RADICAL SHIFTS IN RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS AND GEOPOLITICS OF NEIGHBOURHOOD

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Abstract

The break-up between Russia and Ukraine was rather painful for both sides Though it was not unavoidable, it was prepared by the developments in both countries since the disintegration of the Soviet Union and to a certain extent resulted from the very model of state-building adopted by Ukrainian political elite and based on the opposition of Ukraine to Russia seen as the way to the emancipation from the burden of the imperial/Soviet past. It involved, in particular, a radical revision of Ukrainian territory's symbolic perception, provoked, on its turn, by the Russian-Ukrainian "battles of memory" initiated well before the crisis of 2014. Recent events deeply transformed public opinion in Ukraine and identity of Ukrainians. The author describes some consequences of the break up between two countries for ordinary citizens, especially living in border regions. He briefly considers the adaptation of economy and population to the new conditions of neighbourhood.

1. Introduction

Russian-Ukrainian relations have been complicated and unstable since the first days after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass radically transformed the character of neighbourhood. Ukrainians are a kin people to Russians which have lived for centuries in the common state. They are related by mentality and traditions, closely accrete cultures, economic ties and, finally, on the individual level by family bonds existing between millions of people. So, the break up between Russia and Ukraine turned to be rather painful, as it often happens among close relatives.

Shrinking contacts and interactions have a particularly considerable impact on economy and everyday life in border regions of both countries. These regions are historically closely related with each other. On the one hand, some of them made in the past a part of different states but on another hand, they have for many years developed within Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. The Soviet period was marked for them by intensive socio-economic modernization. They were built in all-state chains of

production not depending on the borders between inner political or administrative borders.

The objective of this paper is two-fold: firstly, to show that the 2014 crisis was prepared by the policy and rhetoric of all post-Soviet years; though it was not unavoidable, it is to a certain extent a natural result of the very model of state-building adopted in Ukraine; secondly, to consider the transformation of neighbourhood between two countries after the crisis.

2. The ways of state-building in Ukraine and geopolitical alternatives

The dynamics of Russian-Ukrainian relations since the disintegration of the Soviet Union is directly connected with the ways of state- and nation-building in both states and reflect a complicated hierarchy of territorial identities. The territory of the Ukrainian state has been shaped relatively recently, and its boundaries do not match the administrative boundaries of imperial provinces (gubernia) and have been many times changed already in the Soviet period (Пантин, Лапкин (eds.), 2014). Political and administrative boundaries of the past are clearly visible in the inhabitants' identity and often match religious, linguistic, socio-economic and cultural-political borders. A deep relation between regional, linguistic and confessional identity and electoral behaviour was explored by numerous studies of Ukrainian, Russian and Western experts with the use of sociological and geographical methods and statistical models (Субтельный, 1994; Hesli et al., 1998; Kubicek, 2000; O'Loughlin, 2001; Wilson, 2015).

Ukrainian foreign policy has been until recently a direct manifestation of dual economic, cultural and political structures. A search of geopolitical orientation and "codes" of the country's relations with its neighbours as part of national and ethnic building was closely intertwined with the key problems of Ukrainian statehood, political and economic reforms (Kuzio, 1998; D'Anieri et al., 1999). Economic factors pushed Ukraine to the east while political and ideological factors lying at the basis of state-building – to the west. These contradictions can be considered as a conflict between the objectives of nation- and state-building and the constraints of economic development. Ukrainian ethnic and political identity is stronger in western regions, while the intellectual and industrial potential are concentrated mainly on the east.

In the conditions of socio-cultural polarization between the east and the west (in reality the country's cultural differentiation is much more complicated)

Ukrainian political elite as early as in the 1990s came to the conclusion that Ukraine could become a modern state only when its society reached a certain cultural and linguistic homogeneity. Fearing the split of the country along regional watersheds, Ukrainian intellectuals and statesmen headed on building a political identity integrating all citizens not depending on their ethnic, linguistic, confessional and regional belonging on the basis of Ukrainian national (often just West Ukrainian) culture, historical representations and stereotypes. Many authors emphasized that each state needed a particular system of national myths, symbols and representations, and therefore, the dominant Ukrainian historiography is not nationalist but national (Kuzio, 1998). They selected the well-known "oppositional" model of identity building: they tried to cement a common political identity and to transform Ukraine into a large democratic European state in opposing their country to Russia.

