

Democratization of Ukraine as a Way to Anchor Russian Neo-imperialism

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Abstract: The focus of this paper is twofold. On the one hand, it outlines the geopolitical rationale behind contemporary Russian expansionism, as well as presents the asymmetric mechanisms utilized by Russia to solidify its authority in the post-communist space. The four commonly used theoretical frameworks explaining Russian expansionism were described and critically assessed. Apart from this, the Russian and foreign political philosophic thought of the 19-21 centuries was referred to, to trace the evolution of the Russian Byzantium-type governing tradition and national identity. On the other hand, the paper assesses the features of post-colonial Ukrainian political culture and unveils premises for the emergence of its statehood in the 1990s. The major differences between Russian and Ukrainian political cultures and identities are emphasized. Finally, the hypothesis tested is that a democratic Ukraine – strengthened by cooperation with its Western allies – will become an obstacle of Russian expansionism in the future.

Key Words: Russian foreign policy, Russian identity, Russian neo-imperialism, Russian expansionism, Ukrainian crisis, Ukrainian identity, Democratization of Ukraine

Introduction

When speaking of the recent conflicts in the post-communist space, one may not overlook a Russian brand behind virtually every one of them: Nagorno-Karabakh, Tajikistan, Transnistria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Adjara (unsuccessful), South Kyrgyzstan, Crimea, Donbass. The list may also be expanded to the First and Second Chechen Wars, which are usually regarded as Russian interior conflicts. Depending on the situation, Russian armed forces are portrayed as arriving as peacemakers or peacekeepers with the Kremlin often denies it is one of the sides in the conflict (Kushnir 2016b). Considering the power, authority, and geopolitical gravity of Russia, it is no surprise that the state takes decisive actions in its neighborhood. However, some of these measures look like parts of a farsighted expansionist strategy, not the precise surgical strikes aimed at a prompt pacification and securing long-term peace between all sides. The recent Russian role in the Ukrainian crisis provides a good example for this.

It is hard to underestimate the potential bilateral benefits of cooperation between Ukraine and Russia, as well as disregard the historical traditions of such cooperation. Ukraine provides its territory and infrastructure for Russian export of resources to the EU, Ukraine is one of the biggest markets for Russian goods, Ukrainian skilled, and unskilled workers are often employed in Russia, the list may be continued. However, it seems that the latter is not feeling very comfortable with Ukraine's ability to conduct sovereign policies. Russia would like its neighbor firmly gripped in its orbit; this will allow the Kremlin to enjoy more power in the post-communist space, as well on the global scale. Ukraine is a brick, but a crucial one, in Russia's foreign policy and geopolitical competition with the West. As Hiski Haukkala (2015: 37) concludes: "The ferocity of the Russian reaction following the undoing of the Yanukovich regime in Ukraine is made understandable by the key role the country plays in the Russian plans to build a credible counter-pole to the EU in Eurasia: Without Ukraine, this dream would essentially unravel."

With this said, Russian leaders are occasionally questioning Ukraine's right to be a sovereign state. The historical, political, economic, cultural, and other ties between states provide the explicit rationale for them to intervene in Ukraine's affairs, lobby Russian interests there, and – if the outcome is not satisfactory – implement even more harsh actions. Russian leaders often perceive Ukrainians and Russians as one nation and continue to reiterate this mantra (Putin 2014; Euromaidan Press 2015), even though the truth may not be as black-and-white.

This research aims to prove that the rationale behind Russia's aggressive actions in its neighborhood resides in its goal of achieving certain geostrategic objectives which are largely predefined by the countries imperial traditions, memories, and fears that the Kremlin may irretrievably lose control over lands which were once Russian.

The hypothesis is that a democratic Ukraine may shift away from its post-communist Russia-centered geopolitical orbit and become a rigid obstacle for Russia in its pursuit of its expansionist geostrategic objectives.

The research will outline differences between the Ukrainian and Russian nations, as well as between their political cultures. In this regard, the influence of historical experiences on the evolution of Ukrainian statecraft, governing traditions, national identity, religious issues, and other features will be scrutinized.

As the methodology is concerned, it will reside in combining classical and critical geopolitics. The first – state-centered Hobbesian geopolitics – will allow for the explanation of the nature of Russian expansionism in light of it seeking *Lebensraum*. In its turn, critical geopolitics will allow for the unveiling of the mechanisms which Russia utilizes to achieve its objectives in the post-Cold War international arena. The paradox here is that Russia pursues state interests through a utilization of mechanisms which emerged in democratic societies to limit the state's power (i.e. empowerment of the individuals and non-state actors). Apart from this, a brief overview of the academic literature on the Russian and Ukrainian political cultures will be provided. The methods of analysis, synthesis, and comparison will also be applied to assess all available data and arrive at generalizations of a higher order.

1. Expansionism as Russian *modus operandi*

It was at the beginning of the XX century that Russian philosophers for the first time clearly presented – and justified – the ideas of Russian exceptionalism, expansionism, and messianism. One may refer here to Vladimir Soloviev (1853-1900) who advocated the idea of a Russian-led global empire built on the principles of religious Christian universalism; or to Nikolai Fedorov (1828-1903) who emphasized the Russian “duty” before humankind to unify the world through Orthodoxy and autocracy; or to Nikolai Berdiaev (1874-1948) with his unveiling the historical and spiritual evolution of Russian Orthodoxy and political culture. The latter claimed that religion and authoritarianism were two cornerstones of the Muscovite state, which later nurtured the Russian

imperialistic idea, and finally provided the impetus to Soviet expansionism and Russian messianism (Østbø 2011: 67-75).

