Russians as a community of Russian speakers, regardless of their ethnic origin. Language is the main marker of national identity” (Tolz, 1998, 995–996). “Those viewing the Russians as a community of eastern Slavs or Russian speakers also place a particular emphasis on Orthodoxy as a marker of Russian national identity” (Tolz, 1998, 996). Russian language and Russian Orthodoxy are the two ideological props for the Russian World. A fourth is “The Russians defined racially, that is, blood ties constitute the basis of common identity” (Tolz, 1998, 996). A racially defined “Russian” identity would include Ukrainians. The fifth identity, “A civic Russian (*rossiiskaya*) nation, whose members are all citizens of the Russian Federation” (Tolz, 1998, 996) continues to exist but is less important than the first three identities which dominate Putin's Russia.

The first four Russian identities deny the existence of a separate Ukrainian identity and seek to absorb Ukraine within a larger community dominated by Moscow. Civic identity defines Russians and Ukrainians as peoples living in independent states with a Western, non-ethnic definition of citizenship and belonging to separate national communities. At the same time, within the Russian Federation, similar to some European civic nation states such as France, does not recognize national minorities such as Ukrainians who are the second largest non-Russian people after Tatars. The Ukrainian minority in Russia is subjected to a far greater degree of assimilation than Russians in Ukraine. Western scholarship on minorities in Russia traditionally ignores the existence of Ukrainians in the Russian Federation (see Prina, 2016).

Eurasianism unites the first three Russian identities into one ideology and identity (Tolz, 1998, 995–996). Eurasianism was a marginal nationalist movement in the 1990s but has become influential in Russia under Putin.

Eurasianism emerged in the 1930s among White Russian émigrés who dropped their anti-communism after coming around to supporting Soviet leader Joseph Stalin's National Bolshevism. White Russian exiles praised Stalin and came to drink “from the same well” (Clover, 2016, 66). The rise of émigré Eurasianism and Soviet National Bolshevism came at the same time as changes in Soviet nationality policies in the second half of the 1930s following the *Holodomor*. The reversal of indigenization policies represented a shift from viewing Russian nationalism and imperialism as the main threat to the USSR (in the 1920s) to that of viewing non-Russian nationalism as the biggest threat (from the mid-1930s to the 1980s). Until the eve of the disintegration of the USSR, the bogeyman of Ukrainian “bourgeois nationalism” was a constant staple of Soviet ideological propaganda, KGB operations, nationality policies, official historiography and religious policy.

In the second half of the 1930s the concept of “friendship of peoples” and “brotherly Russian-Ukrainian peoples” became central to Soviet nationality policies and these were assiduously promoted through Soviet ideological tirades and official historiography (Kuzio, 2017a, 85–117). These concepts claimed Ukrainians and Russians had always been very close peoples and throughout history had sought to remain in union with one another. Ukrainians who had sought to break this unity apart were “traitors” in the pay of hostile outside forces, whether Swedes in 1709, Austrians in World War I, Nazi's in World War II, the CIA and Mossad in the Cold War, and more recently Western democracy promoting foundations and the EU.

Eurasianism then and today is a substitute for de-colonization because it mythologizes Russia as having been more successful than Western Europe in managing ethnic diversity. “Eurasianism treats Russia not as a colonial power, but as a community which is itself under threat of being colonized by the West” (Hutchings and Tolz, 2015, 162). A mythical harmonious union of diverse Eurasian peoples under Russian leadership provides the ideological underpinning to build the EEU and is at odds with Ukrainian views of de-nationalization and Russification under Tsarist and Soviet rule.

Russian nationalists were free to work within the Soviet system during the last three decades of the USSR, particularly during the conservative Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko “era of stagnation” from 1964 to 1985. They had access to many official journals such as *Our Contemporary* (*Nash Sovremenyk*) (and *Young Guard* (*Molodaya Gvardiya*) and media outlets. Official Russian nationalists were active in the Soviet Anti-Zionist movement, a camouflaged Soviet form of anti-Semitism, out of which emerged the *Pamyat* (memory) neo-Nazi organization in the late 1980s (Kuzio, 2017a, 118–140). Russian (unlike Ukrainian) nationalism was never considered to be a threat to the territorial integrity of the USSR.

During the more conservative “era of stagnation” the Great Patriotic War became a major Soviet holiday, Stalin's record was rehabilitated, dissent was more severely repressed and Russification policies were more assiduously pursued. The rehabilitation of Stalin and promotion of the Great Patriotic War as a quasi-state religion took place during the “era of stagnation.” Nostalgia for this conservative period of Soviet history is evident in the revival of its main ideological tenets under Putin. Putin was socialized into this Soviet-Russian nationalist world at school and in his employment in the KGB.

