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The Role of the First World War in the Competition between Ukrainian and All-Russian Nationalism

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The western borderland of the Russian Empire was a laboratory of nationalisms over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries. It was here that the empire faced its earliest and most powerful challenge—from Polish nationalism. It was also here that the empire began to utilize nationalist tools in its own policy, however haphazardly. Russian nationalism emerged as an ideological current that was independent yet enmeshed in imperial structures, in large part as a response to the problems of the western borderlands.¹ It was here that Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian nationalisms emerged in the crucible of Russian-Polish competition during the second half of the 19th century. This essay is composed of two sections. The first part, relying on a small yet substantive corpus of studies, discusses the situation in the Ukrainian lands on the eve of the war. The second part deals with the period of the war itself; it is an essay that aims to address certain queries that have remained largely overlooked in the scholarly literature. I am merely posing questions and proposing hypotheses from the perspective of a historian who began studying this period only recently and is attempting to bring old assumptions, my own included, under scrutiny with the aim of bringing the issues at hand to the attention of other scholars.

In order to appreciate the effects the First World War had on the development of the various nationalisms in the western borderlands, it is vital to have a clear understanding of the circumstances on the eve of the war. However, we are faced with serious difficulties in this endeavor, due to the fact that many aspects of the situation in the region in question have remained understudied. Furthermore, there is a strong tendency in national historiographies to over-emphasize the strength of nationalism in the imperial borderlands.

In their goals and methods Ukrainian, Lithuanian, and Belarusian nationalisms remained almost exclusively cultural movements until 1905. In the

¹ See A. I. Miller. "The Romanov Empire and the Russian Nation," in *Nationalizing Empires*, ed. Stefan Berger and Miller (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014), 309–68.

wake of the 17 October Manifesto, a number of political parties prioritized the national question, demanded national autonomy, and unofficially even espoused the ideals of a federation. Some of these parties had candidates elected to the First and Second State Dumas.² However, the surge of nationalist party activity from 1905 to 1907 subsided thereafter, partly due to increased administrative pressure and an inability to mobilize mass support. For example, the number of Ukrainian periodicals, although quite large in 1906, had fallen drastically by 1908.³ The only remaining newspaper, *Rada*, suffered from a chronic lack of subscribers and financial difficulties; it stayed afloat only thanks to one big sponsor.⁴

Polish influence in the western territories had diminished as a result of the anti-Polish measures the government introduced after the January Uprising of 1863, but it remained quite important nonetheless. Polish activists failed to establish lasting cooperation with the Ukrainian, Belarusian, and Lithuanian national movements. Thus, the Poles remained the quintessential “other” for the smaller borderland nationalisms.

After 1907, Russian nationalism developed most actively in the southwestern territories, in the area of present-day Ukraine. The idea of the all-Russian nation allowed the movement to attract many Little Russians. Poles, Jews, and supporters of Ukrainian nationalism, whom the nationalistic Little Russian circles addressed as “Mazepists” (*mazepintsy*), variously took the position of enemy in the southwestern territories, depending on the circumstances.⁵ The main struggle for identity in this region was between Russian nationalists (Little Russians) and the Ukrainians who supported a separate Ukrainian nation. Both groups attempted to appeal to the apolitical and nationalistically indifferent population in the area through propaganda. The more or less educated among this population referred to themselves as “Little Russians,” while the peasants favored the term *khokhols*.⁶

² See M. D. Dolbilov and A. I. Miller, eds., *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2006).

³ Steven L. Guthrie, “Ukrainian Cities during the Revolution and the Interwar Era,” in *Rethinking Ukrainian History*, ed. Ivan L. Rudnytsky and John-Paul Himka (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta, 1981).

⁴ Up to 1911, the number of subscribers did not exceed 2,000. It rose to 3,000 later.

⁵ See the collections of anti-Ukrainian writings from this period published recently: M. B. Smolin, ed., *Ukrainskii separatizm v Rossii: Ideologiya natsional'nogo raskola* (Moscow: Moskva, 1998); Smolin, ed., *“Ukrainskaia” bolezni' russkoi natsii* (Moscow: Imperskaia traditsiia, 2004).