Over time, little has changed in Russian political philosophy. For instance, after the collapse of the USSR Aleksandr Dugin (1962-) continued to perceive Russian expansionism – especially in its Eurasian dimension – as something natural and inescapable. He contributed the idea of Russia as the Third Rome; from Dugin's perspective, Russia finds itself in an eternal struggle with the global maritime Carthage, which is the U.S. One of the battlefields between these two transcendent powers is Ukraine. Dugin argues that Russia has no other way to exist except for being victorious and constantly growing Empire: "The whole history of Russia is the history of the construction of the Empire. Russia either becomes the Empire or disappears" (Rezchikov 2007; Dugin 2007 cited in Østbø 2011: 134). Moreover, Russia as the entity combining the true Orthodox faith with true political leadership should unite and lead other nations against the Carthage. By doing so, it will prevent the doomsday and the coming of the Antichrist. (Østbø 2011: 143).

The same as Dugin, Nataliia Narochmitskaia (1948-) also stresses the importance of religion in understanding the Russian state and its historic mission. She constructs her narration on the dichotomy between Orthodox Russia and the Anglo-Saxon West, treating the latter as God-alienated and heretic. According to Narochmitskaia, the history of humankind is a by-product of interactions between different religious groups. Thus, it is impossible to interpret history by removing the spiritual element, as the West does it. Moreover, total secularization makes the West unavoidably hostile towards Russia, which remains morally superior due to its strong religious identity. As Jardar Østbø (2011: 169) summarizes Narochmitskaia's major ideas: "The Russian state's expansion was for the most part in self-defence and can be justified by international law ... [The Western view on Russia – O.K.] is stereotypical and essentially false, partly because important research on Russia is not objective. It is rooted in heretical and inhuman thought and misunderstandings and is closely related to geopolitics, i.e. to the desire to conquer and annihilate Russia."

Apart from Soloviev, Fedorov, Berdiaev, Narochnitskaia, and Dugin, one may find a considerable number of other Russian philosophers and geopoliticians who – under various justifications – support the state's expansion. For instance, Alexandr Block (1852-1909), Iurii Kliuchnikov (1886-1938), Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890-1938), Ivan Ilyin (1883-1954), Evgeny A. Korovin (1892-1964), Egor Kholmogorov (1978-), and others. Their views may have been grounded on ambiguous deductions. However, one should not underestimate their influence on Russian foreign and domestic policies, as well as on the formation of Russia's identity.

Vadim Tsymburskii (1957-2009) can be defined as the most consistent anti-imperialist. He argued that Russia's post-Cold War borders were, adequate, and there was no need to acquire new territories. Moreover, he condemned expansionism, claiming that it brings more negative than positive effects; especially, concerning its expansion into Europe. Russia, according to Tsymburskii, is a civilizational island and should always keep its distance from the outer world. But this kind of isolationist geopolitical philosophy was rather an exception than the rule (Tsymburskii 2007: 7-11; Østbø 2011: 97-98)

Addressing the Western philosophic and geopolitical views on the nature of the Russian state, one may hardly discover anything related to messianism, exceptionalism, or a "duty" before humankind. It is the opposite; Russia's aggressive foreign policy is defined by many as an existential threat.

If one were to speak in particular of Polish geopoliticians at the beginning of the XX century, one might observe that a majority of them were openly anti-Russian. For instance, Włodzimierz Wakar (1885-1933) perceived the Russian Empire and later the USSR as a major foe. That was clearly visible in Russian advancements and the seeking for *revanche* after World War I. Wakar supported the idea of Prometheanism which entailed the unification of Eastern European nations, the creation of the Intermarium block of states, and the successful resistance to any aggression from the East. His "ultimate solution" resided in the partition of Russia and the

emergence of independent nation-states (Eberhardt 2006: 86).

In his turn, Władysław Studnicki (1867-1953) also claimed that the major regional villain is Russia. During the last 200 years, Russia had started 38 wars which lasted summarily 128 years. This allows Russia to expand and achieve its major geopolitical objectives (Eberhardt 2006: 111). Thus, the Eastern European states – in particular, Poland – would acquire security only after the demolition of Russia. The conflict between Russia and the rest (or Russia and the West), according to Studnicki, was timeless and natural (Eberhardt 2006: 106).

Adolf Bocheński (1909-1944) considered Russia to be an artificial state full of disgust and moral decay. Expansionism was not the salvation of humankind, but the enslavement of nonconformists. Hundreds of nations were experiencing constant repressions coming from central authorities in Moscow. In a word, the processes taking place in Russia and the USSR were described as barbarian, unhealthy, and harmful (Eberhardt 2006: 138).

Apart from Wakar, Studnicki, and Bocheński, similar views on Russia were shared by other Polish geopoliticians, statesmen, and philosophers, among whom one should name Ignacy Matuszewski (1891-1946), Włodzimierz Bączkowski (1905-2000), Juliusz Mieroszewski (1906-1976), and others.