All Russian political leaders have never been reconciled to Ukrainian sovereignty and borders. Throughout Leonid Kuchma's presidency in 1994–2004, the Russian parliament and Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov made territorial claims on the Crimea and Sevastopol (Kuzio and D'Anieri, 2018, 62–85). Although President Yeltsyn distanced himself from these territorial demands against Ukraine it took him three years from 1994 to 1997 to travel to Ukraine to sign a treaty recognizing the Russian-Ukrainian border.

Russian nationalism and Eurasianism have gained center stage during President Putin's tenure in office. Former Moscow correspondent of the *Financial Times* Charles Clover (2016, 287) writes that the, "emergence of a virulent nationalist opposition movement took the mainstream hostage." President Putin believes Russia is defending and fighting for Russian and Eurasian civilization in the face of Western aggression and views Western support for Ukraine's integration into Europe as encroachment into what President Dmitri Medvedev described as Russia's "zone of privileged interests" (Kryshtanovskaya and White, 2009).

White Russian émigré writers as well as military and political leaders have become popular in Putin's Russia and their views have deepened Russian chauvinistic views of Ukrainians as a branch of the "Russian people." Ivan Ilyin, a prominent White Russian émigré writer and fascist sympathizer is President Putin's favorite author (Barbashin, and Thoburn, 2015; Snyder, 2018). Ilyin, typical of White Russian emigres, does not believe Ukrainians are a separate people. Putin and Russian leaders have replaced Soviet views of Ukrainians as separate but a close people to Russians with pre-Soviet Russian nationalist views of Ukrainians as one of the three "Russian" peoples (Kuzio, 2017a, 33–84). Putin has increasingly described Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" while his aggressive policies have widened the gulf between them. Returning to Russian chauvinist views of Ukrainians will not endear Ukrainians to again become "brothers."

In an April 2008 speech to the NATO-Russia Council at the Bucharest NATO summit, Putin (2008) described Ukraine as a fragile and artificial construct. He questioned Ukraine's right to control Russian-speaking eastern and southern Ukraine. The eight *oblasts* of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Zaporizhzhya, Odesa, Mykolayiv and Kherson he *de facto* laid territorial claim to are the same as those he included six years later in *Novorossiia*.

Foreign intrigue designed to tear apart the "Russian people" is a long-established component of the attitude of Russian nationalism towards Ukrainians. Putin has called Russians the most divided people in the world (Laruelle, 2015). "The majority of Russians saw Ukrainian nationalism as a result of intrigues either by the Poles or the Austrians" (Tolz, 2001, 2016) and "Even some liberals began to see Ukrainian separatism solely as a result of intrigues of foreign powers aimed at dismembering Russia" (Tolz, 2001, 2018).

Bizarrely, Putin reinvented the myth of the common origins of Russians and Ukrainians in "Kievan Russia" as justification for Russia's annexation of the Crimea. In his speech to the Federation Council accepting Crimea's admission into the Russian Federation, Putin (2014) said, "we are not simply close neighbors but, as I have said many times already, we are one people. Kyiv is the mother of Russian cities. Ancient Rus is our common source and we cannot live without each other." Putin (2014) continued:

"Everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where Prince Vladimir was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus."

Five years after Crimea's annexation, a high 85 percent of Russians continue to support this step with only 10 percent opposed (Levada Center, 2019c). 56 percent of Russians support Donbas separatism, whether becoming independent state (29 percent) or joining Russia (27 percent) (Levada Center, 2019d). Russian leaders and Russians do not understand how their support for the annexation of the Crimea and support for separatism in eastern Ukraine has damaged Russia's image in Ukraine leading to negative consequences for Russian-Ukrainian relations.

4. How Ukrainians view themselves

In Ukrainian historiography, the Austro-Hungarian empire is viewed positively because it permitted Ukrainian language and identity to flourish. The Tsarist Empire is viewed in negative terms because it destroyed the autonomous Ukrainian Cossack Hetmanate, introduced serfdom, and promoted Russification.

Protection of Ukrainian language and culture in the face of Russification has been an important theme in Ukrainian political thought since the second half of the nineteenth century. The Ukrainian language was the only language to be banned in the Tsarist Empire, the first time in 1863 with the Valuev Circular and the second in 1876 with Alexander II's Ems decree. Concern over Russification was an important question for nineteenth century Ukrainian political and cultural activists, Ukrainian national communists, dissidents and nationalists throughout the existence of the USSR.

During thaws and periods of liberalization, Ukrainians have demanded a return to the indigenization policies of the 1920s and described "Soviet Internationalism" introduced in the second half of the 1930s as a camouflage for Russification. This was reflected in the policy paper prepared for Ukrainian Communist Party leaders by Ivan Dzyuba (1968). After being leaked and smuggled to the West it was published in English and in the Ukrainian and Russian languages as "Internationalism or Russification?" The book was finally published in 1990 in Soviet Ukraine.