⁶ Andreas Kappeler, “Mazepintsy, malorossy, khokhly: Ukraintsy v etnicheskoi ierarkhii Rossiiskoi imperii,” in *Rossiiia–Ukraina: Istoriiia vzaimootnoshenii*, ed. A. I. Miller,

Governmental organs actively supported Russian nationalists, especially during the tenure of Petr Stolypin, when the number of such organizations in the cities and in the countryside rose steadily. For instance, the membership of the Union of the Russian People in Volhynia far exceeded 100,000 on the eve of the war primarily because of the influence the Orthodox clergy had on the peasants. Large Russian nationalist organizations that united the well-off classes thrived in Kiev and Odessa. The Kiev Club of Russian Nationalists (KCRN), established in 1908 under the patronage of Stolypin, was already very influential by 1910, and was winning elections to the City and State Dumas. Soon, the KCRN began to lay claim to the overall leadership of Russian nationalist organizations in the empire, citing, among other things, its successes in election campaigns. Its leader, Anatolii Savenko, wrote as early as 1908 that

while Great Russian *gubernii*s sent a significant number of revolutionaries even to the Third Duma, Little Russia sent to the Taurida Palace almost exclusively Russian nationalists. While Great Russian Moscow and St. Petersburg are the mainstays of the revolution, the center of Little Russia—Kiev—is the center of the all-Russian patriotic movement.⁷

This point of view was considered perfectly legitimate on the eve of the war. The memorial to Stolypin unveiled in Kiev in 1913 in front of the opera house, where he was murdered in 1911, was inscribed with the late prime minister's words: "I firmly believe that the warming light of the Russian national idea in the west of Russia will not fade and that it will soon shine on all of Russia." Combined with tough administrative pressure exercised by the government, the strong presence of Russian nationalists in the area led to a dramatic drop in representation for non-Russian nationalists in the Duma.

The recent publication of several important works on the history of Russian right-wing nationalism notwithstanding, the phenomenon remains understudied.⁸ This is especially true of the history of Russian right-wing nationalism in the western borderlands and its influence on the masses.

V. F. Reprintsev, and B. N. Floria (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul'tury, 1997); A. Kotenko, O. Martyniuk, and A. I. Miller, "Maloross," in "*Poniatie o Rossii*": *K istoricheskoi semantike imperskogo perioda*, ed. Miller, D. Sdvizhkov, and I. Shirle (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2012), 2: 392–443.

⁷ A. I. Savenko, "Zametki: Po povodu 100-letii so dnia rozhdeniia Gogolia," *Kievlianin*, 16 November 1908.

⁸ Iu. I. Kir'ianov, *Pravye partii v Rossii, 1911–1917* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2001); S. A. Stepanov, *Chernaia sotnia v Rossii: 1905–1914 gg.* (Moscow: Izd-vo VZPI A/o "Rosvuznauka,"

Over the course of the entire postrevolutionary period, and especially after 1907, the Kadets (Constitutional Democrats) had to seek support from the peripheral nationalists in the borderlands in their struggle against the Russian nationalist right. An aspect of this tactic—in a certain sense the price the Kadets had to pay—was support for the reorganization of the empire according to the principle of national autonomy. However, the alliance of Kadets and borderland nationalists was purely one of convenience. The two sides could not find common ground on the question of autonomy, and the Kadets refused to countenance federative ideas. In these circumstances, the Kadets sought to delay any discussion of specific plans of autonomy they believed had no realistic chance of implementation.

The tactic employed by Kadets in the Duma—dealing with the threat of radical borderland nationalism by making moderate concessions—faced unrelenting opposition from the right. To this end, during a discussion of the Ukrainian question in February 1914, Kadet leader Pavel Miliukov stated, “Be afraid of Dontsov! If you carry on with this policy, there will be hundreds, thousands, millions of Dontsovs.”⁹ Kiev Club of Russian Nationalists (KCRN) leader Savenko, who was Miliukov’s main right-wing opponent in this debate, warned that the Ukrainian movement represented a “serious, genuine threat to the unity of the Russian Empire.” On the question of the recognition of Ukraine as a separate nation, distinct from Russia, Savenko noted: “Once a people is [recognized as] distinct, it should, according to the dominant idea of the century, enjoy the right to self-determination; it must have its own cultural-national and political existence.” He called for non-interference in the government’s struggle against the Ukrainian movement and insisted on the correctness of the Little Russian version of identity, denouncing the Ukrainian movement as divisive for the “one, unitary, 100-million strong people.” He further emphasized that the loss of the non-Orthodox, non-Slavic (*inorodcheskie*) borderlands would not be nearly as dangerous to Russia as the splintering of the Russian nation.¹⁰ Right-wing nationalists gladly brought peasants to the Duma, who criticized “Ukrainiandom” on behalf of the entire

2005); I. V. Omel’ianchuk, *Chernosotennoe dvizhenie v Rossiiskoi imperii (1901–1914): Monografiia* (Kyiv: MAUP, 2009). See also the politically engaged but informative work by A. D. Stepanov and A. A. Ivanov, eds., *Chernaia sotnia: Istoricheskaia entsiklopediia 1900–1917* (Moscow: Institut russkoi tsivilizatsii, 2008).

⁹ Dmitro Dontsov was at that time the main ideologist of Ukrainian integral nationalism.

¹⁰ *Gosudarstvennaia дума, IV sozyv, sessiia II. Stenograficheskie otchety*, pt. 2 (St. Petersburg, 1914), cols. 901–15, 927–33.

