

## PREFACE

Ukraine's re-emergence from political oblivion and its achievement of independence were major historical events which changed the map of Europe and altered international relations generally. They were the decisive factor which scuttled schemes to preserve the Soviet Union in a revamped form and which precipitated its demise. The Ukrainian resurgence also defined the arrangement which replaced the Soviet Union - the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) - as a loose association of independent states, rather than a supranational entity. Since then, Ukraine's determination to stick to its chosen path of independence has thwarted efforts to promote the political and military integration of the CIS into a new bloc, facilitated NATO's enlargement in the east, and transformed the fledgling state into one of Europe's pivots.

Just as in 1917-20, when attempts to establish an independent Ukrainian state were met with scepticism or outright hostility, so Ukraine's reassertion of its desire for sovereignty and independence took many by surprise and the initial reaction was ambivalent. Indeed, the very idea of Ukraine as a distinct nation and country did not fit into traditional political and historiographical schemes. This stemmed largely from the erroneous but widespread tendency to regard Russia and the Soviet Union as one and the same thing and the failure to understand the actual nature of the multinational former Soviet empire. The basic lack of knowledge about Ukrainian history and culture, resulting in the belief or assumption that the Ukrainians are simply Russians who speak a different dialect, also did not help. As Norman Davies noted in his ground-breaking comprehensive history of Europe, 'the best thing to do with such an embarrassing nation', which refused to disappear meekly under both tsarist and Soviet domination, 'was to pretend that it didn't exist'.<sup>1</sup>

In reality, throughout most of the twentieth century, Ukraine remained Europe's largest nation to have been denied the right to

1 Norman Davies, *Europe: A History*, Oxford and New York, 1996, p. 41.

national self-determination. While externally its fate passed largely unnoticed, some of the more astute observers drew attention to its predicament. As far back as the late 1950s, the incisive scholar of Communism, Milovan Djilas, asked in his celebrated *The New Class*: 'Who knows anything nowadays about Ukrainian writers and political figures? What has happened to that nation, which is the same size as France, and was once the most advanced nation in Russia [that is, the Russian Empire]?'<sup>2</sup> More than a decade later, after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Czech writer Milan Kundera, while reflecting on the erasure of historical memory, noted poignantly in his *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*: 'Over the past five decades forty million Ukrainian have been quietly vanishing from the world without the world paying heed.'

Ukraine was the Soviet Union's most important non-Russian republic and, in order to ensure that it remained docile, as in the tsarist era, Ukrainian national aspirations were ruthlessly suppressed. The republic was closely integrated into the centralized Soviet political and economic system and its proclaimed sovereignty remained a legal fiction. In addition to the political absorption and Sovietization which accompanied it, the Ukrainians were also confronted with official policies promoting cultural assimilation, denationalization and Russification. Although the Ukrainians were by far the largest non-Russian nation in the Soviet Union, they were, together with the Belarusians, linguistically and culturally the closest to the Russians; therefore, they were particularly vulnerable to Russification through the erosion of their native language and sense of national history, as well as suppression of their national churches. Furthermore, in the post-war period, Russians continued flooding into Ukraine; by 1989 they formed a huge 11-million-strong minority in the republic, and today they are the largest Russian group living outside of Russia proper. This unabated inflow and the restrictions on the development of Ukrainian national institutions perpetuated the sharp regional differences, which for various historical reasons distinguished the more nationally assertive Western Ukraine from the Russified Eastern part of the country, hindering national integration and the completion of the processes of modern nation- and state-building.

How then, after being seemingly written off so long ago, did

<sup>2</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The New Class*, New York, 1957, p. 102.

Ukraine manage in a relatively short time, and without bloodshed, to reassert itself? How did the process of revival begin, who led it, and how did it develop into a powerful movement for national renewal and emancipation? What obstacles and weaknesses faced this drive during the period *ofglasnost*, *perestroika* and imperial decay, which external factors influenced and inspired it, and how did the movement eventually succeed? Were the Ukrainians simply beneficiaries of the collapse of the Soviet system, to what extent did they actually have to struggle to achieve their freedom, and how did they contribute to the dissolution of the USSR? These are some of the key questions addressed in this book.