British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) defined Russia as the permanent Byzantium-type state, regardless of the time epoch and political regime ruling over it. Russian leaders, the same as Byzantium Emperors, were considering their decisions and judgments always correct and indisputable. This encouraged them to rule over the state with totalitarian confidence; state institutions were also appropriately adjusted. Bearing this in mind, Toynbee makes no distinction between tsarist Russia and the communist Soviet Union. 'In this Byzantine totalitarian state, the church may be Christian or Marxian so long as it submits to being the secular government's tool', he states, and concludes: 'Under the Hammer and Sickle, as under the Cross, Russia is still "Holy Russia", and Moscow is still "The Third Rome."' (Toynbee 1948: 164).

The nature of the Byzantium state, as described by Toynbee, makes Russia permanently hostile towards the West. These two powers are civilizationally incompatible. Moreover, Toynbee describes the self-identification of Muscovites – the title of the Russian nation – as chosen by God to protect the true faith after the fall of Constantinople and, eventually, to build a world empire around that true faith (Østbø 2011: 78). Here one may make numerous allusions to Russian philosophers and geopoliticians presenting Russia as the Third Rome. The difference between Toynbee and them, though, resides in the fact that the first neither sees Russian expansion as *a priori* constructive nor "legitimizes" it from the perspective of serving the global good.

Ukrainian geopolitician Yuriy Lypa (1900-1944) stressed the military aspect of the state's expansionism: "War and only war was the idol of imperial rule. War could be easily started because the majority of the population supported it eagerly: peasants were waging heavy wars with the administration on their lands, that they were reluctant, or even looked with hope to gain new territories" (Lypa 1995: 25; Kushnir 2013: 128). Lypa emphasized that Russia had always been absorbed with wars, either internal or external. This was possible because ordinary Russians perceive wars and armed conflicts as something natural; moreover, some of the dwellers even saw a chance to improve their personal well-being through conquering and looting new lands.

Finally, the US ambassador to the USSR, George F. Kennan (1904-2005) (1998: 61) stated the following of the Soviet Communists: "From the Russian-Asiatic world out of which they had emerged they carried with them a skepticism to the possibilities of permanent and peaceful coexistence of rival forces. Easily persuaded of their doctrinaire "rightness," they insisted on the submission or destruction of all competing power." As one may see, Kennan reiterates the idea of Russians perceiving themselves as the "true doers" under the strong unchallenged leadership, what often entailed the destruction of external competitive forces.

Bearing all of the above mentioned in mind, the rivalry between "Orthodox" Russia and the "Carthaginian" West should never come as a surprise; it cyclically reappears in history. Haukkala

(2015: 31) stresses that even if Russia tries, the principles of western governance and democratic identity cannot be incorporated genuinely into the state's policies. Instead, Russian centuries old traditional expansionism seems to constitute a much more efficient and rational *modus operandi*. One may find the latest proof in the post-Cold War experience. Russian attempts under President Boris Yeltsin to preserve and enhance its geopolitical importance through democratic mechanisms was faulty (Torbakov 2016; Horbulin and Litvinenko 2009). Therefore, President Vladimir Putin's return to expansionist outward-looking policies was predictable; it is the return to Byzantium roots which successfully nourished the Russian Tsardom, Russian Empire, and the USSR.

2. Features of Russian expansion: imperviousity, cautiousness, adaptiveness

It will be a grave mistake to claim that Russia seeks to expand by any means possible. On the contrary, Russia expands because it acquires the proper opportunity. This opportunity, though, may emerge either as a consequence of favorable circumstances or as a result of the Kremlin's purposeful activities.

In 1947 Kennan (1998: 62) wrote that Soviet foreign policy was cautious, flexible, and deceptive. It was like a fluid stream which moved wherever it acquired space. Citing Kennan's Long Telegramme: "Soviet power ... is neither schematic nor adventuristic. It does not work by fixed plans. It does not take unnecessary risks. Impervious to the logic of reason, and it is highly sensitive to the logic of force. For this reason, it can easily withdraw – and usually does when strong resistance is encountered at any point."

One may find an appropriate illustration for the Soviet's absence of fixed plans in its occupation of the Baltics. According to the Russian historian Elena Zubkova (2008), at the end of the 1930s, one of Joseph Stalin's strategic objectives resided in establishing full control over Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia. However, there was no clear strategy, as evidenced by the archives,

for political, economic, and military expansion. All Stalin's decisions and actions were made *ad hoc* and targeted the weakest sides of an opponent. This approach proved to be efficient.

On the contrary, Stalin's highly improvisational intervention into Finland – the 1939-1940 Winter War – was a fiasco. Regardless of acquiring new lands and moving the border further to the west from Leningrad, the major objective – emergence of the Soviet-controlled Finnish socialist state – was not met. Moreover, the casualties faced by the Red Army were disastrous: 126,000 soldiers dead or missing, 188,000 soldiers severely injured, almost 2300 tanks and armored vehicles destroyed (Russian Life 2014: 26; Citino, 2014: 50). Since then the Kremlin did not undertake a firm attempt to establish control over its neighbor in the north. However, it will be wrong to conclude that the Kremlin abandoned its Finnish ambitions for good.