Little Russian peasantry and publicly proclaimed their adherence to the all-Russian nation.¹¹

In general, the western borderlands were an unstable equilibrium before the war. Local authorities could not realistically hope to “uproot” non-Russian nationalists, yet they were not willing to compromise. In the years before the conflict, the government and Russian nationalists combined administrative pressure with active propaganda. The immediate, existential, and inevitable threat that russification presented to the Ukrainians is attested to in the latter’s contemporaneous activist literature. For instance, the key activist of the Ukrainian movement in Kiev, Yevhen Chikalenko, wrote the following in his diary in 1909: “Our cities have been russified [*omoskovleny*] to such an extent that only a small percentage of the population has any interest in Ukrainiandom whatsoever.... All cities and towns in Ukraine are thoroughly russified.”¹² He also wrote to his associate Petro Stebnitsky in St. Petersburg: “what we can achieve now with a few thousand [rubles] will be impossible to achieve later, when the people have been russified, even with a few million.”¹³

The widespread idea that the war eliminated barriers for the already steadfast Ukrainian movement is untenable. In this essay, we cannot assess with utter certainty the successful appeal of regional nationalisms to local Orthodox populations throughout contemporary Ukraine. We can only note that the struggle between all-Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms (as well as the even weaker Belarusian version) did not have a predetermined outcome. A substantial number of politicized Little and White Russians came out in favor of all-Russian nationalism, while the non-political, non-national masses remained an object of this struggle.

¹¹ Grigorii A. Andriichuk, representing Podolia, declared: “We reject all Ukrainophile propaganda because we never have and never will consider ourselves non-Russian. Regardless of how cleverly the accommodating Miliukovs try to push us towards a break with the Great Russian, they will not succeed. We, Little Russians as well as Great Russians, are, for all intents and purposes, Russians.” *Gosudarstvennaia дума, III sozyv, sessiia III. Stenograficheskie otchety*, pt. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1910), col. 3081. “We are Russians, and no one has the right to say otherwise,” asserted Matvei S. Andreichuk, peasant MP from Volhynia. *Gosudarstvennaia дума, III sozyv, sessiia IV. Stenograficheskie otchety*, pt. 1 (St. Petersburg, 1910), col. 1280.

¹² Yevhen Chikalenko, *Shchodennik, 1: 1907–1917* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2004), 47–48 and 281–82.

¹³ Yevhen Chikalenko and Petro Stebnitskyi, *Listuvannia, 1901–1922 roki* (Kyiv: Tempora, 2008), 72.

The Beginning of the War

The popular mood in the first year of the war was characterized by a rise in imperial patriotism and Russian nationalism. The dimensions of mass political mobilization of the military-patriotic type are still understudied. However, several scholarly works highlight the significant rise of interest in politics in general and, in this context, in nationalist sentiment, among rural as well as urban populations.¹⁴ With the Russian army not suffering obvious defeats and even boasting victories on the Austrian Front, the first year of the war enhanced the rise of Russian nationalism.

The war had a dual effect on borderland nationalisms. On the one hand, administrative persecution increased sharply—many periodicals and local centers of the Ukrainian cultural organization Prosvita were shut down, and several activists, including Mykhailo Hrushevskyyi, were sent into exile. Some national activists sought to demonstrate loyalty to the empire, partly in the hope of evading repression, partly in order to win concessions from the government at the end of the war in the event of Russian victory.¹⁵ On the other hand, the war created an atmosphere of grave uncertainty. For the separatist-minded borderland nationalists, it became not so much an impetus for increased pragmatic action, as a spur of the imagination that fed fanciful plans about their respective nation's place in the postwar reorganization of Europe.

In the early autumn of 1914, the Russian army occupied East Galicia, including Lvov/Lemberg. The annexation of Galicia had been one of the key Russian aims before the war, especially for irredentists who described the incorporation of this region as a "reunification of Red Rus' and Russia." At the same time, Russian nationalists expected the occupation of Galicia to undermine the Ukrainian movement. For example, when outlining Russia's aims in the forthcoming war in 1912, Petr Struve emphasized the need to "reunify and reunite within the empire all parts of the Russian people," i.e., annex "Russian Galicia," asserting that the incorporation of Galicia was necessary for

¹⁴ See Joshua Sanborn, "The Mobilization of 1914 and the Question of the Russian Nation: A Reexamination," *Slavic Review* 59, 2 (Summer 2000): 267–89; Sanborn, *Drafting the Nation: Military Conscription, Total War, and Mass Politics, 1905–1925* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Scott J. Seregny, "Zemstvos, Peasants, and Citizenship: The Russian Adult Education Movement and the First World War," *Slavic Review* 59, 2 (Summer 2000): 290–315.