This account would have been incomplete without some attempt to examine the nature of the new independent Ukrainian state, its viability and prospects. The last chapters of the book, therefore, chart the first five or so years of independence and explore how Ukraine has coped with the new challenges and opportunities which the change in its status has brought. They describe how, in the face of economic crisis, internal divisions and friction with Russia, Ukraine consolidated independence, grappled with the problems of transition to democracy and a market economy, and, while preoccupied with state-building, sought greater security for itself within the new Europe.

In tracing Ukraine's road to independence and beyond, an attempt has been made to situate the country's political evolution in a wider historical and geopolitical context. Continuities between the Ukrainian past and present have been indicated, the benefits and costs of Soviet rule considered, and the significance of Ukraine as a regional and international factor, even when not an independent actor, highlighted.

By examining Soviet nationalities policy towards Ukraine and describing how the Soviet Union's decline and disintegration were experienced in its most significant and, at that time, also politically most loyal (at least as far as the local Communist leadership was concerned) non-Russian republic, this book also offers additional insights into the nature and collapse of the Soviet Union. By also focusing on the question of Ukrainian-Russian relations, both on the bilateral plane and within the CIS, and examining Ukraine's attitude towards its other neighbours and the West, the study is also intended to contribute to a better understanding of the post Soviet set-up in the CIS and Eastern and Central Europe.

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I began writing this book shortly after Ukraine became independent and initially wanted to chronicle how this had come about while the events were still fresh in the mind. As someone who had closely followed these developments, I was aware that I was well placed to attempt such a study, and the cartons of research material I had accumulated seemed to beg to be processed and made sense of.

From the very outset of my academic and professional career, I had been particularly interested in human rights issues and the nationalities question in the Soviet Union. As a post-graduate student at the London School of Economics and Political Science, I was fortunate to have as my mentors Peter Reddaway and Leonard Schapiro, who already in the mid-1970s were prepared to support what was then still a rather unconventional research topic in the area of Soviet studies - a case study of Ukraine under Shelest. After my academic studies, from 1978 to 1982 I was Amnesty International's Researcher on the Soviet Union and afterwards wrote extensively for the British and American press on Soviet affairs. Eventually, in 1990, together with the late Victor Swoboda who taught at London University's School of Slavonic and Eastern European Studies, I published a comprehensive history of the nationalities problem in the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> Writing in late 1989, I concluded with the observation that 'genuine democratization and the preservation of empire, however disguised, are incompatible', and predicted that among the likely scenarios for the 1990s was 'the gradual break-up of the empire' and 'the creation of some sort of Soviet Commonwealth'. As is known, though, the rapidity of the dissolution of the 'immovable Union' during the next two years took everyone by surprise, observers and direct participants in the process alike.

Meanwhile, from 1984, I worked as a research analyst for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) in Munich, specializing in Soviet foreign policy and nationalities issues generally and Ukraine in particular. RFE/RL, an American-financed radio station, control of which had been taken over in the early 1970s from the CIA by the US Congress, not only broadcast uncensored information each day to the peoples of Eastern and Central Europe and the Soviet Union in their own languages, but also had a renowned research

<sup>3</sup> Bohdan Nahaylo and Victor Swoboda, *Soviet Disunion: A History of the Nationalities Problem in the USSR* London and New York, 1990.

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department, complete with impressive archives, a media-monitoring network and regular analytical publications. At RFE/RL, with its unrivalled publicly-accessible collections of newspapers, journals, books and unofficial writings or *samizdat* from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and rich pool of specialists, I was able to develop my knowledge and understanding of the Soviet Union, and build up my own personal records and expertise on the subjects of particular interest to me.

In May 1989 I was privileged to be appointed Director of the Ukrainian Service of RFE/RL, a position I continued in until September 1991. This meant that during the crucial period from when the cracks in the Soviet edifice had just begun to appear to when Ukraine and other non-Russian republics had declared their independence, I was entrusted with responsibility for supervising the preparation of a daily three-hour programme which, because of the limitations of *glasnost*, was eagerly listened to by millions in Ukraine and the eastern Ukrainian diaspora from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania to Almaty and Vladivostok. The challenge for me and my team was to provide a programme corresponding to the needs of those exciting but still uncertain times, offering timely and balanced news, current affairs and analysis, supplemented with coverage of historical, cultural and religious themes, as well as information about the Ukrainian diaspora. Gradually, as democratization continued to make headway, I was able to establish (telephone) contact with, and eventually meet and interview, many of the leading and less well-known Ukrainian political and cultural figures. In the summer of 1990 I finally made the first of my many visits to Ukraine.