Internal liberalizers and national communists such as Dzyuba (1968), together with writers, historians, and others viewed Soviet Ukraine's "golden era's" as those when the USSR liberalized in the 1920s, during the thaw from the death of Stalin in 1953–1971 and during Mikhail Gorbachev's *perestroika* and *glasnost* in 1985–1991. For Soviet and Russian nationalists, such as Putin, liberalization was tantamount to Westernization and a threat to the break-up of the USSR. Their "golden era's" were when hardliners and Soviet leaders sympathetic to Russian nationalism ruled the USSR under Stalin, Brezhnev, Andropov and Chernenko. Gorbachev is synonymous to Ukrainians with liberalization and to Russians with the disintegration of the mighty Soviet state and the West's disrespect for Russia in the 1990s.

Ukraine became an independent state in 1991 with a different Soviet legacy, emphasizing nation building and distancing itself from the USSR. One important area has been memory politics. Research, publishing and collection of eyewitness

testimonies of the *Holodomor* and de-Stalinization has been taking place for three decades (Kuzio, 2017c). A November 2017 poll found 77 percent of Ukrainians believed the *Holodomor* was a genocide, including 56 percent in the east and 65 percent in the south of Ukraine (Rating Group, 2017; Kuzio, 2017b). A majority of Ukrainians view Stalin as a tyrant. In Russia, re-Stalinization has been taking place since 2000 under Putin. By 2019, a record number of 70 percent of Russians held a positive view of Stalin with half of Russians ready to explain away his crimes against humanity (Levada Center, 2019a).

The text of Ukraine's August 1991 Declaration of Independence had already signaled there would be a replacement of Soviet myths by those underpinning "the 1000-year tradition of state development." Kyivan Rus' leaders Volodymyr the Great and Yaroslav the Wise feature on the one and two hryvnya currency notes. Ukrainian historians have long laid claim to the medieval state of Kyivan Rus' as exclusively belonging to Ukrainian history. In 1982, Soviet Ukraine celebrated the 1500 anniversary of Kyiv. In 2016, a monument to Volodymyr the Great was unveiled in Moscow in a city that did not appear until 1147 and therefore had not existed when he ruled Kyivan Rus'.

An independent Ukrainian state permitted the revival of national historiography, including the return of Ukrainian diaspora scholarship to Ukraine (Magocsi, 2010; Plokhly, 2015), new pedagogy, national currency, monuments, festivals and commemorations. Those deemed traitors in the Soviet Union, such as Hetman Ivan Mazepa who allied with Sweden against Muscovy in 1709, have become heroes; Mazepa is to be found on the ten hryvnya currency note (Kuzio, 1998).

The Soviet regime treated Cossack Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky as a hero and an example of how Ukrainians always sought unity with Russia through the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav. In his poem *Subotiv*, Taras Shevchenko, Ukraine's national bard in the nineteenth century, provided a damning critique of Khmelnytsky, writing, "Their gain has been our loss; The Muscovites have snatched away all that they came across; And now they rend the burial mounds in search of further loot;" ending with "You've ruined derelict Ukraine." The Treaty of Pereyaslav was critically appraised by some historians and dissidents in Soviet Ukraine, in histories of Ukraine published in the West and since 1991 in Ukraine's revived national historiography. Soviet Ukrainian historian Mykhaylo Braychevskyi (1974) text "Annexation or Reunification?" was turned down by the Ukrainian Historical Journal (*Ukrayinsky Istorychnyy Zhurnal*) the official journal of the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences) and was instead published first in *samvydav* (*samizdat*) and then in the West (Basarab, 1982).

Since 1991, the Treaty of Pereyaslav has come under even more scrutiny and critical appraisal in new generations of history writing in Ukraine and translations of Western histories of Ukraine, such as those by Paul R. Magocsi (2010) and Serhiy Plokhly (2015). At the heart of the controversy was another example of how Ukrainians and Russians disagree about their histories. Russian and Soviet history viewed - and continues to view - the Treaty of Pereyaslav as Ukrainians seeking to unify with and be absorbed under Russian leadership in what is clearly an unequal relationship. Ukrainian history sees the Treaty of Pereyaslav as a military alliance of equals against Catholic Poland. Unification under Russia's leadership and a military alliance of equals are two very different interpretations.

The deterioration of Ukraine's relations with Russia began during Viktor Yushchenko's presidency (2005–2010) who was viewed in Moscow as a "nationalist" and his Ukrainian-American wife Kateryna Yushchenko as an "American agent." Ukrainian-Russian relations came to a head in 2008–2009 over Russia's invasion of Georgia, Ukraine's goal of NATO membership and the expulsion of Russian diplomats for supporting separatism in Crimea and Odesa.

History and identity were again at the center of their deteriorating relations. In August 2009, in response to the expulsion of Russian diplomats, President Medvedev wrote an undiplomatic open letter to President Yushchenko. In it, Medvedev outlined Russian views of its historical relationship with Ukraine and made outrageous demands:

"Russian-Ukrainian relations are tested by your administration's review of our general historical framework, glorification of Nazi collaborators, the exaltation of the role of radical nationalists, and attempts to press the international community in supporting nationalist interpretations of the 1932–1933 famine in the USSR as a "genocide against the Ukrainian people." There is continued repression of the Russian language in public life, science, education, culture, media, and judicial proceedings" (Medvedev in Kuzio, 2015, 438–439).