¹⁵ The influential leader of the Polish National Democrats Roman Dmowski in particular preferred loyalty to the empire as the "lesser evil."

the “internal healing of Russia, since the Austrian everyday life of the Little Russian tribe has created the ugly, so-called ‘Ukrainian question.’”¹⁶

By the time of the Russian occupation, Galicia had already become subject to harsh Austrian governmental measures. More than 10,000 Ruthenians the government suspected of pro-Russian sympathies had been deported to the concentration camp Talerhof. Altogether during the war more than 20,000 people passed through Talerhof and another camp at Teresienstadt, which became the first concentration camps on European soil. Several thousand were executed.¹⁷ Simultaneously, the Austrian government created the first Ukrainian military formation—the legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen (Ukrains’ki Sichovi Stril’tsi), which swore loyalty to Austria-Hungary on 3 September 1914.

In turn, the Russian occupational authorities shut down all Ukrainian periodicals. They also arrested and deported to Russia a substantial number of Greek Catholic priests, including Metropolitan Andryi Sheptytskyi.¹⁸ Altogether, nearly 2,000 people were subject to administrative deportation to the central provinces of Russia.¹⁹

Thus, the pattern that soon came to dominate other war-affected regions was clearly evident in Galicia as early as the first year of the war—when analyzing present and potential loyalty, imperial structures viewed ethnic identity as an important, if not paramount, factor. In a situation characterized by intense competition between various nationalist projects and the simultaneous absence of steady ethnic identification, as was the case in Ukraine, imperial authorities sought to undermine the influence of “disloyal” variants of identity by all means and bolster “loyal” ones at the same time.

The Setbacks of 1915–16 and Their Consequences

The western borderlands of the Russian Empire became the main theater of military operations on the Eastern Front during the First World War. Following the German breakthrough at Gorlice-Tarnów in May 1915, the Russian army

¹⁶ P. B. Struve, “Obshcherusskaia kul’tura i ukrainskii partikuliarizm,” *Russkaia mysl’*, no. 1 (1912): 65–86.

¹⁷ V. R. Vavrik, *Terezin i Talergof: K 50-letnei godovshchine tragedii galitsko-russkogo naroda* (Moscow: Soft-izdat, 2001).

¹⁸ See further in the article of Mark von Hagen in this volume.

¹⁹ The exact figure is unknown. The report of Count Georgii Bobrinskii, the head of the Russian civil administration in Galicia, mentions 1,962 persons who were exiled to Russia. See A. Iu. Bakhturina, *Politika Rossiiskoi Imperii v Vostochnoi Galitsii v gody Pervoi mirovoi voiny* (Moscow: AIRO-XX, 2000), 193.

suffered a whole series of setbacks, which forced it to abandon not only Galicia, which it had occupied in 1914, but a substantial part of the western borderlands of the empire as well. These defeats left no trace of the patriotic fervor of the early days of the war. The sudden shifting of the front eastwards had important consequences for the development of the nationalisms of the western borderlands.

Researchers have pointed out several factors that led to the mobilization of ethnicity during the war.²⁰ Among these, the phenomenon of mass refugees was the first to emerge.²¹ Some people evacuated on their own, while others were forced against their will. Many Russian nationalists, most importantly among Little and White Russian circles, as well as Russian officials, left the occupied territories, which led to a steady decline in the influence of Russian nationalist organizations. Understandably, Austro-German occupation authorities did not leave Russian nationalists much freedom of action. At the same time, as Peter Gatrell has demonstrated, influential nationalist structures emerged among non-Russian refugee groups from the Baltic, which subsequently played an important role in national movements.

The Central Powers created a new administrative structure in the occupied territories. At first, Ukrainian territories fell mostly under Austro-Hungarian control. To this day, there are no in-depth studies of Vienna's occupation policy in this region. Even the latest volume edited by Austrian historians offers virtually nothing on the subject.²² Thanks to Vejas Liulevicius, we know more about German occupation policy, especially that of Ober Ost, which controlled the northwestern territories and the Baltic littoral. Having carefully studied Ober Ost policy, he points out several aspects that seriously affected the development of borderland nationalism. The new administration carried out an ethnic categorization. Ober Ost civil servants put together an *Atlas of the Division of Peoples of Western Russia*, claiming it demonstrated that "the state-structure, which before the war was considered a uniform Great Russian empire, is to a large extent formed out of territories of independent ethnicities, who do not stand closer to the Muscovite nature than to us."²³

²⁰ See Mark von Hagen, "The Great War and the Mobilization of Ethnicity," in *Post-Soviet Political Order: Conflict and State-Building*, ed. Barnet R. Rubin and Jack L. Snyder (London: Routledge, 1998), 34–57.

²¹ Peter Gatrell, *A Whole Empire Walking: Refugees in Russia during World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

²² Wolfram Dornik et al., eds., *Die Ukraine zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Fremdherrschaft 1917–1922* (Graz: Leykam, 2011).

²³ Vejas G. Liulevicius, *War Land on the Eastern Front: Culture, National Identity, and German Occupation in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117.

