Understanding and Explaining the Ukraine-Russia Conflict

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• What is Ukraine?
• Brief history of Ukraine and Ukraine-Russia relations
• What is the current conflict about?
• The causes of the conflict
• Consequences for Ukraine, Russia and the West
• Sovereignty as THE fundamental problem in Ukraine – Russia relationship and other FSU states
Ukraine not (the Ukraine)

- Country in Eastern Europe and the largest country in Europe

- Human settlements on the territory since 32,000 BC and are an important part of the cultural heritage of contemporary Ukrainians

- Endowed with rich, fertile farmlands

- A unitary state, semi-presidential system (parliamentary - presidential)

- Ranked 142 on Transparency International Corruption Index (Russia 136) out of 175
Historical milestones or how Ukrainians trace their heritage and identity

- Prehistoric cultures – left mark on cultural practices in modern day Ukraine

   **neolithic** (Cucuteni-Trypillian culture, Sredny Stog Culture, Yamna Culture, Catacomb Culture)

   **Iron Age** (Dacians, Cimmerians, Scythians and Sarmatians, as well as Greek colonies in the Black Sea)

   **early AD** (Goths’ arrival, Kyiv Culture, Huns, Slavic tribe expansion during 5th century)
Cucuteni - Trypillian

Reconstruction of Talianki c 4000 B.C.
Design Kenny Arne Lang Antonsen & Jimmy John Antonsen
Historical milestones or how Ukrainians trace their heritage and identity

- Middle Ages and Early Modern Period

Kyivan Rus’ and its Golden Age (Christianization; cradle of pre-modern Slavic sovereignties)

Golden Horde and partition of the Kyivan Rus’

Rise of Muscovy, Tsardom of Muscovy, Russian Empire
2. Rus’ principalities ca. 1100
(Source: The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Russia and the Former Soviet Union [Cambridge, 1994].)

Source: Serhii Plokhii, The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
1. Kyivan Rus’

Source: Serhii Plokhii, The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
4. Lands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the sixteenth–eighteenth centuries

Source: Serhii Plokhii, The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
Historical milestones or how Ukrainians trace their heritage and identity

- Modern Period

Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Russian Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Ottoman Empire, the Crimean Khanate and the Hetmanate

WWI and attempts at independence (the birth of modern Ukrainian sovereignty)

Soviet expansion and the formation of modern boundaries of Ukraine
5. Cossack Ukraine ca. 1650

Map 1: The Hetmanate and surrounding territories in the 1750s.

Source: Serhii Plokhii, The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
Map 4 Modern Ukraine.

Source: Serhii Plokhii, The Origins of Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus (Cambridge University Press, 2006)
Legacies of the Soviet disillusion
Further references


Stephen Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine 1917-1922* (University of Toronto Press, 2011)

What is the conflict about?
2 narratives

Sovereignty (Ukraine and most of the international community)
  – Ukraine’s referendum on independence of December 1991
  – Ukraine’s Constitution and the Constitution of the Crimean Autonomous Republic (through the Crimean referendum and annexation)
  – Bilateral agreements (CIS Minsk Treaty 1991; 1997 Friendship Treaty)
Independent Ukraine:
1991 referendum
What is the conflict about?

2 narratives

Self-determination of the Crimea and self-proclaimed republics of Donetsk and Luhansk (Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Cuba, Nicaragua, North Korea, Syria, Sudan, Venezuela, Zimbabwe)

– Euromaidan revolution as an illegitimate coup

– Suppression of Russian minorities in Ukraine as a basis for legitimacy of Russia’s annexation of the Crimea and support for separatism in the Donbas regions

– Crimean referendum as legitimate expression of self-determination of peoples
UN General Assembly Resolution 68/262

“Territorial Integrity of Ukraine”, March 27, 2014

Results of the United Nations General Assembly vote about the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

- In favor
- Against
- Abstained
- Absent when the vote took place
Legitimacy of the revolution

• Was elected through a slim majority on 17 January 2010 (48.95% Viktor Yanukovych; 45.47% Yulia Tymoshenko)

• During his term as a President, usurped the power to eliminate checks and balances on his policies (through favorable Constitutional Court appointments overturned the 2004 Constitutional amendments and returned to super-presidential model; his party took all control over central and regional government posts; increase in media censorship and corruption – tried to build Putin-like model in Ukraine)

• Yanukovych’s legitimate, but semi-constitutional ousting: On February 21 Foreign-mediated agreement signed, but Yanukovych already preparing to leave. People on Maidan and radicalized groups dismiss the agreement and give an ultimatum to Yanukovych to step down. On February 22 Yanukovych flees and quickly following his departure the Parliament by constitutional majority votes to remove Viktor Yanukovych from the post of the President of Ukraine – 328 from 447 – on the grounds of failing to fulfill his duties.
What was the cause of the Euromaidan revolution?

### Ukraine – by regions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence</th>
<th>Western</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Influence of the West that aims to include Ukraine in its sphere of political interests</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>16.9</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>57.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalistic moods</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>45.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outrage with the corrupted regime of Yanukovych</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>54.8</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim to get relief for Ukraine from economic and political dictatorship of Russia</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim to make Ukraine as civilized and the other European countries</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of civic dignity that does not accept self-will of authorities</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protest against tough actions of ‘Berkut’/internal troops</td>
<td>42.8</td>
<td>33.6</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficult to answer</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

National survey by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, February 8-18, 2014, including Crimea, 2032 respondents.
Which side of the protests do you empathize with?