As Russia's benefit from favorable circumstances is concerned, one may refer to the inclusion of the islands, Sakhalin and Amur into the Russian Empire. At the beginning of the XIX century, these territories remained underpopulated and poorly explored with neither Russia nor China claiming authority over them. Therefore, it was simply an issue of setting a settlement in the Amur estuary to mark the whole region as Russian. This was done in 1850 and in 1853 Tsar Nikolay I confirmed the inclusion of the island of Sakhalin and Amur into the empire by stating: "Once the Russian flag is raised over it, let it never be lowered!" (Kushnir 2016a; Gelaev 2015). Exhausted by the Opium war, China agreed to recognize Russian expansion through signing the Treaty of Aigun (1858) and the Convention of Peking (1860).

As the Russian creation of opportunities is concerned, in his Long Telegramme, Kennan (1947) also outlined the principles of Soviet expansion apparent in the Baltic and Finnish cases. He stressed that the Kremlin usually achieved key objectives through exerting its influence on (i) political parties in other states which openly or secretly support communism and – in their unity – form some kind of the concealed Comintern; (ii) social leaders and opinion makers who are loudly promoting particular political ideas and solutions, usually revolutionary; (iii) a wide variety of

national associations and organizations (labor unions, youth movements, and others); (iv) international organizations which could interfere with the domestic policies of other states; (v) Russian Orthodox church; (vi) Pan-Slav movements and other related movements; (vii) national governments who are ready to align their states to Soviet objectives. The Soviet Union strove to create a multi-dimensional network of agents and proxies in target states. If one removes the communist component, similar *modus operandi* can be observed in contemporary Russian foreign policies (especially as the post-communist space is concerned). One of the best examples here is the conspiracy behind the annexation of Crimea, as it was unveiled by Taras Kuzio (2006), Lada L. Roslycki (2011: 301-307), Joanna Szostek (2014: 466), Michał Wawrzonek (2014: 760-766), Ostap Kushnir (2016a), and other researchers. Another example is the Georgian war of 2008 with Russia using its proxies in South Ossetia to eradicate the already explosive situation, engage Georgia into armed conflict, and then arrive as the peacemaker recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states (Sakwa 2012: 591-592; Sarıkaya 2011: 4; Sinkkonen 2011: 272-274). Timothy Thomas (2015: 449-450) in his turn points out that the Kremlin has also created a powerful network in the EU. In particular, he prescribes to this network Former Premier Silvio Berlusconi of Italy, Jean-Marie Le Pen, leader of France's far-right National Front, former German Chancellors Gerhard Schröder and Helmut Schmidt, and many CE's of German industrial giants. Thomas defines them as Russian proxies – or at least sympathizers – in Europe who speak in one voice with the Kremlin on many issues. It is very unlikely Russia will seek expansion into Western Europe soon.

It will be logical to conclude that Kennan in the 1950s outlined the principles of Soviet policies which has provided the backbone to contemporary Russian asymmetric or – according to some – "hybrid" offensive operations. Thomas (2015: 454) argues that the first type of operations "feature a combination of forms and methods of using forces and means that depend on an adversary's unequal combat potential." This includes the strategic planning of every step with significant emphasis made on acquiring the informational and intellectual superiority before any

action is taken. In a word, the victory on a conventional battlefield is not the key objective anymore; moreover, the certain defeat of an adversary is not necessarily achieved through armed struggle as the information environment, social architecture, and international community also becomes a battlefield. Sakwa (2012: 583-588) adds to this point that the conspiracy narratives – searching for the hidden enemy in the black-and-white world – also plays one of the key roles in justifying the state's actions.

According to Volodymyr Horbulin (2015), contemporary Russia is not conducting asymmetric operations, but waging "hybrid" wars against the target states. He defines the "hybrid" war as a "fuzzy" military conflict which envisages the implementation of non-military means which originally have no direct relation to serious military confrontation. This includes complex and the flexible nature of adversaries, utilization of conventional and irregular means of warfare, wide-scale media propaganda, cyber-attacks, and others. Some Western experts add to this point that the ultimate Russian goal resides in making strong authoritarian leaders rule over key states or territories with their powers grounded in organized crime, GONGO's, and secret services. All of these authoritarian leaders are accountable – directly or indirectly – to the Kremlin (Roslycki 2011: 300-301; Socor 2005; Jackson 2006).

In turn, Russian military strategists avoid the term "hybrid" war while addressing conflicts in their neighborhood; instead, they refer to such terms as asymmetric, non-linear, or indirect operations (Thomas 2015: 455; Andrianov and Loyko 2015: 149). For instance, it was Russian Chief of General Staff Valerii Gerasimov who advocated the importance of "non-linear" warfare as a complement to the military might of the modern state (Galeotti 2014). In his article "The Value of Science in Foresight," Gerasimov (2013) emphasized the following: "the role of non-military means of achieving political and strategic goals has grown, and, in many cases, they have exceeded the power of force of weapons in their effectiveness." He underlined that in the contemporary world non-military operations should occur at a rate of 4:1 over military operations (Thomas 2015: 455).

Gerasimov also raised the importance of conducting surgical intelligence operations and nurturing social dissatisfaction within the target state to undermine the authority of local governments in order to create a vacuum of power. Non-military means, especially manipulations with information, are employed to weaken the adversary's military potential and disorient the indigenous population. Finally, "the open use of forces – often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation – is resorted to only at a particular stage, primarily for the achievement of the final success in a conflict" (Gerasimov 2013 cited in Galeotti 2014).