The German authorities' language policy sought primarily to create a vocabulary of administrative and government terms for the local vernacular. Schools were organized according to the principle of nationality, i.e., on the basis of native tongue. However, the Germans soon began introducing German terms and language in general, thereby stifling the attempts of local nationalist activists to open new schools. In addition, laws entered the books as soon as they were published in German. The Russian language was excluded from both the administration and the public sphere generally.

The Germans aimed to undermine Polish influence on Belarusians and Lithuanians, and Russian influence on Belarusians. They were actually quite surprised to discover the existence of the Belarusian people and amazed at the underdeveloped state of Belarusian culture and sense of national identity. However, the occupation authorities soon came to the conclusion that this presented them with an opportunity to influence the process of self-identification of the local population as separate from Poles and Russians. In 1916, Ludendorff issued a special directive on the support of Belarusian identity through cultural policy.²⁴ In general, the Germans tried to play the role of tutors and leaders of the local peoples in Ober Ost. To this end, they devised school curricula that were supposed to foster respect for Germany and German culture as an "elder power."

As Liulevicius points out, "cultural policy was in fact the military state's nationalities policy, bracketing native cultures in German institutions imposed from above: press, schools, and work rooms.... The German concept for 'education,' *Bildung*, was taken to its literal meaning, of 'forming.' As a political section official announced, 'We are the ones, who bring *Bildung* and no one else.'²⁵ "The Kultur Program of *Ober Ost* ... defined people's place and ethnic essence by their function, fixing national identity.... German national identity was also defined, presented, in its essence, as rule."²⁶ The activity of the German occupation administration in the western borderlands of the Russian Empire was an aspect of a new German geopolitical vision of this space as part of a *Mitteleuropa* that would have Germany as its dominant center.²⁷ Local activists were now trying to adapt their visions of the future to the emerging geopolitical reality by imagining the place for their groups in German-

²⁴ Ibid., 121.

²⁵ Ibid., 122.

²⁶ Ibid., 143–44.

²⁷ Friedrich Naumann, *Mitteleuropa* (Berlin: Reimer, 1915).

dominated Eastern Europe.²⁸ Vienna had its own plans for the resolution of the Ukrainian question, which are yet to be the subject of a thorough analysis. In any event, we know that members of the Ukrainian Sich Rifleman were transferred to Russian Ukraine. Among other things, they set up schools with young, educated female teachers that had been recruited from Galicia.

POW policy was another important factor in the rise of nationalism in the western borderlands. Approximately three and a half million soldiers from the tsar's army had been captured.²⁹ POW camp administration paid special attention to soldiers from Ukraine, creating several special camps that boasted dramatically better conditions than the general norm. The German camps for Ukrainian POWs were located in Rastadt and Salzwedel, and the Austrian camp was in Freistadt.³⁰ They housed up to 400,000 people. Functionaries from Ukrainian nationalist organizations, first and foremost the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, conducted propaganda activities, taught the Ukrainian language, and published Ukrainian periodicals. Approximately 40,000 of the more responsive POWs were organized in Ukrainian formations with a special military uniform.

In his forthcoming study based on the archives of the Union for the Liberation of Ukraine, Mark von Hagen describes, among other things, the difficulties the camp administration and the Union activists faced when trying to single out Ukrainians among the general mass of POWs, due to the fact that the term "Ukrainian" meant nothing to the vast majority.

Propaganda work among POWs also took place in Russia. In 1916, the authorities established a Special Political Section of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, whose aim was to conduct propaganda among Slavic POWs from the Austro-Hungarian army.³¹ Historian of the Austrian army István Deák stresses the important role of POW camps in the dissolution of the Habsburg

²⁸ Lithuanian politicians, for example, soon came up with the idea to invite a German prince to become king of Lithuania. See more in Dolbilov and Miller, *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiiskoi imperii*, 415–16.

²⁹ N. N. Golovin, *Voennye usiliia Rossii v mirovoi voine*, 2 vols. (Paris: T-vo ob"edinennykh izdatelei, 1939). Golovin's estimate is the highest; alternative estimates come up with figures between two and three million. See *Rossia v mirovoi voine 1914–1918 gg. (v tsifrah)* (Moscow: Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie SSSR, Voенно-statisticheskii otdel, 1925).

³⁰ There are sources on these camps in the archives of the Special Political Section of the Russian Interior Ministry, Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Imperii (AVPRI) f. 135, op. 474, d. 26.

³¹ For more on the Special Political Section of the Interior Ministry, see Alexei I. Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism: Essays in the Methodology of Historical Research* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), chap. 7.

Empire.³² Already in late 1916, the Section began to pay special attention to the Ukrainian camps in Germany and Austria-Hungary, having correctly assessed the level of threat they posed to Russian policy in the western borderlands. There was, however, one crucial difference between propaganda in POW camps in Russia, and in Ukrainian camps in Germany and Austria: in Russia, propaganda efforts aimed at changing the political loyalty of the prisoners, who had by that time developed national (Czech, Slovak, etc.) identity, while in camps for Ukrainian prisoners the primary focus of propagandistic effort was on shaping certain national identity.