Russians have never understood how memory politics over Russification are an important driver of Ukrainian identity (Fournier, 2002). Ukraine's differences with Russia over identity and history have sharpened since the Euromaidan Revolution and four de-communization laws adopted in spring 2015. Ukraine no longer celebrates the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) on May 9 replacing it with commemoration of World War II (1939–1945) on May 8. All Communist plaques and monuments of Vladimir Lenin have been removed from Ukraine. Ukraine has the freest access to Soviet archives anywhere in Eurasia and on a par with access in the three Baltic States.

In the USSR, ideological campaigns against "bourgeois nationalism" targeted Ukrainians, Lithuanians, Latvians and Estonian dissidents and nationalists and their respective diasporas (Kuzio, 2017a, 5–117). These Soviet ideological concepts were revived by Russian political technologists working for Viktor Yanukovich's election campaign in Ukraine's 2004 elections. Russian information warfare was provided with greater resources with the advent of social media and 24-h TV in the second half of the 2000's.

Putin's re-election in 2012 and his turn to a more extreme Russian nationalism has been evident in Russian information warfare towards Ukraine and Ukrainians who have been the main target (Kuzio, 2019). "Almost five years into the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Kremlin's use of the information weapon against Ukraine has not decreased; Ukraine still stands out as the most misrepresented country in pro-Kremlin media" (EU Disinformation Review, 2018a). This has culminated in 56 percent of Russians holding a negative view of Ukraine, only 1 percent less than Russian negative views of the US (Levada Center, 2019b).

In what can be understood as the ultimate example of fake news, [Putin \(2019\)](#) claimed Russian media conduct “independent editorial policies.” Acting with insincere incredulity during the 2019 Valdai conference he said, if the Russian media “depict Ukraine in an unfavorable manner, then I agree that this wrong. We should not depict our closest neighbour and brotherly people in an unfavorable light” ([Putin, 2019](#)). Human rights think tank Freedom [House, 2017](#) ranks Russia’s media as “Not Free” and reports: “Television, which is still the leading source of news and information, often functions as a propaganda tool for the government.” ([Freedom House, 2017](#)). Russia’s massive disinformation and propaganda assault on Ukraine and its depictions as an “artificial” and “failed state” could not be happening without Putin’s endorsement.

5. Why the Russian Spring and Novorossiya failed?

A tense relationship between Russians and Ukrainians came to a head in the 2014 crisis and led to the failure of the “Russian Spring.” This was because Russian nationalist stereotypes and myths about Ukraine and Ukrainians had little basis in reality ([Kulyk, 2018](#); [Plokhyy, 2015](#), 347–355; [Kuzio, 2017a](#), 211–289; [Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018](#); [O’Loughlin et al., 2016](#)).

5.1. Russian speaking Ukrainian patriots

Anti-Russian views were present in western Ukraine because of its long history outside the Russian empire which had permitted nation-building to take place decades before Soviet rule. Russian nationalists have never viewed western Ukraine as part of the Russian World because it lived for a long period of time outside the Russian Empire, it is not Russian speaking, Catholic and “polluted” by Polish and European influences.

Russian misconceptions and stereotypes of left and right-bank Ukraine believe it to be the quintessential “Little Russia”—Russian speaking, where the Russian Orthodox Church is dominant and an area that was part of the Russian Empire for centuries. Left and right-bank Ukraine are therefore natural components of the Russian World.

Russian leaders believe “Russians” in right and left-bank Ukraine are eager to be part of the Russian World but are prevented from doing so by a coalition of rapacious oligarchs and western Ukrainian “fascists” who took power in an illegal putsch in the Euromaidan Revolution. “Failed state” Ukraine is kept financially afloat by a perfidious US government and EU seeking to deny Russia its historic sphere of influence ([Shekhovtsov, 2017](#)).

These stereotypes and myths, again, had nothing to do with reality. Worse still, Russia has never understood how its annexation of the Crimea and military aggression would change the attitudes of Russian speakers in Ukraine. In 1954, the Crimea was transferred to Ukraine to commemorate the 300th anniversary of “age-old Russian-Ukrainian brotherly friendship” supposedly enshrined in the 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav between Muscovy and Cossack Ukraine ([Kasymenko, 1954](#)). Russia’s annexation of Crimea took place on the 360th anniversary of the Treaty of Pereyaslav. In taking back the Crimea Putin drove a nail in the coffin of Ukrainian-Russian “brotherly relations.”