The non-linear military strategy presented by the Russian Chief of General Staff became known as the Gerasimov's Doctrine. It also has clear references to the 86, 88, 89, and 20 provisions of the latest Military Doctrine 2010 which – amongst others – stresses the Russian obligation to protect its citizens abroad (Kushnir 2016a). Being multi-dimensional, ruthless, planned in advance, and – at the same time – highly adjustable, this is the strategy Russia evidently implies in order to exert its influence over target states. In particular, one should speak here of the post-soviet states.

3. Reasons behind Russian neo-imperialist expansion

Before assessing Ukraine's potential in anchoring Russian expansionism, one should understand why Russia dared to start a non-linear military operation against its neighbor in 2014. On the example of the annexation of Crimea, Andrei Tsygankov defines four of the most common explanations behind Russian intervention into Ukraine.

The first – imperial – explanation portrays Russian actions as a straightforward inspiration to restore the Kremlin's rule over former Soviet lands. Experiencing the revival of a nationalistic narration in the times of Putin, Russia expands wherever it acquires the opportunity and faces minimal resistance. Tsygankov (2015: 294) claims that a significant number of Western researchers still “continue to interpret Russia as a traditionalist and expansionist power waiting to expand into

former Soviet lands.” For instance, here one may name Horbulin (2015) who invented the term “revanche geostrategy” to explain Russian-led “hybrid” wars. Apart from Horbulin, the bigger or to a lesser extent, this explanation is supported by Anton Barbashin and Hannah Thoburn (2014), Timothy Snyder (2014), and others.

The second explanation – diversionary – presents Russia’s aggressive external actions as the Kremlin's attempts to consolidate domestic power and secure internal stability. In this light, Russia’s annexation of Crimea and its subsequent engagement into the East Ukrainian conflict was nothing else, but a lure to distract the attention of its citizens from political protests and economic troubles. One of the supporters of a diversionary explanation is Igor Torbakov (2011: 1), who wrote the following in his article "What does Russia Want?":

... ultimately, the goal of Russian foreign policy efforts is to create conditions for preserving and perpetuating the current political and economic regime ... the Kremlin's three-pronged objective is: to secure the persistence of a system of authoritarian rule and of bureaucratic capitalism; to have this system recognized as valid in its right—being equal (or even superior) to the Western liberal model; and to integrate Russian economy into the global system while shielding the domestic policies from the "pernicious" outside influences.

Apart from Torbakov, in a bigger or to a lesser extent, this explanation is supported by Hiski Haukkala (2015), Michael McFaul (2014), Steven Sestanovich (2014), Daniel Treisman (2014), and others.

The third explanation – divergent identities – presents Russian engagement into Ukrainian affairs as a retaliation to the anterior Western civilizational assault. Tsygankov (2015: 296) states that the Ukrainian revolution of 2013-14 – or the EuroMaidan – came as a shock to Russian decision-makers. The latter simply could not accept Ukraine's conscious alienation from the Russian “civilizational space”; they tended to perceive the EuroMaidan as a successful West-

orchestrated operation (Darczewska 2014: 15). Thus, the Crimean annexation and later events were nothing, but an over-reaction of the “East Slavic Orthodox Civilization” on the existential threat to its Byzantine nature. This explanation is supported, for instance, by Michał Wawrzonek (2014: 760):

The neo-imperialist goals of Russian policy toward Ukraine in recent years have received a doctrinal foundation – the concept of the Orthodox civilizational community – the *Russkiy Mir* ... This model asserts Ukraine's incompatibility with Western institutions, values, and standards. The concept of the "Russkiy Mir" implies isolation from the West and consolidation of the authoritarian regime. It is therefore in opposition to democratization as the way out of the gray zone.

Apart from Wawrzonek, in the bigger or lesser extent, this explanation is supported by Olga Malinova (2014), and Zbigniew Brzezinski (2014).

The fourth explanation – the so-called "angry guy" – portrays recent Russian policies regarding Ukraine as Putin's personal fury and outrage after the failure of his plans. Putin repeatedly stressed that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the XX century (see Annual State Address to Parliament in 2005); naturally, the President of Russia was willing to restore the global status which his state once enjoyed, as well as to overcome the West's mistreatment of Russia. The EuroMaidan was a noticeable strike in Putin's ambitions what made him act out emotionally (Tsygankov 2015: 297). Timothy Thomas (2015: 447), while not exactly interpreting Putin's decisions as effective, portrays contemporary Russian actions in its neighborhood as clearly "Putin-led". According to Thomas, there would neither be a Crimean annexation, nor other instabilities in the post-soviet space without Putin's direct input. Apart from Thomas, in the bigger or to a lesser extent, the "angry guy" explanation is supported by Tuomas Forsberg, Regina Heller, and Reinhardt Wolf (2014).