After independence was declared, I returned to analytical research and till the spring of 1994 was an Assistant Director at the RFE/RL Research Institute. I was responsible for coverage of the independent non-Russian states which had emerged as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was during this time, in early 1992 to be precise, that with the encouragement of my publisher, Christopher Hurst, I began work on this book. Initially it was to have been a brief account of how Ukraine had become independent.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> This initial effort was published in the form of a brief report by the Royal Institute of International Affairs, which, in places, I have drawn on. See Bohdan Nahaylo, *The New Ukraine*, London, 1992.

But as I began to examine the research material I had collected and tried to fill gaps in it, started interviewing some of the many contacts I had established in Ukraine, and realized just how little scholarly literature had actually been produced about modern Ukraine, I decided to invest the time and effort in producing a more substantial study — one w h i c h in fact could serve as a surrogate concise political history of modern Ukraine and offer a tentative picture of the new independent Ukrainian state.

Thus, the book turned out to be longer and more detailed than I had anticipated when I took on the project. I also changed jobs in May 1994 and moved to Geneva, where my new responsibilities for the UN High Commissioner for Refugees left me little spare time after work in which to write. Consequently, with the generous understanding of my publisher, the completion date was pushed back by several years until 1998. If this book helps to fill a void in the literature, chronicles some of what might otherwise be forgotten about an extraordinary period, stimulates interest, discussion and further research, and serves as a rough but useful map for other scholars, the investment will have been worthwhile.

In the book I have used the Ukrainian forms for the names of places and individuals (unless they are Russians). Although, for example, the capital of Ukraine, Kyiv, is still generally referred to in English-language sources in its Russian form as Kiev, the time has come to acknowledge the profound political changes that have taken place during the 1990s and to begin using the Ukrainian name for the city, as the United Nations and OSCE already do. After all, depending on who ruled over Ukraine, the city was variously known as Kijow (Polish) and Kiev (Russian). Today, in independent Ukraine, the official name of the capital is finally Ukrainian, just as the city formerly known as Lwow, Lemberg and Lvov is now Lviv and Odessa is Odesa. This 'n a t i v i z a t i o n' of the names of cities is of course by no means peculiar to the Ukrainians and should not be dismissed out of hand as a manifestation of nationalism: it is a feature of post-Soviet decolonization, i.e. part of the undoing of the previous imperialism. Moldova's Kishinev has become Chisinau, Kazakhstan's Almata, Alma-Aty, and Kyrgyzstan's Frunze, Bishkek. Having got used to the change at China's request of Peking to Beijing, or of Rhodesia's Salisbury to Zimbabwe's Harare, is it really asking too much to show greater sensitivity in switching to the native, as opposed to externally imposed, names of places and

individuals, even if up till now they have been the accepted 'English' forms?

Following from this, I have also used the names for the countries which were formally Soviet 'Union republics' as they are now reflected in the new post-Soviet independent states; for example, Belarus rather than Belorussia, and Moldova rather than Moldavia. For the sake of simplifying things, I have also omitted soft signs in my transliteration from Ukrainian and Russian.

As I have indicated, this book does not claim to provide a definitive account of a complex and very recent period, but rather to sketch the main political contours and provide an introductory survey or guide for readers of all kinds. I have therefore approached the topic as both a historian and an informed journalist, hoping to have found an acceptable balance between the descriptive and the analytical. The chronological narrative draws on a wide variety of sources, including numerous interviews with key political and cultural figures, the Soviet, Ukrainian and Western media, *samizdat*, the best of Western analysis and the first publications in Ukraine to deal with the very recent past.