The "national idea" suggested by political and intellectual elite was grounded on the representation on Ukrainians as a European people always gravitating around the advanced European countries but violently torn away from Europe after the "reunification" with Russia. The denial of cultural unity of Eastern Slavs, though with some hesitations, has naturally led to the acceptance of the "Western" geopolitical doctrine (Вендина et al., 2014). As the Ukrainian identity is opposed to the Russian and "Little Russian" ones (the identity of Russian-speaking and "Russified" Ukrainians), it involves the need in shortening social and cultural distance between the regions and the building of a centralized unitary state in which the questions of culture and education are solved mainly in the capital.

National stereotypes always include the images of space: different areas of the state receive a kind of codes, and many of them become national symbols, and are considered as a statehood cradle, the strongholds of national consciousness and the struggle for independence. Geographical images are backing projects of state-building and foreign policy's strategies – for instance, the accession to NATO or EU.

The contemporary "national idea" supposes a radical revision of Ukrainian territory's symbolic perception and its borders as an organic part of identity. The East has been the main region of Ukraine in the Soviet period for both economic and ideological reasons: a high concentration of the working class considered as the main support of the Soviet power, an ethnically mixed structure of population and the diffusion of Russian language. The East included Donbass, one of the most important industrial regions of the Soviet Union, Kharkiv, the first capital of Soviet

Ukraine and the third city of the USSR by the number of inhabitants hosting large industrial plants strategically important for all country, etc. The great number of natives from the East constantly joined the ranks of top Soviet party and military authorities, intellectual elite and creative intellectuals.

On the contrary, the West, which has never been part of a common state with Russia before World War Two, was perceived as a rural, agrarian periphery and associated with the guerrilla fight against the Soviet power in the first post-war years and its leader Stepan Bandera. But since independence the West became in national mythology the cradle of the national liberation movement and of the real, pure Ukrainian identity, the stronghold of democratisation and the driving force of social progress making sure the desired rapprochement with Europe, while the inhabitants of Donbass are often represented as Russified, poorly educated "quilted jackets" (*vatniki*) fooled by Communist, and later by Russian propaganda which cannot remember who they are. Their position was interpreted as an obstacle to Europeinisation and democratic transformation of the country, and Russian – as a symbol of pro-Communist orientation and nostalgia about the Soviet past (Рябчук, 1992). The discourse about "indigenous population" and its culture, national security, imagined or real external threats, historical myths and stereotypes determines the attitude of the people to neighbours and the borders with them.

In the East those who share the concept of three brother East Slavic peoples believed that thanks to many centuries of life within the same state Ukrainian and Russian cultures deeply penetrated each other, and Russian and Ukrainian identities became very close – at least, in their region. According to this opinion, the common Russian-Ukrainian cultural and linguistic space was split as a result of the "clash of civilisations" by external forces which liked to change the geo-cultural "code" of the Ukrainian people and to transform Ukraine into a periphery of the global West. Radical Ukrainian nationalism in its Galician version became an instrument of these forces. It is just West Ukraine, a remote periphery of the West which is "stranger" in the Ukrainian state (Алексеев, 2008).

The idea of federalization of Ukraine as a mean to take into account the diversity of different regional interests and the pronounced cultural specifics was close to the inhabitants of the East. They worried not so much about the status of Russian and not about the "national idea" preached by national political elite but its fundamental anti-Russian component, the imposed representation on their inferiority and culturally peripheral character, and the dependence

of "Russified" territories on the "nationally conscious" West. A deep difference in the collective historical memory and values between the East and the West played an important role in their contradictions. "Easterners" did not perceive themselves only as victims of the Soviet regime established by "strangers" from Russia but felt active actors of the Communist period and kept souvenirs not only about its failures, injustice and misfortunes but also achievements, asserting the right on their own interpretation of the recent past (Zhurzhenko, 2002), especially as the economic and intellectual potential and the level of well-being were higher on the East.