In 1916, the Political Section of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs debated making concessions to the Ukrainian movement in order to bring some of its leaders over to Russia's side. This was a notable development. As the position of the Ukrainian movement became stronger in the territories under the control of the Central Powers, Petrograd was forced to acknowledge this factor in its own policy. This resulted in a number of symbolic concessions to the Ukrainian movement, which sought to demonstrate the willingness of the authorities to come to terms with Ukrainian leaders who remained loyal to the empire. As early as August 1915, the term "Ukrainian" appeared for the first time in official discourse in a telegram sent on behalf of the tsar to Ukrainian activists in Switzerland who had declared their support for Russia: "Sa Majesté m'a donné l'ordre de vous remercier ainsi que le groupe d'Ukrainiens réunis en Suisse pour les sentiments exprimés dans votre télégramme" (His Majesty has ordered me to thank you as well as Ukrainians gathered in Switzerland for the feelings expressed in your telegram).³³ In 1916, there were plans to open two Ukrainian high schools and organize a visit by the heir to the throne, accompanied by his Little Russian orderly, Derevenko, to Galicia, in case of a new occupation. Draft recommendations for policy towards the Uniate Church, prepared by the Special Political Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the necessity to desist from any repressive measures.³⁴ SPO also prepared lists of Ukrainian politicians, including those in Galicia, who could be induced to come over to the Russian side, if they were convinced that only Russia could unite all the Ukrainian lands. The support the Central Powers gave to the Ukrainian movement thus had the knock-on effect of forcing Petrograd to appear more tolerant towards it. There was nothing new in this tactic; as early as the 1840s–60s, the authorities showed

³² István Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³³ Minister of Court, Count Frederiks (telegram), 24 August 1915, AVPRI f. 135, op. 474, d. 27, l. 12.

³⁴ Miller, *The Romanov Empire and Nationalism*, chap. 7.

leniency towards Ukrainian nationalists in order not to drive them over to the Polish side.³⁵

The years 1915–16 saw a serious shift in relative strength in the struggle between the All-Russian and Ukrainian nationalisms. During the evacuation of Galicia, more than 100,000 locals who had collaborated with the Russian administration or sympathized with Russia joined the retreating Russian army.³⁶ Soon, the majority of activists from Russian nationalist organizations had to leave the part of the western borderlands the Central Powers had occupied. The new occupation authorities dismantled the organizational structure of Russian nationalism in these territories. At the same time, Berlin and Vienna expended considerable administrative and financial resources towards developing the organizational structure of the Ukrainian movement. Russian military setbacks, the retreat of the army, and the measures German and Austrian occupation authorities took helped undermine the prestige Russia enjoyed among the non-politicized part of the local population, particularly the peasantry.

1917: Collapse of the Imperial Center and Nationalization of the Army

With the fall of the monarchy in February 1917, three new and powerful mobilizing factors for borderland nationalists emerged. First, even at this time the monarchy remained the legitimate imperial center for a substantial part of the traditionally-minded peasantry, including the 100,000-odd peasant members of the Union of the Russian People in Volhynia. This conventional source of legitimacy and loyalty was now lost.

Second, the weak Provisional Government called for the formation of a new administration in the countryside, without, however, suggesting clear principles of organization or making its stance on autonomy and/or federation clear. At a time when the influence of Russian nationalists in the borderlands had been curtailed, this provided regional actors with a new opportunity for political action.

³⁵ See Alexei I. Miller, *The Ukrainian Question: The Russian Empire and Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Budapest: Central European University Press), 2003.

³⁶ Exact figures are unknown, but in summer 1915 about 100,000 refugees from Galicia were concentrated in Volhynia. By autumn 1915, 40,000 Galician refugees were reported to be in Kursk *guberniia*. In August 1915 every day 3,000 Galician Ruthenians were coming to Kiev by train. See I. V. Kuchera, *Dobrovilna i prymusova migratsiia naselennia Schidnoi Galichyny v roky Pershoi svitovoi viiny*, vyp. 19 (Kyiv: Gileia, 2009), 10–16; O. Serdiuk, “Bizenstvo v Ukraini pid chas Pershoi svitovoi viiny,” in *Problemy istorii Ukrainy XIX–pochatku XX st.* (Kyiv: Instytut Istorii Ukrainy, 2002), 4: 111–32.

Finally, the increase in desertions and Bolshevik influence in the army led the High Command to propose its nationalization. Following an order by Commander in Chief General Lavr Kornilov, the ukrainization and belarusization of the army corps commenced. Kornilov hoped that this would shield the army from Bolshevik influence, and, at the same time, serve as a countermeasure to the actions of the Central Powers on the Ukrainian and Belarusian questions. The difference was that Ukrainian units were created on Ukrainian territory, whereas Belarusian ones appeared primarily on the Romanian and Baltic fronts, where they were cut off from their homeland and thus prevented from playing the active role ukrainized units played.