A large proportion of eastern and southern Ukrainians had believed Soviet myths of Russian-Ukrainian “fraternal brotherhood” which was never the case in Ukraine’s west ([Wawrzonek, 2014](#); [Razumkov Center, 2017a, b](#); [Stewart and Dollbaum, 2017](#)). The Russian-Ukrainian crisis, Crimea’s annexation and war forced many Russian speakers to choose which side of the fence they were on. 64 percent of Ukrainians do not see Russians as their “brothers” or Russia as Ukraine’s “strategic partner” ([Razumkov Center, 2019](#), 216; [Kulchytsky and Mishchenko, 2018](#), 192). Russia’s military aggression therefore came as a greater shock and betrayal to Russian speakers in eastern and southern Ukraine than it did to western Ukrainians. Russian military aggression has turned Ukrainian supporters of uniting Ukraine and Russia into one state, among whom Russian-speakers and eastern-southern Ukrainians would have been its main backers, from a high of 22% in 2009 to 7% in 2014, the year of the outbreak of the Russian-Ukrainian war, then collapsing to 4% and 5% in 2015 and 2016 and an all-time low of 3% in 2018 and 2019 ([Levada Center and Kyiv International Institute of Sociological Studies, 2019](#)). Ukrainian support for “Russian relations with Ukraine should be the same as with other states – with closed borders, visas, and customs” increased from its lowest support of 9.66% in 2009 to its highest level of 46% in 2017. Meanwhile, Ukrainian support for “Russia and Ukraine should be independent, but friendly states – with open borders, without visas and customs” dropped from a high of 70.5% in 2012 to its lowest support of 42.5% in 2017 ([Levada Center and Kyiv International Institute of Sociological Studies, 2019](#)).

Prior to 2014 the Russian World was supported by popular pro-Russian political forces, such as the Party of Regions and Communist Party (KPU) and by a third of Ukrainians supporting integration into the CIS Customs Union (the pre-2015 name for the EEU). Russia’s view of the Russian World was challenged by the 2004 Orange and 2013–14 Euromaidan Revolutions which supported Ukraine’s integration into Europe and away from the Russian World ([Wawrzonek, 2014](#), 776). Importantly, Ukraine resisted the Russian World because its “components (for example, the defense of the Russian-speaking population or “common views of social development”) serve more as a justification for Russia’s forcible intervention in the territory of Ukraine than as an agenda to be used by Ukraine’s independent authorities” ([Wawrzonek, 2014](#), 776).

Since 2014, Ukraine’s “pro-Russian east” has shrunk to two *oblasts* in the Donbas ([Zhurzhenko, 2015](#)). Ukraine no longer has a Russian “super-minority” ([Kulyk, 2018](#)). The Party of Regions disintegrated in February 2014. The KPU is unable to participate in elections because it continues to use Soviet symbols banned under de-communization laws. Nearly a fifth of traditionally pro-Russian voters in the Crimea and Donbas are unable to participate in Ukrainian elections because they live in Russian-occupied territories ([D’Anieri, 2019](#)). Yanukovich and the Party of Regions won all eight *oblasts* in Ukraine’s east and

south in elections held between 2006 and 2012. Pro-Russian candidate Yuriy Boyko and the pro-Russian Opposition Platform won votes in only two Donbas *oblasts* in the 2019 Ukrainian presidential and parliamentary elections.

Russian speakers can be found in volunteer groups supplying soldiers on the front line and in volunteer battalions in 2014–15. Russian speakers constitute 62 percent of Ukrainian security forces in the Donbas (Poroshenko, 2015). President Putin claim to be protecting Russian speakers in Ukraine are patently false as 1.7 million Russian speakers have suffered damage to or the loss of their properties and have fled from the Donbas to other regions of Ukraine. Eastern and southern Ukrainian regions have suffered the highest proportion of military casualties and of these *oblasts*, Dnipro (Dnipropetrovsk until May 2016) has the largest number.

A more informed way to understand Ukraine's conflict is through national identity rather than language (Razumkov Center, 2016a, b, 2017a, b). The war in eastern Ukraine is between those holding a Ukrainian (civic, ethnic or civic-ethnic) identity and those nostalgic for the USSR and holding an allegiance to the Russian World. Since 2014, a higher proportion of Russian speakers whose primary identity is Ukrainian prefer to see Ukraine's future in Europe (Razumkov Center, 2016a, b, 2017a, b). Support for membership of the EEU has collapsed to less than a third of its pre-2014 levels. This contrasts with the near tripling of support for NATO membership from less than a quarter prior to 2014 to 69 percent (Razumkov Center, 2019). This sizeable increase in support for joining the EU and NATO is impossible without the support of Russian speaking Ukrainians.