Cultural and political cleavage between the East and the West was aggravated by the conflict between regional elites which disputed control over national political institutes. The parties representing different parts of the country monopolized the support of voters in their regional strongholds: in Donbass, most people supported first the Communist party and later the Party of Regions. Political polarization conserved regional myths and stereotypes, and relative cultural isolation of the East and the West. Sociologists from Luhansk showed that in 2007 54% of this city's inhabitants had never been in the western part of the country, and at the same time 65% of the inhabitants of L'viv had never visited Donbass (Скоркин, 2018).

"The European perspective" served a reference point for social and institutional modernisation to many countries of Central-East Europe, including Russia during its first post-Soviet decade. In Ukraine, it was transformed into an ideology of identity- and state-building in the framework of the concept "Ukraine is not Russia" (the title of a big volume signed by the then President Leonid Kuchma and published in both countries) (Кучма, 2003). This idea kept its key importance in course of all post-Soviet period, though the degree of its practical implementation varied depending on political circumstances and persons at power.

The Ukrainian leaders proclaimed European integration as the main goal of Ukrainian foreign policy and state building since the first years of independence. Yet in 1998 President Leonid Kuchma published the decree "Strategy of Integration of Ukraine into the EU" which contained a list of measures necessary for the country's adaptation to European norms (Указ…, 1998).

Therefore, the commitment of Ukraine to the "European vector" has undoubtedly a long- term, and non-tactical character. It is based on rational and objective considerations. Ukrainian elite believes that Russia can offer little except energy resources. It suffers from similar economic problems. Russian

economy is not diversified enough and is specialized in the production of fuel and raw materials. Export and transit of oil and gas is a too narrow basis for economic integration. It is always better to have access to a larger market, and the ratio of economic potential of EU and Russia was about 8 to 1. Besides, Ukrainian elite has always feared that Moscow considered massive Russian investments in strategic branches of Ukrainian economy as a soft way to recreate its empire and that in cooperating with Russia Ukraine is doomed to remain its "younger brother".

As they estimated that Russia was the origin of the main threat to national sovereignty and the perspectives of state building, since the 1990s Ukrainian leaders were convinced that the cooperation and then the accession to NATO could provide the country with convincing international guarantees. Yet during the presidency of L. Kuchma Ukraine started to adapt its armed forces to the standards of NATO. His successor, Viktor Yushchenko declared his firm intention to get membership in this organization.

Russia perceives these steps very painfully. It considered the approach of NATO to its borders as the fundamental threat to its ability to conduct independent foreign policy and to keep an autonomous and visible role on the international scene, especially after the events in Kosovo and Iraq. The 2009 version of the Strategy of National Security (Указ…, 2009) read that the plans to move NATO military infrastructure closer to Russian borders remained unacceptable and continued to be the determining factor of its relations with the alliance. In June 2008 the State Duma adopted the document claiming to withdraw from the so called Big Treaty with Ukraine in case if it joins the Action Plan for preparation to the membership in NATO (Госдума…, 2008) . Russian foreign minister S. Lavrov stated: "We will do everything to prevent the accession of Ukraine and Georgia to NATO and to avoid degradation of our relations with the alliance, its leading members and our neighbours inevitably involved by this potential accession" (МИД…, 2008). Moscow believed that Washington's declarations on "strategic partnership" with Russia hided the policy "the winner gets everything": Ukraine and other former Soviet republics have been parts of Russia's security system, and now Washington claimed them for "our key security zone".