Pavlo Skoropads'kyi, the hetman of Ukraine in 1918 and a loyal imperial general in 1917, recalled in 1919 how he was tasked with the ukrainization of his corps:

I told Kornilov that I had just been in Kiev, where I observed Ukrainian activists. They made a negative impression on me. The corps could potentially become a major factor in the development of Ukrainiandom in a direction unfavorable for Russia.... Kornilov's simplistic attitude towards this issue revealed his lack of knowledge and understanding. I tried to make him see the gravity of the matter, as I was aware that one should treat tactfully and without exploitation the sincere national sense the Ukrainians possessed.³⁷

Skoropads'kyi was convinced that there was no pressing need to take such a step in the summer of 1917, and he tried to make the danger of ukrainizing the army evident. However, the disciplined general still carried out Kornilov's directive, which soon resulted in Skoropads'kyi becoming the hetman of Ukraine under German protection.

The creation of national units had huge consequences for Ukraine, Belarus, and Bessarabia, especially after the Bolshevik coup. The period of revolutionary crisis transformed the army from a supporter of the old regime to an independent actor. In all empires undergoing crisis, the army leadership uses their units, usually the last organized force, to contain the situation in a more limited territorial sphere, often in support of the national idea, once they

³⁷ Pavlo Skoropads'kyi, *Spohady, kinets 1917–hruden' 1918* (Kyiv: Institut ukrains'koi arkheohrafii ta dzhereloznavstva im. M. S. Hrushevs'koho NAN Ukrainy, 1995), 64. Skoropads'kyi recalled the following about his youth and family: "We understood Ukraine as a glorious national past which, however, had nothing to do with the present. In other words, there were no political plans for the restoration of Ukraine. My whole family was deeply devoted to the Russian tsars, while also emphasizing that we were not Great Russians—we were Little Russians of notable ancestry, as the contemporary expression went." Skoropads'kyi, "Moe detstvo na Ukraine," in *Spohady*, 387.

realize the old regime is beyond salvation.³⁸ This became especially important after October 1917, when the legitimate center of power in the empire vanished irretrievably. The considerable number of Russian nationalists of all shades who collaborated with the government of Hetman Skoropadskyi is the best affirmation of this pattern.

In 1918, many desperate anti-Bolshevik Russians were dreaming about the German occupation of Petrograd as the only possible salvation. The Germans did not go that far, although influential military leaders, including Ludendorff and Ober Ost Chief of Staff Major General Max von Hoffmann, occasionally entertained the notion of marching on Petrograd, deposing the Bolsheviks, and sponsoring a pro-German, conservative Russian government. But they had managed to occupy the entire Donetsk basin and establish Ukrainian authorities there.³⁹

At the beginning of the war, the competing governments threw away the previous conventional limitations. The macrosystem of continental empires in Europe's east had remained internally stable for a long time because they did not strive to destroy one another. In fact, they needed each other to deal with the heritage of the partitions of the Polish Commonwealth.⁴⁰ However, over the course of the war, which quickly assumed the guise of a life-and-death struggle, the empires actively played the ethnic card against their adversaries. They encouraged separatism inside the enemy states and introduced repressive measures against disloyal or suspect ethnic groups among their own subjects. These factors took on a special meaning in Ukraine and Belarus, in the context of a struggle between different versions of identity and loyalty.

New Major Players—the Soviets and Poland

Until 1918, the main question facing political activists in the national borderlands was ascertaining which country would win the war; and after October

³⁸ In his forthcoming book on imperial borderlands Alfred Rieber describes the army as the “glue and solvent” of the imperial system. I would qualify this by saying that the army does not become a force of dissolution as long as there is hope for the preservation of order on an imperial scale. Having lost this hope, however, the army takes on the role of organizer of the new regime in the separate regions of the dissolving empire, often attempting to transform them into nation-states.

³⁹ See Vladimir Kornilov, *Donetsko-Krivorozhskaiia respublika: Rasstreliaannaia mechta* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2011).

⁴⁰ See more in Alexei I. Miller, “The Value and the Limits of a Comparative Approach in the History of Contiguous Empires on the European Periphery,” in *Imperiology: From Empirical Knowledge to Discussing the Russian Empire*, ed. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Sapporo: Slavic Research Center at Hokkaido University, 2006), 11–24.