5.2. *The myth of Novorossiia*

In 2014–2015, the idea of *Novorossiia* was revived (Putin, 2008). But in both 2008 and 2014, Putin confused which territories had belonged to *Novorossiia* (Magocsi, 2010). There had been two different *Novorossiia gubernia* (provinces) in 1764–1802 and 1822–1874 but neither had included Kharkiv which was the center of the *Slobozhanshchyna* province. *Slobozhanshchyna* had historical ties to Ukrainian Cossacks and since the opening of a University in 1804 was the intellectual capital of eastern Ukraine. In 1922–34, Kharkiv was capital of Soviet Ukraine.

Historically, *Novorossiia* was never inhabited by a majority of Russians but by Ukrainians, specifically Ukrainian peasants who moved there after its annexation by the Russian Empire (Magocsi, 2010). By the 1897 Tsarist census, Ukrainian peasants had become the majority of the population in all of the regions of *Novorossiia*. *Novorossiia* was also populated by Jews, Romanians, and Tatars; ethnic Russians, to whom Putin always appeals, arrived much later during Soviet industrialization (Laruelle, 2016).

Describing the inhabitants of *Novorossiia* as “Russians” is undertaken by denying Ukrainians are a separate people and understanding “Russians” to encompass the three eastern Slavic peoples. This approach was used in the 1897 Tsarist census in which Ukrainians were included within the overall category of “Russians.” Putin describes *Novorossiia* as inhabited historically and today by “Russians” because he does not differentiate Ukrainians from Russian inhabitants of *Novorossiia* as he believes they are “one people.”

In Putin's (2008) speech to the NATO–Russia Council he repeated Russian misconceptions and stereotypes and myths about Ukraine that are ingrained in Russia's nationalist attitudes towards Ukraine and Ukrainians. “In the south, the south of Ukraine, there are in fact only Russians” which is not true unless one conflates, as Putin does, Russians and Russian speakers in Ukraine into “Russians.” Ukraine's 2001 census recorded an overall average of 74.37 percent Ukrainians and 14.1 percent Russians in the four south-eastern *oblasts* of Odesa (62.8 percent Ukrainians: 20.7 percent Russians), Mykolayiv (81.9 percent: 14.1%), Kherson (82 percent: 14.1 percent) and Zaporizhzhya (70.8 percent: 24.7 percent) (Ukrainian Census, 2001).

5.3. *The Novorossiia project*

In the “Russian Spring,” pro-Russian activists and Russian nationalists believed Putin would follow the annexation of Crimea with the annexation of *Novorossiia*. Putin's goals in eastern and southern Ukraine was to weaken Ukraine's central government by transforming Ukraine into a loose federation with *Novorossiia* as a Russian satellite state.

Russia had pursued a similar strategy in 2003 in Moldova in the plan outlined by Russian first deputy head of the presidential administration Dimitrii Kozak who had proposed a solution to the Trans-Dniestr question through Moldova's federalization. Only deep-seated stereotypes and myths can explain why Russian leaders believed Ukrainians would sign up to a similar proposal after Moldova's Communist leadership had rejected the “Kozak Plan.”

In the “Russian Spring” Moscow's goal was to provoke a “civil war” in Russian speaking areas of Ukraine that would be portrayed as popular opposition to Euromaidan Revolutionary “putschists.” Opponents of the “putschists” would call for Russian protection (Kuzio, 2017a, 211–250). “Uprisings” would be assisted through the use of Russian intelligence assets, Russian GRU (military intelligence) special forces (the so-called “Little Green Men” used in the Crimea), Russian neo-Nazi, nationalist and Cossack mercenaries, and Russian “political tourists” bused into Ukraine and pretending to be locals. Russia could also rely upon Ukrainians in Ukraine's military and intelligence services who had been recruited by Russian intelligence (Kuzio, 2012), pro-Russian party activists from the Party of Regions, KPU and other groups.

Local pro-Russian activists were instructed to take control of official buildings, pressure local politicians to transfer their loyalty to Russia, stage protest rallies, and eventually issue appeals to Russia to intervene. During the “Russian Spring”, this eclectic alliance of Russian fascists, Soviet nationalists and Tsarist and Orthodox fundamentalists (Laruelle, 2016) would call for a general strike, the formation of armed self-defense units, the taking of hostages from the Ukrainian authorities,

dismantling of the border, elimination of border guards and customs officers and mobilization of information warfare against Ukraine.

Leaked tapes of Russian presidential adviser Sergei Glazyev, who worked directly under President Putin's senior adviser Vladyslav Surkov, give an insight into Moscow's plans in the "Russian Spring" (Shandra and Robert Seely, 2019). Glazyev is heard saying "I have a direct order from the (Kremlin) leader to mobilize the masses in Ukraine wherever we can." On another tape he is heard pleading, "President Putin has signed the order (for military intervention in Ukraine). The operation has begun." (Lutsenko, 2016 and Kravets, 2016).

Armed conflict between Russian speakers and "fascists" would be followed by the signing of a "peace agreement" and the introduction of CIS (i.e. Russian) "peacekeepers" (Shekhovtsov, 2017, 196). Russia had 2000 special forces ready in Trans-Dniestr to intervene in Odesa,¹ but a combination of low public support for pro-Russian activism and the death of 48 activists mainly from fire and a few from gunshots on May 2, 2014 dampened agitation and protests in that city.