Russian public opinion has always perceived NATO as an important threat. In 2002–2008 51 to 53% of Russian citizens shared this conviction. Only 20% had the opposite view, and their ratio was decreasing. Not surprisingly, the attitude of 59% of respondents to the perspective of Ukraine's accession to NATO was negative. They believed that the country's membership in NATO would put it in a subordinate position with respect to the US, which would cause extensive damage to Russian-Ukrainian relations (Отношение…, 2008). Moscow blamed Ukrainian leadership in wishing to involve the country in NATO despite the negative opinion of its own citizens. Indeed, in 2008 45% of Ukrainians fully disagreed with this perspective, and 14.5% partly disagreed with it. The accession to NATO was fully supported by only 10% of respondents (Бунин, Макаркин, 2009).

3. "Battles of memory" and "Realpolitik"

The reaction of Russia to the early 2014 events in Ukraine was based on the sad experience of the deterioration of the relations with Ukraine under "pro-European" President Viktor Yushchenko (2005–2010) who came to power as a result of the "orange revolution". It provoked in the Kremlin a sharp rejection. Russian leaders formulated the doctrine of "destructive revolutionary shocks" in the post-Soviet space inspired by the US and the collective West. Moscow put all its influence at stake to prevent the victory of Yushchenko. Either the "right" forces win, and Ukraine concludes an alliance with Russia on the Belarusian example, or it breaks up, and Russia reunites with its "brothers" in the East and the South of the country while "Western Ukrainians" can integrate the desired West. Under Yushchenko all trends in Ukrainian domestic and foreign policy negatively perceived in Moscow have strongly amplified.

His administration presented Russia to Ukrainian public opinion as an exclusively reactionary force, the former empire which liked to impose a political choice to the country and to slow down its modernisation. Yushchenko and his supporters believed particularly important overcoming the dependence of Ukraine on Russian energy as a basis of possible dictate by Moscow. They did not forget in Ukraine the summit of B. Yeltsin and the first president L. Kravchuk when the Russian side claimed in a categorical form to pass her the Black Sea Fleet as compensation of a debt for energy carriers. Kyiv fought Russian investors in reconsidering the results of large enterprises' privatization. The compliance of joint projects to the policy of integration into the EU was proclaimed the main criterion of their evaluation.

Yushchenko stated: "Our idea is the single people, the single state language, the single nation" (Ющенко…, 2007). By the end of the 2000s Russian and other minorities' languages were gradually forbidden in office-work, advertising, cinema, legal proceedings. Not only entrance examinations in all higher educational institutions, but also teaching

(except few special faculties) had to be carried out only in the «state» language; thesis are accepted also only in Ukrainian, even in Crimea though it formally had the status of autonomous republic with Russian majority. Yet in 2007 in the city of Kharkiv, where 66% of population declared that Russian was their mother tongue they taught only in Ukrainian in all professional colleges, and only 28% of pupils studied in Russian schools or forms.

These steps contradicting the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages ratified by the parliament provoked the decisions on the return to Russian of the rights provided by this document taken by the councils of many large cities of East and Southern Ukraine – Kharkiv, Luhansk, Mykolaiv, Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk (now called Dnipro), Odesa, and Sevastopol. But local prosecutor's offices recognized these decisions incompatible with the Constitution, and they were canceled in a judicial proceeding (Alekseev, 2008). Russian TV was banned, and the distribution of Russian newspapers radically decreased.

It was just under Yushchenko that the Ukrainian side intensified the "battles of memory" initiated long ago, at the end of the 1980s. There were three principal "fields" of these battles: 1) the origin of Ukrainians and Ukrainian statehood; 2) the annexation (or the "reunification", according to the traditional Russian/Soviet version) of Ukraine by the Muscovy in 1654; 3) the outcomes for Ukraine of the co-existence in a common state with Russia.