None of these reasons, though, reflect the position of Tsygankov on contemporary Russian

policies in its neighborhood. He interprets these policies as a rational response by the Kremlin to the West's growing ignorance of Russian values and national interests: "In acting toward Ukraine, Russia has been guided by its understanding of national interests and values, as well as the degree of their recognition by Western powers. The absence of such recognition has contributed to confrontation and violence in Ukraine" (Tsygankov 2015: 298). Thus, aggression regarding Ukraine is defensive behavior by Russia in a deteriorating international environment caused by the unilateral and multifarious Western expansion into Eastern Europe. Moreover, in Putin's view, it is also an issue of prestige to withstand the cultural, historical, and geopolitical ties with Ukraine from a Western assault even if such defense breaches Ukraine's sovereignty. The question of defending Russian-speaking minorities from the far-right offenders in the post-revolutionary Ukraine is also on top of Putin's agenda. The major weak point with such a position, though, is Tsygankov's sporadic perception of Ukraine as the subject, not the object of international relations.

Summarizing the above enlisted explanations and developing the Tsygankov's perception – which is relevant in its core – the Russian expansionist behavior is nothing else, but the attempts to ensure geopolitical "justice" as Russia unilaterally sees it. The post-Cold War history has revealed that contemporary Western liberal and democratic values found proper ground in the post-communist space. The painful and uneven, but gradual and conscious process of transition started in Ukraine and other states in the 1990s. Thus, it is incorrect to claim that the West conducted a *multum* of special operations, "intervened", and "enforced" democracy among millions of people living in the newly-emerged states. The people decided to switch to democracy by themselves, what this meant is that the Byzantium-type Russian model of governance lost out to its Western alternative. Russia – which has always favored imperial thinking (Dugin 2007 cited in Rezchikov 2007) – could not accept this easily. Moreover, the accelerating transition in the post-communist space looked for many in the Kremlin as a reiteration of the "biggest catastrophe of the XX century". Thus, losing the competition, but not wanting to lose, Russia started to "forcefully export"

its model of governance through "hybrid" wars and asymmetric operations. This was the best way to deal with Western "tempted" states before they become irreversibly westernized. Apart from this, numerous local conflicts were – and remain – a message to all post-communist states that their security and prosperity depend on the extent of their coherency to Russia.

In a word, regaining geopolitical influence and securing civilizational homogeneity – lost after the collapse of the USSR – are treated by the Kremlin as a “right” and a “just” affair (Kushnir 2006a). Through conducting an expansionist foreign policy, Russia strengthens its national integrity; its leaders satisfy their personal ambitions, a wide range of Russian interests on different levels are met, and – finally – Russian Byzantium-type policies are re-confirmed as functional in the contemporary world. From this perspective, the political preferences and national interests of people living in Ukraine and other post-soviet states are of minor importance. The West, in turn, should review its understanding of Russia as a player in international affairs.

The question, though, remains unanswered what are the limits of Russian expansionist ambition and whether or not Ukraine has a fair chance to anchor to it.

4. Ukraine is not Russia: the split of identities

It was in 2003 that the President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma published the book “Ukraine is not Russia.” Regardless of numerous inconsistencies and arguable statements uncovered by both – Ukrainian and Russian – readers, the book delivered a powerful symbolic message. The idea of differences between two “brotherly” nations was manifested at the highest level by a person commonly associated with “Soviet” political culture. This idea, thereby, resonated and raised discussions all over Ukraine.

From a broader perspective, Ukraine as a separate research object started to attract more scholarly attention after the collapse of the USSR; not to speak here of the regular activities

conducted by the diaspora schools of Ukrainian studies. Thus, the differences between Russian and Ukrainian nations – and especially between their political cultures and identities – have not been addressed only by Kuchma. To acknowledge these differences, one should address Ukraine's approach to religion and governance, as well as assess the influence of historical experiences on state-building and political culture.

Speaking of the historical experience, Ivan Rudnytsky defined Ukraine as the “non-historical” nation which had never had a proper development of ruling elites and of its statehood. This happened due to the inability of the proto-states and state-like formations allocated on the territory of contemporary Ukraine to defend themselves against foreign assaults, in particular against the Mongol invasion of the 13th century, and later against Polish and Russian expansions (Rudnytsky 1963 cited in Khrestin 2002: 9).

Lacking historical continuity and national traditions (von Hagen 1995: 667), contemporary Ukraine is a classical post-colonial state with a bucket of inferiority complexes. Polish and Russian domination throughout 16-20 centuries significantly – and irreversibly – altered the outlook of Ukrainians; being a Ukrainian was intimidating, stressful, and even dangerous at that time. The enlightening role of Ukrainian nobility and intellectuals was eradicated (von Hagen 1995: 668); actually, the latter could not count on the support of common people who were – in their majority – poorly educated and easily manipulated. "This, in Ukraine's case, led to a significant portion of the population rejecting its traditions while adopting the beliefs, attitudes, and values of the oppressor. Ukrainians became instrumental in the destruction of their culture and language which led to passivity and a dependency syndrome" (Kuzio 1998: 152 cited in Khrestin 2002: 10; also see Sysyn 1991: 852). This also led to the impossibility of defining themselves as a distinct nation in the Russian-governed states. Instead, the majority of people were fine with a subordinate role and the *Small Russian* identity (Sysyn 1991: 852). As the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and later the Austria-Hungarian Empire is concerned, the Ukrainian – or Ruthenian – population enjoyed more

political freedoms, however, Polish elites, and their culture were more mature and traditionally dominant. On the one hand, this encouraged Ukrainians to Polonize, on the contrary, this nurtured exclusive nationalism and unconditional rejection of non-Ukrainian rule (Himka 2006: 488).

