

Russia in Independent Ukraine's Politics
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Despite “European integration” rhetoric so often heard in Kiev, Russia remains the fundamental and most significant political, cultural, and economic influence in Ukrainian politics. The presence of the “Russian factor” or, as many Ukrainians call it, “Moscow’s long shadow,” is easily perceived in most state political processes such as the conceptualization of the Ukrainian *raison d’état*, the setting of state and national interests, and the shaping of national security. In current foreign and domestic politics, a strategic partnership with Moscow is considered a priority and a traditional influence difficult to ignore.

Common cultural and religious roots and centuries of complex Ukrainian-Russian relations have decided ethnic and linguistic relations in today's Ukraine. For these reasons the knot of Ukrainian-Russian resentments and sympathies, prejudices and mutual attraction, discouraging stereotypes and Slavic solidarity, seems impossible to be untied. With the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of an independent Ukrainian state came the creation of a new national identity: for Russians, the rejection of colonial consciousness and for Ukrainians, the refusal of a long-standing inferiority complex. These processes are difficult and complex not only due to historical reasons – the common roots of Russian and Ukrainian self-identification – but also to the deep political, social and economic crises in both states.

Bilateral relations between Moscow and Kiev play an influential role in international politics and carry broad political implications. The ultimate collapse and disintegration of the Soviet empire - which restricted and controlled the “living space” of the Ukraine for centuries - was greatly due to the secession of the “Ukrainian segment”. Thus, one of the fundamental conditions for the eventual reconstruction of the empire is that Moscow recover full control of the Ukraine. This would guarantee the necessary balance between the Asian (Turano-Mongol) and European (Slavic) elements in imperial politics, as well as give Moscow the opportunity of unrestricted implementation of geopolitical goals on its west- and south-European border. Is it possible, in the face of such a fundamental conflict of interests, to establish “normal,” civilized and neighborly relations based on mutual acceptance and co-operation? In Russia’s policy towards the Ukraine during the last decade, Moscow has had recourse to a diverse set of political means; though the extremely violent means in the symbolic sphere have always been counter-weighted by a balanced approach in the political sphere. Is Russia’s policy- so many times denounced by Ukrainians because of its connection with Western politicians - a real danger to the sovereignty of the Ukrainian state, or is it only an element of a “policy of equilibrium” between Russia and the West? In Kiev's geopolitical concepts, the anticipated political and economic aid from the West obviously constitutes an important element. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that it is in the Ukrainian elite's political plans to reject the Eurasian

option (relations with Russian) for the sake of the Euro-Atlantic structures and the process of European integration.

The geopolitical dimension of Ukrainian-Russian relations is closely tied to the United States' and Russia's strategies in the global, post-bilateral, vision of world politics. It especially concerns the development of a common security system and the need to fill the political vacuum of the post-Soviet era. In regards to security, political chaos and lack of security in the ex-Soviet states is as much a danger as the possible attempts at reconstructing the Soviet empire and returning to political bi-polarism. In this vein, the political situation of the Ukraine- especially the quality of its relations with Russia- can be either an important and constructive or a destabilizing element in the geopolitical scene.

This book deals with the most important aspects of the relationship between Kiev and Moscow. It analyzes their importance and impact on political relations of the contemporary world, on the political situation of the East-Central European region, as well as on the political future and the role of the Commonwealth of the Independent States and the internal processes of developing and stabilizing Ukrainian statehood.

In the author's attempt to present the "Russian problem," or the "Russian question" as it is perceived and rationalized by Kiev, he describes and analyzes the main spheres of conflict, which manifest themselves with various intensity and effects in different lapses of time from the first decade of Ukrainian independence. For instance, in the "CIS problem," Russia's "re-integrational" plans and activities in political and economic relations areas conflict concerning post-Soviet nuclear weapons, the Crimean Tartar problem, conflicts about the Black Sea Fleet, and the legal status of the Crimea.

The author goes beyond the historical limits of description and documentation of the 1988-1998 events concerning the relations between the Ukraine and Russia; he sets them on a broad background of international relations, with special attention given to the political situation of the region. On the other side, the book does not limit itself to strict analysis and diagnosis of politics, but tries to predict a course of events and, at the same time, offer possible solutions.