The ethnocentric, unequivocal and uncompromising Ukrainian interpretation of history is irreconcilably opposite to the Russian one and makes up the basis of young citizen's socialisation and indoctrination at school. Ukrainian historians stress that their country is the only and the direct heir of the Kievan Rus' and stress that it was just Ukraine, and not common ancestors of Eastern Slavs, who adopted Christianity in 988, and its great princes kept close contacts with European dynasties, while Russians are a mixture product of Slavic, Turkic and Finno-Ugric tribes and have never been a truly European people. The authors of school textbooks wrote that the disintegration of the Kievan Rus' in the early 13th century (sic!) proceeded "along ethnic lines" (Ладиченко et al., 2007, p.143). They needed this statement for grounding the ancient origin and the continuity of Ukrainian statehood.

Common history is portrayed exclusively as an uninterrupted struggle of advanced figures of Ukrainian society against national oppression. Collective traumas are represented as the main content of this history and were used in constructing a deeply hostile image of the northern neighbour. They involved into current political discourse one tragic event after

another and conferred responsibility for them only on Russia and Russians. All economic and political risks and difficulties of post-Soviet state-building were related with Russia which was blamed in continuing to exploit Ukraine and to profit from its "dependent" position.

Soviet Ukraine was described in school textbooks as a special kind of colony: "Ukraine has not been a colony of the Asian type – a poor, without its own industry, from which the empire just extorts resources. It has been a colony of the European type, an industrially developed one which has been deprived not so much of resources but of capital and potential profits" (Турченко, Мороко, 2009, p. 193–194). According to the authors, it became "a European type colony" contrary to the empire which tried to slow down its economic development. They state that in building railways in the late 19th century the empire tried "to connect Ukrainian lands not with Ukrainian cities but with the Moscow region which contradicted the interests of Ukraine" (Турченко, Мороко, 2009, p. 199).

Particularly heated was the issue of Holodomor – a result of the adventurous and misanthropic Stalin collectivisation of agriculture in 1932–1933 which has entailed mass hunger and the death of millions of people. Holodomor was officially declared the genocide of Ukrainian people – a purposeful attempt of Moscow authorities to exterminate Ukrainians for getting control of their territory. The Russian side used archival documents for proving that not only Ukrainians have fallen the victims of collectivisation but also millions of Russians (especially in the Middle Volga regions), Kazakhs and other peoples of the Soviet Union (see, for instance, Голод…, 2008; Зеленин et al., 1994; Ивницкий, 2009; Кондрашин, 2008; Современная…, 2011; Kondrashine, 2013).

Moscow replied to the policy of Yushchenko by the attempts to use economic leverages: by sharply increasing the prices for gas, banning under different pretexts the import of some kinds of Ukrainian products or applying other restrictions to foreign trade focusing on the most sensitive branches of Ukrainian economy. The sides unleashed "gas wars" involving EU countries. Russian leadership blamed Ukraine in unfair partnership, unauthorized gas intake, violation of international obligations, etc. On its turn, Ukraine interpreted these actions as blackmail.

Russian federal TV channels controlled by the state conducted a practically non-stop anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaign. Covering the events in Ukraine, they selected news about political scandals, disasters, accidents, poverty, etc. Ukraine was represented as a poor, unfriendly and unstable country surviving a permanent political crisis. Political

summits became limited and later were blocked. A great number of bilateral agreements concluded earlier were not implemented.

At the same time, for historical reasons and because of a wide use of Russian many people in Russia before the 2014 crisis still considered Ukraine as an organically kin country. It explains the belief in a "particular character" of Russian-Ukrainian relations. Russian authorities perceived Ukraine as a country which can hardly conduct an independent foreign policy but was rather an arena of competition between Russia and the West. They confessed a stereotyped representation about a "due" behaviour of Ukraine in foreign relations, and its actions not matching this stereotype were considered as unfriendly.

Sharp contradictions between two states were softened by Viktor Yanukovich dismissed from the post of President as a result of the coup (or the revolution) in February 2014. He was often represented in Western media as pro-Russian politician though he continued the politics initiated by his predecessors even more actively. But the strategy of "eurointegration" preached by Yushchenko was replaced by the strategy of "national pragmatism". It was based on the assumption that good neighbourhood with Russia creates "a healthy political environment" which contributes to the association of Ukraine with Europe (Выступление…, 2010). The hesitations of Yanukovich who tried to sign the agreement about the association with EU and at the same time to keep acceptable relations with Russia and the irreconcilable positions of the sides unleashed the conflict which has been prepared by all post-Soviet developments in Ukraine and Russia.