To understand the formation of Ukrainian political culture, one should not seek its roots in the history of this non-existent national state. Instead, Ukrainian political culture is born through a history of adjustments to foreign rule, rejection of foreign rule, or escaping foreign rule by adopting multiple loyalties and establishing alternative state-like formations. The latter is very important when trying to understand the features of contemporary "hybrid" democracy and statehood in Ukraine. One should pay specific attention in this regard to the revival of medieval Cossack tradition.

The first written records about Cossacks can be traced back to the years 1489 and 1492. In 1552-1556 the Zaporozhian Sich – the state-like fortress – was erected by Cossacks on one of the Dnipro islands. The Sich was ruled by democratically elected leaders (*Hetman* and *Starshyna*), it developed sophisticated governing structures, it introduced unique legislation, and it even conducted foreign policy (Sysyn 1991: 849; Melnichuk 2013: 2209; Levinson 2015: 261). In 1710 Hetman Pylyp Orlyk created *the Pacts and Constitutions of Rights and Freedoms of the Zaporizhian Host* which is considered by many as the first European Consitution with a democratic division of powers between Hetman and the elected Cossack Parliament (Pritsak 1998: 471). This constitution, though, never came into force.

Zaporozhian Cossacks were a grassroots movement of people who tried to escape the restricting realities of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and ensure security in the regions which were poorly protected by central authorities. Cossacks emerged due to the existence of free people in medieval Ukrainian society who moved to the underpopulated Black Sea steppes to avoid social and religious oppression, feudal obligations, and state taxation (Sysyn 1991: 849). Apart from that, Cossacks took on the burden of defending the southern flanks of the Polish-Lithuanian

Commonwealth – which was also their homeland – from the raids of the Crimean Khanate and the nomadic Tatar hordes. This was a movement of people who developed their loyalties, liberties, culture, and armed forces without the state's authorization (Melnichuk 2013: 2208); one may consider the Zaporozhian Sich as a state within a state.

The issue of developing multiple loyalties and alternative state-like structures was typical for the people living in the territory of modern-day Ukraine; at least, for those residing in the parts governed by Russia. The absence of a clear political and national identity allowed this to happen frequently in its history. For instance, in 1659 Hetman Ivan Vyhovskyi with the support of Crimean Tatars defeated the armies of the Tsardom of Russia under Konotop and, simultaneously, Ivan Sirko with a part of the Zaporozhian Cossacks launched an attack on Crimea, which broke the treaty between Vyhovskyi and the Tatars. In 1709 Hetman Ivan Mazepa, one of the closest advisors to Tsar Peter I joined the Swedish army of King Charles XII and attacked the Russian forces under Poltava, while a part of the Zaporozhian Cossacks were fighting on Russia's side. In 1917-1921, during the so-called War for Independence, the territories of modern day Ukraine became a battlefield between the Bolsheviks, the Volunteer Army, Symon Petliura's Ukrainian army, Machno's anarchist army, the Germans, and the Poles; each of the fighting sides had the support of the local population (Himka 2006: 488). It was only the Ukrainian forces in Galicia and Vohlynia with their unchallenged anti-Polish position that remained consistent and fought one enemy with all their available resources at the time.

Paradoxically, as John-Paul Himka states a breakthrough in Ukrainian identity-building came into being under communism (see also Sysyn 1991: 850). Vladimir Lenin allowed Ukrainian schools, newspapers, and cultural institutions to appear all over the Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic (UkSSR); the Ukrainian state as such emerged for the first time in history (Himka 2006: 490; von Hagen 1995: 663; Zhurzhenko 2002: 6). Igor Khrestin (2002: 11) writes that "In the period of 1923-1939, "forced Ukrainization" was instituted throughout the country. By 1939, 85% of

Ukraine's population was literate.” Regardless of its education being pro-Soviet and anti-nationalist, this still contributed to the self-identification of Ukrainians. Western Ukraine joined the UkSSR in the 1940s thus completing the unification of Ukrainian lands under one rule.

The environment deteriorated under Joseph Stalin. Sovietization was launched in the middle of 1930s as communists understood the threat of nurturing Ukrainian nationalism (Khrestin 2002: 12-13). The only Soviet identity – an evolved form of Russian identity – was forcefully installed (Kuzio 2011: 337; Levinson 2015: 262). Major public figures and intellectuals were either arrested or executed. The Holodomor famine – presumably artificial – raged on Ukrainian lands in 1931-1933. Then came World War II with its devastating human loss and the re-population of Ukrainian lands with people from various parts of the USSR.

Sovietization was a success. By the late 1980s, according to Frank Sysyn (1991: 852): “... more than 42 million people in the USSR called themselves Ukrainians, [but] they did not form a cohesive national community as Germans, Poles, or Hungarians did ... For much of the population in the southern and eastern Ukraine, "Ukrainian" merely connoted ancestral roots. Collective loyalties to a "Soviet people" and to an East Slavic family coexisted with a Ukrainian identity that was often devoid of linguistic, cultural, or historical content." Khrestin (2002: 12-13) adds to this point that only 43% of the UkSSR citizens in 1989 considered Ukrainian as their native language while over a third of ethnic Ukrainians preferred Russian in their daily communication. This said, regardless of Stalin's oppressions and losses in experienced World War II, the impetus acquired in 1917-1939 was sufficient for the proclaiming of independence in 1991 (Himka 2006: 490).