### Ukraine – by regions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Macro-regions</th>
<th>Western</th>
<th>Central</th>
<th>Southern</th>
<th>Eastern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the side of authorities led by Yanukovych</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>32.2</td>
<td>51.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the side of protesters</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>51.0</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the sides</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>41.7</td>
<td>39.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFICULT TO ANSWER</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ukraine – by sex:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the side of authorities led by Yanukovych</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>26.1</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
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</table>
### Ukraine – by age:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>18-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
<th>40-49</th>
<th>50-59</th>
<th>60-69</th>
<th>70+</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the side of authorities led by Yanukovych</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>20.2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>37.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the side of protesters</td>
<td>43.6</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>38.8</td>
<td>37.1</td>
<td>31.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the sides</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>31.3</td>
<td>27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIFFICULT TO ANSWER</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Ukraine – by education level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Basic (less than 7 years)</th>
<th>Incomplete secondary (less than 10 years)</th>
<th>Complete secondary (10-11 years)</th>
<th>Higher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On the side of authorities led by Yanukovych</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>30.9</td>
<td>25.8</td>
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<td>32.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>DIFFICULT TO ANSWER</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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From revolution to an undeclared war between Ukraine and Russia: why?
Causes of the Ukraine-Russia Conflict

- **Structural/geopolitical**: US hegemony and Russia’s growing rejection of the Western order

- **Regional**: Changing perspectives of the Russian elites on the expansion of NATO and the European Union; Ukraine’s growing desire for energy independence, free trade & association with the EU and Russia’s inability to accept Ukraine’s Westphalian sovereignty

- **Domestic**: Russia’s growing authoritarianism and “Orange fears” (Color revolutions, Bolotnaya protests, Euromaidan); democratic Ukraine as a threat to “managed democracy” model in Russia and in the wider post-Soviet space
Annexation of Crimea: planned but Euromaidan served as a trigger to put the plan into action – had to be executed swiftly
Separatism in Donbas or foreign-backed insurgency?
How frontline in Donbas was changed

(June 16 — September 22, 2014)

KEY EVENTS
1 — July 17, shooting of MH17
2 — August 24, beginning of direct invasion by Russian military
3 — August 27, surrounding of Ukrainian troops in Illovaisk
4 — August 31, Ukrainian troops trying to broke from a trap
5 — September 5, start of "ceasefire"


Texty.org.ua
How has allegiance to independent Ukraine changed over the last two decades?

Reflecting on recent events, if separatism in the Crimea and the Donbas was and is a genuine grass-roots movement then how and why have the popular preferences changed so radically since 1991?
Independent Ukraine: visualization project
http://gis.huri.harvard.edu/independent-ukraine/about-the-independent-ukraine-project.html

• illustrate sovereignty preferences in Ukraine over time (as a marker of civic nationalism)

• Using annual surveys by Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS): 1995-2014, 12 surveys

• are national survey visualizations useful? (external and internal validity problems for regions)
What kind of relationship would you like to see between Ukraine and Russia?

1. They should be like between other states with closed borders, visas and customs

1. Ukraine and Russia should be independent, but friendly states with open borders, and without visas and customs

2. Ukraine and Russia should unite into one state

3. Hard to say

4. Refuse to answer
Macro trends

• Analyzing trends before Euromaidan revolution (1995 – May 2013) and after (September 2013 – April 2014)

• In 1990s greater polarization between Galicia and Donbas, by May 2013 Ukrainians were more united in their view of relations with Russia: friendly with open borders, no visas and no customs
Percent of Respondents Supporting Closed Borders, Visas, and Customs Between Ukraine and Russia

Survey data from Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. © Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute 2014
Percent of Respondents Supporting Open Borders without Visas and Customs Between Ukraine and Russia

Survey data from Kyiv International Institute of Sociology. © Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute 2014
Macro trends

Broad-based pro-Russian separatist movement in the Donbas and the Crimea was much more likely to emerge during late 1990s, when popular support for unification with Russia stood at 58-78 % in the Crimea, Luhanskk and Donetsk oblasts; declining ever since to 24-32% in November 2013 (right before the revolution)
Euromaidan re-ignited some polarization between Galicia and Donbas in regards to relations with Moscow
But even during the height of Euromaidan in late February, majority of Ukrainians in all regions did not see Russia as a threat and wanted friendly relations with Moscow (open borders, no visas and no customs)
Percent of Respondents Supporting Open Borders without Visas and Customs Between Ukraine and Russia

- 26 - 44%
- 45 - 62%
- 63 - 80%
- 81 - 100%
- No Data

Sept. 2013
N=1983

Nov. 2013
N=1885

Feb. 2014
N=1942

April 2014
N=1900
However, the annexation of the Crimea, united central Ukraine and Galicia, and part of southern Ukraine in stark opposition to Russia.
Conflict is still ongoing, but what are preliminary consequences?

- **Geopolitical/structural**: weakening of the international legal order; militarization of the former Soviet space, the Black Sea and Europe – historically tends to lead to world wars

- **Regional**: declining demand and economic growth in Europe, Russia, Ukraine and the states of Eurasian Union – starting to pick up, but should the hostilities flare up currencies and trade will slow down again

- **Bilateral**: Russia is firmly anointed in the minds of Ukrainian elites and the population as top enemy – will be very difficult to reverse

- **Domestic**: Ukraine - declining standards of living for average Ukrainians – inflation due to war expenditures, lack of FDI, halting of economic production in the eastern Ukraine and economic mismanagement; continuing civilian and military casualties; IDPs; and Russia – declining standards of living for average Russians - inflation; sanctions pushing Russia to further its economic nationalism; growing Russian nationalism and support for neo-Nazi groups; further stifling of opposition and liberals in Russia; Crimea is a growing humanitarian and demographic disaster
The inability of Russia to fully accept Westphalian notion of sovereignty for Ukraine and other post-Soviet states as THE fundamental cause for present conflict with Ukraine and Russia’s problematic relationship and other states of the FSU