1917, attempting to negotiate with Germany about a new status within the framework of German hegemony in Eastern Europe. When it became evident that Germany, too, would be defeated, national movement leaders quickly turned to the Entente. Unlike Russia and Germany, the Entente could not control Eastern Europe directly. However, Entente leaders were in no hurry to fulfill the expectations of borderland nationalists, as they were counting on the fall of the Bolsheviks from power and the restoration of Russia. Consequently, in 1918 the world war in these spaces was gradually transformed into a series of civil wars distinguished by their class or ethnic focus. This often included conflicts between various paramilitary formations over territories they considered to be their rightful ethnic patrimony (Lviv/Lwów, Wilna/Vilnius). The same is true of Kiev, which had passed from hand to hand 14 times during the Great War and revolutionary wars. In 1918–19 it was often various Ukrainian warlords who claimed the city. The experience of the weak and unstable Ukrainian states in the western and central parts of the country (from the hetman state of Skoropads'kyi and Petliura's Directorate to the West Ukrainian People's Republic) shows that the mobilizing potential and organizational capacity of Ukrainian nationalism was rather limited. Characteristically, Nestor Makhno was able to win considerable support from the peasantry without utilizing the Ukrainian theme as a chief ideological concept. These peculiarities are typical of a situation in which the empire withdraws from its peripheral territories as a result of the collapse of the center rather than as a result of anti-imperial movements. We know very little about the development of nation building in the east and south of present-day Ukraine—in the regions of Kharkiv, Donbass, and New Russia during the period under consideration.

Once in control (1918), the Bolsheviks instituted a reign of terror in Ukraine against the Russian nationalists.⁴¹ It was precisely Russian nationalism and the social forces behind it that the Bolsheviks considered their main enemy up to the late 1920s.⁴² We can say that the all-Russian version of national identity, which was a key element of Russian nationalism during the imperial period, became "orphaned" with the fall of the Russian Empire. Many achievements of the russification policy in the borderlands were deconstructed within the logic of the Soviet project of territorialization of ethnicity⁴³ and *korenizatsiia*

⁴¹ All KCRN members the Bolsheviks captured in Kiev were shot.

⁴² Veljko Vujacic, "Stalinism and Russian Nationalism: A Reconceptualization," *Post-Soviet Affairs* 23, 2 (2007): 156–83.

⁴³ Robert Kaiser, *The Geography of Nationalism in Russia and the USSR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

(indigenization).⁴⁴ Russian agricultural settlement in many borderland regions in the Caucasus, Steppe, and Central Asia was proclaimed wrong, and many settlers moved back to Central Russia. Cossacks, who performed the role of the armed vanguard of the settlement movement, were targeted with brutal repressions as foes of Soviet power, which the majority of them truly were. The Orthodox Church and clergy, who were also important elements of Russian presence in the peripheral regions, remained targets of systematic repression throughout the interwar period all over the USSR. In the western borderlands the Bolsheviks completed the dismantling of the legacy of imperial policy and prewar Russian nationalism by discarding the concept of a triune Russian nation, which was supposed to include Great, Little, and White Russians. The Soviet population census in 1926 made the term “Little Russian” illegal, keeping only “Ukrainian” as the term for identification.⁴⁵ The terms “Russian” and “Great Russian” became synonymous. The Bolsheviks pursued an entirely different project of political consolidation of the space of the former Romanov Empire. As a quasi-national state, Soviet Ukraine received a “national territory,” a Soviet Ukrainian national identity, and the infrastructure of a Ukrainian national culture.

The Polish-Soviet War of 1920 was a struggle for control of Eastern Europe between two new major players, in which Ukrainian forces played a strictly subordinate role. We can characterize the interwar period as a cold war, during which Piłsudski's Promethean action and the Soviet Piedmont principle treated Ukraine as a single element in a vast, geostrategic struggle.⁴⁶ However, the struggle of large empires for control of Eastern Europe, which placed particular importance on Ukrainian policy, resumed in 1939.⁴⁷

The view presented above does not contradict the facts historians already know. However, these facts are insufficient to prove the undeniable correctness of the proposed interpretation of events. We can merely formulate the main theses as questions. Can we consider the situation on the eve of the Great War with respect to the struggle between the Ukrainian and Little Russian/all-Russian projects of nation building unresolved? In these circumstances,

⁴⁴ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Zh. Kadio [Juliette Cadiot], *Laboratoriia imperii: Rossiia/SSSR, 1860–1940* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2010).

⁴⁶ Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire*; Timothy Snyder, *Sketches from a Secret War: A Polish Artist's Mission to Liberate Soviet Ukraine* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

⁴⁷ Frank Gelka, *Die Ukrainische Nationalbewegung unter deutscher Besatzungsherrschaft 1918 und 1941/42* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrasowitz Verlag, 2005).

the question—"To what extent was the Ukrainian movement of the First World War period the product of the policies of warring empires that also depended on the resources provided by these empires?"—becomes perfectly legitimate. Who played the crucial role in the struggle between the Ukrainian and all-Russian projects—local nationalist movements or the mighty empires engaged in a lethal struggle? Can we claim that the Ukrainian and Belarusian nations are to a large extent the product of imperial competition during the Great War?