The key to the success of this Russian strategy lay in portraying local "uprisings" as representing the popular will of Russian speaking Ukrainians seeking protection from "fascist" Kyiv. If there were no large pro-Russian rallies and protests against the Ukrainian authorities, there would be no fig leaf cover for the intervention of Russian forces. In Zaporizhzhya, a paltry 1500 pro-Russian protestors were pelted with eggs and flour and the "pro-Russian uprising" collapsed as quickly as it had started. Glazyev, who was born in Zaporizhzhya, was clearly frustrated and asked, "Why is Zaporizhzhya silent?" complaining "Where are they? Where are the Cossacks? I have an order to get everyone out into the streets to demand Russia's help." (Lutsenko, 2016).

The targeting by Russian information warfare of Ukrainians as "fascists" was in contradiction with "significant involvement of various representatives of Russia's far-right movements" among the mercenaries travelling to the Donbas to fight for Russian proxies (Shekhovtsov, 2017, 186; Shekhovtsov, 2018). Some Western scholars writing about the "Russian Spring" ignore the presence of these Russian neo-Nazi's (Sakwa, 2015, 2017; Matveeva, 2018) instead exaggerating the influence of Ukrainian "nationalists" (Kuzio, 2018d, 544–547).

The origins of the eclectic alliance of brown fascists, red Communists and white Tsarist and Russian Orthodox extremists is to be found in the 1993 uprising against President Yeltsyn (Laruelle, 2016). Following the failed nationalist uprising these groups either became marginalized or were banned. Many of the mercenaries travelling to the Donbas were from the neo-Nazi Russian National Unity (RNE) which was briefly banned for its involvement in the 1993 uprising. These extremists, like White Russian emigres who have been rehabilitated under Putin, see Ukraine as an "artificial state" and Russians and Ukrainians as "one people."

5.4. Four reasons why the Novorossiia project failed

The first was that Russia misunderstood, and continues to misunderstand the internal dynamics of Ukraine, especially the identity of Russian speaking Ukrainians. Public support for pro-Russian "uprisings" in the eight regions Putin included in his *Novorossiia* never materialized. Even in the Donbas, the most pro-Russian region of eastern-southern Ukraine (outside the Crimea), pro-Russian forces were on the verge of defeat and were only saved by Russian artillery attacks in July and Russian military intervention in August 2014.

The second was that those who are commonly lumped together as "separatists" include Ukrainians in favor of their region's unification with Russia and those who support creating an independent state. Taken together they have never been supported by more than a third of the population in the Donbas and 40 percent in the Crimea. Kharkiv, which had the second highest support for separatism after the Crimea and Donbas, had only 16 percent support for separatism. The 31.6 percent who supported separatism in the Donbas did not have a united vision of what that meant with 4.7 percent backing independence, 18.2 percent incorporation into Russia and 8.7 percent supporting the Donbas existing in a federal union with Russia (Stebelsky, 2018). This support for separatism was higher than in the other six regions of Putin's *Novorossiia* but nevertheless it never constituted a majority of the population in these two *oblasts*.

In the Donbas, 30 percent of Russians but only 11 percent with a dual Russian-Ukrainian identity supported separatism (ethnic Ukrainian support was even lower). Of the six issues in the 2014 separatist program, only joining the CIS Customs Union over the EU and fear of extreme Ukrainian nationalism had high support. Columbia University Professor Elise Giuliano (2018) concluded that a majority of Russians, Ukrainians and those holding a Russian-Ukrainian identity in the Donbas did not support separatism.

Even weaker support for separatism is found in other areas of eastern and southern Ukraine. Mikhail Golubev, a resident of Odesa, said Putin "miscalculated, thinking that because we are Russian speakers, we want to rejoin a new Russian empire" (Olearchyk, 2015). The population of eastern and southern Ukraine saw *Novorossiia* "for what it was – an imperial political narrative" (Stebelsky, 2018, 44). The takeover of official buildings was supported by 24 percent, 18 percent and 10 percent respectively in Luhansk, Donetsk, and Kharkiv. Although anti-Maidan sentiment was high in eastern Ukraine, 32 percent in the Donbas and 16 percent in eastern and southern Ukraine opposed the use of lethal force by *Berkut* (Golden Eagle) riot police (Giuliano, 2018). Participation in pro-Russian protests was backed by a quarter of the population in the Donbas and

¹ Information provided by Stephen Blank on 'Gunboat Diplomacy,' CEPA (Center for European Policy Analysis), Podcast, episode 19, November 30, 2018.

even less, 15 percent in Kharkiv. In the remainder of eastern and southern Ukraine it was supported by only 3–7 percent (Stebelsky, 2018).