Over the years, it has been my good fortune to meet many individuals who helped develop my interest in, and enrich my knowledge about, contemporary Ukraine. From among them, I would like to thank the following for their help and support, whether wittingly or unwittingly provided, and especially those with whom I was able to discuss at various times topics and themes dealt with in this book, or who helped me obtain material I was searching for. They include Mykhailo Dobnansky, Yaroslav Rozumny, the late Borys Lewytzky, the late Viktor Swoboda, Anatol Kaminsky, Leonid Plyushch, Nadia Svitlychna, Vitalii Korotych, Roman Solchanyk, Frank Sysyn, Roman Szporluk, Adrian Karatnycky, Nadia Diuk, Alexander Motyl, Ivan Myhul, Zenon Kohut, Bohdan Bociurkiw, Petro Potichnyj, Orest Subtelny, David Marples, Bohdan Osadchuk, Yaroslav Pelenski, Bohdan Hawrylyshyn, Serhii Naboka, Taras Kuzio, Mykola Ryabchuk, Mykola Zhulynsky, Les Tanyuk, Vyacheslav Bryukhovetsky, Vyacheslav Pikhovshek, Ihor Markov, Ihor Hryniv, Taras Stetskiw, Ihor Derkach, Vitalii Portnikov, Yurii Pakhomov, Valeni Smolii, Yurii Shapoval, Serhii Marchenko, Yaroslav Koval, Nadir Bekirov, Artur Bilous and Anatolii Rusnachenko.

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Naturally, special thanks are owed to former colleagues and staff at RFE/RL in Munich for the stimulating discussions, helping to locate research material and providing a valuable comparative perspective. Here I would like to mention especially Roman Solchanyk, whose readiness to share his knowledge and materials was, whether he knew it or not, an important source of support, and my debt to his writings is apparent from the footnotes. Enders Wimbush, David Marples, Vladimir Socor, Toomas Iivask, John Lepingwell, Ivan Hvat, Chrystyna Lapychak, Andrii and Iwanka Rebet, Volodymyr Hanyk, Lida Holvaty, Garik Superfin and Inna Burgher also helped at different times and in various ways. From outside RFE/RL, Steve Larrabee, Sherman Garnett and John Morrison were generous in sharing their interpretation of developments in Ukraine with me.

The long narrative needed maps and photographs to assist the reader to understand better the geography and spirit of the events being described and I would like to thank all those who helped in this respect. The maps were prepared by Helena Bray and Yves Bouchardy in Geneva on the basis of earlier drafts made by John Richmond in Munich or derived from products by American Digital Cartography.

For the photographs I have to thank Vitalii Vozyanov, the Director of the Ukrainian National News Agency, Ukrinform, who gave permission for me to use photographs from its archives, and Serhii Marchenko, one of the leading contemporary photographic chroniclers of Ukraine's past and its recent resurgence, whose creative work I have admired for years. Serhii Spasokukotsky also provided a selection of photos for me to choose from. I would also like to express my gratitude to Joseanne Umpleby for her help in designing the cover of the book from photographs by Serhii Marchenko.

Of course none of those whose assistance I have acknowledged above is responsible in any way for any errors, factual or interpretive, that I may have made in this book and for any imprecision and

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inconsistency discovered by the reader. There are no research assistants to blame and the index was also my own doing.

The book was written by me in my private scholarly capacity: the views and conclusions presented in it are mine alone and do not purport to represent the views of any organisation with which I have been, or am, professionally associated.

Finally, a special word of thanks to those whose interest and support helped the project through the years of research and writing. Christopher Hurst had the vision and understanding to ask me to write a book on Ukraine several years before I actually agreed and when an independent Ukraine still seemed, as Rosa Luxemburg once put it, to be the dream of coffee house politicians. In Michael Dwyer, Director at Hurst Publishers, I discovered an exemplary partner, a firm but tolerant manager, who is genuinely interested in the themes he proposes and commissions.

Needless to say, the one individual who witnessed the conception, long pregnancy, labour pains and birth of this book was my wife Tamara Tarnawska. Her steady support and readiness to discuss various parts of the work in progress deserve a special '*dyakuyu!*' (thank you in Ukrainian). Her son Alex and my children Emma and Maksym also had to put up with the project's encroachments on the time I could spend with them and I hope that in return they will glance through this book one day and find things of interest. I cannot omit a mention of our cats, Jimmy, Smoky, Toffee and Kyi, who took turns in keeping me company at all hours in my study during the long periods of solitude and who infrequently either 'helped' rearrange my papers or served as splendid paperweights. If only this book could also have nine lives....

*Ferney- Voltaire*  
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