4. After 2014: radical transformations of neighbourhood and the adaptation to the new situation

The events of 2014 have deeply transformed public opinion in Ukraine. On the one hand, they provoked de facto secession of some areas of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts but on the other hand, they strongly contributed to the consolidation of Ukrainian political nation (O'Loughlin et al., , Toal and Kolosov, 2017). Nationalism is one of the main forms of territorial ideology and the basis of state-building. It supposes the battle for territory or the defense of the rights on it (Paasi, 1996).

After 2014, the trends in cultural-linguistic policy observed earlier quite logically led to the clearly pronounced policy of minorities' assimilation on the territory of Ukraine. It confirmed the fears they expressed on the days of a new revolution in Kyiv. In September 2017 Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian parliament) adopted the new law on education (Закон України…, 2017). Since the 2018/2019 academic year teaching in Russian and in all other minorities' languages (Hungarian, Romanian, etc.) will be possible only in primary school, and since the next year should be banned at all, though Russian is the mother tongue for at least a third of population. The only exception is made for Crimean Tatars as an "indigenous" ethnic group, though most of them live in de facto Russian Crimea. Surnames are "ukrainised" even if a person prefers their Russian version: Elena becomes Olena, Konstantin – Kostyantyn, etc. (Паромный, 2017). The governments of Hungary and Romania protested and believe that the new law violates the rights of the Hungarian and the Romanian minorities. Experts from the opposition emphasize that it will enhance the split in society.

The Institute of National Memory created under Yushchenko was transformed into part of the executive authorities directly run by the government. It initiated the policy of "decommunisation" which in particular returned to hundreds of cities and villages their historical names and eliminated from the map of the country countless toponyms related with the names Communist leaders of the 1930s and reminding about the dark times of Stalinism. At the same time, many streets and squares in Ukrainian cities were renamed after Bandera and his supporters. This institute now claims to recognize the Soviet epoch as the period of "occupation", counting the history of independent Ukraine since the declaration of the ephemeral Ukrainian People's Republic in November 1917 after the collapse of the Russian Empire . Its boundaries varied depending on the peripeteias of the civil war and did not match the boundaries of contemporary Ukraine. This act would create a legal basis for disputing the belonging to it of eastern and south-eastern as well as the western regions which were included to (occupied by?) the territories of neighbouring states of Central Europe (Ивженко, 2018).

Political crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations continuing since 2014 has radically transformed cross-border interactions between the countries which concern vital interests of millions of people. Firstly, the cross-border circulation of people and passenger connections are radically reduced. The Ukrainian side banned direct flights between the cities of two countries and the flights of Russian companies over the Ukrainian territory, and Moscow replied by reciprocal measures. The number of long distance trains crossing the boundary felt down from more than 30 in 2013 to 9–10 per day (all of them are Ukrainian

or Moldovan). The number of their passengers decreased between 2013 and 2016 by 60%. All local cross-border trains are cancelled. There were in 2017 only a half of cross-border bus routes existed in 2013. It takes two to six hours to cross the boundary by bus.

It is not surprising considering that Russian male citizens between 16 and 60 are as a rule stopped at the boundary by Ukrainian border guards as they are suspected in going to the zone of fighting in Donbass. All Russian citizens must now pass biometric control, possess certified invitations and provide in advance Ukrainian authorities with information on the purpose, the length and other details of their visit. As a result, Ukrainian citizens make up about 80% of the cross-border flow. According to Ukrainian data, 2.1 million Ukrainian citizens work in Russia, and in total more than 4 million crossed Russian boundary in 2016 (the number of crossings was higher only at the boundary of Ukraine with Poland – 9.5 million) (Сколько…, 2016). So, paradoxically, new restrictions concern Ukrainian citizens more than Russians.