A third factor was that Russian attempts to use “active measures” (ideological, political, economic and information warfare) to maintain Ukraine within Russia’s sphere of influence had failed (Hosaka, 2018, 323). Putin’s anger at the failure of Russian “active measures” in Ukraine in 2012–14 was a major driver behind his decision to annex the Crimea (Hosaka, 2018, 324).

In 2012–2013, Putin lobbied Yanukovich to support eastern Slavic and Russian Orthodox unity and drop support for the Association Agreement with the EU. In August 2013, a Russian strategy document was leaked entitled “On the Complex of Measures to Co-Opt Ukraine into the Eurasian Integration Process” whose authenticity was confirmed in the hacked Surkov emails (Standish, 2016).

Russia sought to thwart Ukraine’s integration into the EU and the signing of an Association Agreement through Yanukovich’s re-election (or that of another pro-Russian candidate) in January 2015. The elected pro-Russian president would take Ukraine into the EEU. Putin never trusted Yanukovich because he believed he would be willing to play the EU card if that meant he would win the 2015 elections. Although for a kleptocrat such as Yanukovich, power and money were more important than Russian nationalist ideology and eastern Slavic identity.

Russia supported Viktor Medvedchuk as a potential alternative candidate which showed to what degree Russia had little understanding of Ukraine where Medvedchuk is highly unpopular. Medvedchuk’s Ukrainian Choice party was a “front for the Kremlin” (Hosaka, 2018, 341) and had no popular base in the country. Medvedchuk has since become a leading member of the pro-Russian Opposition Platform.

A fourth factor was loyalty of the security forces. They remained loyal to Kyiv in all Ukrainian regions, except the Crimea where there was a mass defection to Russia. In the Donbas defections were also significant but not as wholesale as in Crimea. In the other six regions of eastern and southern Ukraine, local security forces remained loyal to Kyiv and these were bolstered by forces brought from other Ukrainian regions. Ministry of Interior Special Forces were used to remove pro-Russian activists from official buildings in Kharkiv and other cities in *Novorossiia*. In Kharkiv, political tourists bussed in from Russia occupied a theatre by mistake believing it to be the state administration building. These forces were backed up by local self-defense units who had emerged from the Euromaidan Revolution, “ultra” football fans and nationalists.

Following the failure to mobilize Russian speakers in the six *oblasts* outside the Donbas, the Kremlin project for a *Novorossiia* was folded. By the spring of 2015, the Kremlin had effectively admitted defeat and the, “dream of many Russian imperial nostalgists that great swathes of Russian-speaking Ukraine would flock to join Moscow has faded” (Matthews, 2015; Levada Center and Kyiv International Institute of Sociological Studies, 2019). *Novorossiia* leaders attributed its failure to the fact, “it has no active support in Ukraine’s eastern regions” (Project *Novorossiia-game over?*, 2015).

6. Conclusions

Putin’s *Novorossiia* project failed because of stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians that had little basis in reality. These in turn emerged from the integration of Russian and Soviet identities and Soviet nationality policies and historiography that had depicted Ukrainians as “brotherly peoples” who had always been seeking to be in union with Russia. A Ukrainian identity had developed within the confines of the Soviet Ukrainian republic and since 1991 Ukrainian nation-building has consolidated in support of the country’s territorial integrity and an identity and history that was becoming separate to Russia’s.

Russian stereotypes and myths had already come into competition with Ukrainian identity during and after the Orange Revolution. The growth of Russian nationalism under Putin was evident in Russian leaders returning to Tsarist chauvinistic denials of Ukrainians as a separate people. These developments in Russia and Ukraine’s goal of integration into Europe placed Russia and Ukraine on a collision course. Russian nationalists accused Putin of “betrayal” for not following the annexation of Crimea with annexation of *Novorossiia*. But the real reasons for the failure of *Novorossiia* are to be found in Russian stereotypes and myths of Ukraine and Ukrainians; in particular, an inability to recognize Russian speakers as Ukrainian patriots and that Ukrainians are a separate people with a sovereign right to decide their own domestic and foreign policies. It is therefore not surprising that 67 percent of Ukrainians believe the Russian regime seeks to “destroy Ukraine’s independence and sovereignty” (Razumkov, 2019, 215).

2014 has become a turning point in Ukrainian-Russian relations akin to 1991. Russia’s annexation of Crimea has undermined the Soviet myth of the 1654 “re-union” of Ukraine and Russia which was commemorated with such pomp in 1954 with the transfer of Crimea to Soviet Ukraine (Kasymenko, 1954; Basarab, 1982; Levada Center and Kyiv International Institute of Sociological Studies, 2019).

Russian leaders have yet to come to terms with their own actions which have led to deeper transformations in Ukrainian identity, movement away from the Russian World and collapse of Russian soft power in Ukraine. Current Russian leaders believe Gorbachev “lost” the USSR. Future Russian leaders may come to remember Putin for having gained Crimea and lost Ukraine.

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