Secondly, all local crossing points at the border with Russia are closed by the Ukrainian side. The opening time of road crossing points which can be used now only by Ukrainian citizens is limited as the flow of people and vehicles is too low. For instance, in Belgorod oblast where there were 22 crossing points and their density per 100 km of the boundary was the highest, there remained in 2016 only four international road crossings and one railway crossing point (Колосов, Вендина (eds.), 2011; Родной край…, 2017).

All agreements on cooperation concluded by Ukrainian and Russian partners on the regional and local level are not implemented or broken by the Ukrainian side. Ukrainian officials, professionals, scholars, etc. cannot participate at any event in Russia. Very few of them take the risk to come on the individual basis carrying about hiding their presence.

The trade turnover between two countries decreased in 2013–2016 by the ratio of more than four. But the exchanges between border regions shrank less than in average. Moreover, since late 2016 a fast compensation growth of Russian-Ukrainian trade is noticed; its 2017 estimation riches 23%. This growth is particularly visible in border regions. For example, the export from Rostov oblast to Ukraine increased in 2016 by 45% as compared with the previous year and exceeded its historical maximum (Королева, 2017; Экспорт товаров…, 2017). It is certainly explained by the trade with the break away regions of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts which is included in statistical data on all Ukraine.

Whatever, different fields of activity are being gradually adapted to the current situation. Transport service was restructured first. Regular trains and buses belonging to large state or municipal companies were replaced by Ukrainian private carriers who organized either direct trips to Russian cities or bring their passengers to a crossing point, where Russian carriers wait for them on their side of the boundary (it is difficult for them to cross the border because of formalities and restrictions). As a result, at some sections of the border the passenger turnover is being restored.

At the boundary with self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk republics (DNR and LNR) local crossing points were not closed, and their inhabitants can cross the border using their internal passports. Consequences of the war which often separated family members and led to the shortcoming of some consumer goods provoked the doubling of cross-border flows. Large retailers built new super- and hypermarkets in neighboring towns of Rostov oblast for customers from DNR and LNR; the turnover of distribution centres in Rostov and Taganrog increased.

These facts are evidence that it is difficult or even impossible to completely break the relations, which have been shaped during a long time, even by emergency political and administrative measures.

5. Conclusion

The deep crisis in Russian-Ukrainian relations unleashed in 2014 was prepared by the policy and rhetoric in two countries since the very disintegration of the Soviet Union. The question is whether they contributed to the processes of nation- and state-building in Ukraine, helped to create a well integrated independent European state. More than three centuries of common history of Russia and Ukraine make their separation and delimitation particularly difficult. Before the crisis a careful shaping of a strongly negative image of Russia and other anti-Russian measures seemed to be a growth disease and a natural though perhaps temporary phenomenon. Nowadays, it appears as an inevitable result of the annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbass. This explanation is convincing but it still leaves a space for a question to what extent it was useful for Ukraine.

The experience of Poland – the country historically closely related with both Russia and Ukraine – can probably help to answer to this question. Polish sociologist Tomasz Zarycki (Зарицкий, 2006, p. 64) wrote: "The image of Russia plays a key role in shaping contemporary Polish identity and performs

in discursive mechanisms a number of functions related with the compensation of Poland's peripheral weakness as compared with the West". Polish experience is certainly well known in Ukraine. But it was shown that it could not be simply copied (Вендина et al., 2014). In particular, in Poland Russia is an object for "consolatory» comparisons. On the background of Russia represented as a country rich in natural resources but poor, militarized, authoritarian and with underdeveloped civil society Poland looks very attractive. But for Ukraine Russia is rather an object of very controversial comparisons – at least, until now. A higher level of freedom for media is a not so much a manifestation of a democratic character of society, but rather of conflicts between different strata of political elite, often based on regional interests.

Acknowledgements

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