The collapse of the USSR and the revolutions of 1990, 2004, and 2014 – as well as other numerous protests – reintroduced the idea of multiple loyalties and Cossack traditions into Ukrainian political culture. It appeared that authoritative or charismatic leaders managed to rally around themselves a significant number of people. The two biggest revolutions, namely the Orange revolution of 2004 and the EuroMaidan of 2014, provide the best illustration for this. Both

revolutions began with numerous protests – though not state-wide – against electoral fraud and certain arbitrary decisions of authorities in Kyiv. Both revolutions were led by grassroots leaders – not always connected with conventional political circles – encompassing the sporadic mobilization of supporters and the building up fortified camps in the center of Kyiv. The latter is a reminder of the structure and traditions of Zaporozhian Sich; a state within the state. Aleksei Levinson (2015: 267-268) portrayed the camps on EuroMaidan in the following way:

Prototypes of the form of organization to be set up were to be found ... in the history of Ukraine – specifically, in the organization of the Cossack units in the Sech' [Sich] ... The participants were deployed in units of Cossack squadrons representing particular communities ... Gradually, the squadrons were assigned to specific places on Maidan Square and nearby; army-type tents were set up there, and bivouacs were organized, along with kitchens and other things ... Among those who came to stand watch was also a highly developed functional organization in action. Hundreds of people took on themselves the logistical functions of supplying the Maidan with essential provisions, equipment, and food ... Medical stations and "hospitals" of a sort were set up, where surgery was performed ... Volunteers who had medical training, as well as those who did not, organized an echelonized system of emergency medical assistance on the Maidan and in the rear of it.

When Crimea was annexed by Russia and armed conflict broke out in the Eastern parts, post-revolutionary Ukraine was too weak to respond timely and efficiently. The response, paradoxically, came from civil society; Ukrainians self-organized themselves with the powerful and sophisticated movement of volunteers, thus reflecting the Cossack military tradition. Some of them started to satisfy basic army needs (buying or fixing equipment, ensuring food supplies, repairing military hardware, running fundraising campaigns, and others) while some became soldiers. To the word, President Petro Poroshenko admitted that the fights in Donbass could be more burdensome and lingering without the instant help of volunteers (Censor.net 2015).

The proneness of Ukrainians for self-organization and building up of defenses while the

state was weak mentioned by Lypa (1997: 19) in 1938: "Ukrainian masses united across the single mass instinct often passed the exams of history without official leaders. This explicitly explains the fact of peasant chieftaincy (...) the possibility of prompt, unprepared mobilization of Ukrainians into one body in case of external aggression."

To draw an intermediate conclusion, Ukrainian people – at least their nationally conscious and socially active part – can construct alternative power structures which replace the state whenever the latter is weak, poorly-governed, or inefficient (Levinson 2015: 266-267). These structures with alternative loyalties may even become a threat to the state. For instance, the soldiers of voluntary battalions did not always execute orders issued by the Ukrainian General Staff but listened instead to their grassroots commanders. The same happened in history when, for instance, the Cossacks of Zaporozhian Sich refused to accept the laws of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Melnichuk 2013: 2208). In this regards, Lypa (1997: 147-148) raises the issue of the nature of leadership. Unlike Russians, who find it appropriate to obey the authoritarian *Vozhd*, Ukrainians feel much more comfortable with the authoritative *Father* in the community of *Brothers* and *Sisters*. The family-type social relations based on mutual respect, trust, and coherency may provide fertile soil for the further growth and democratization of the Ukrainian state.

The situation with religion and the freedom of faith in Ukraine also differs from Russia; it is much less monolith. According to Larysa Vladychenko (2016), 97% of religious organizations in Ukraine at the beginning of 2016 were Christian embracing three major branches of Orthodoxy (55,4% within the Christian group), two branches of Catholicism (14,7%), and various Protestant branches (29,9%). Ukraine's religious diversity became possible due to historical attempts by the clergy and nobility either to adjust to the unfavourable environment (i.e. gradual switch from Orthodoxy to Roman-Catholicism in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or gradual acceptance of the Nikon-reformed Orthodoxy in the Tsardom of Russia), or to resist it (i.e. signing the 1595-96 Union of Brest which established the Greek Catholic Church to prevent the expansion of Roman-

Catholicism).

The medieval tectonic religious processes provoked fundamental disputes between Catholic and Orthodox devotees in the 16-17 century. The best minds of that time broke their spears discussing the ideas of separation of state and religious powers, the freedom of faith, limitation of rights of the nobility and the clergy, as well as the right of citizens to resist abuses of powerholders (see 1597-98 ΑΠΟΚΡΙΣΙΣ by Christophor Philaleth; pamphlets by Ivan Vyshenskyi; 1631 Triodion by Petro Mohyla, and other sources). Religious disputes are not uncommon even today. With Ukraine's gaining of independence in 1991, Christianity became even more diverse. The schismatic Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Kyiv Patriarchate) came into being, the Ukrainian Autocephalous Orthodox Church was re-established, and the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church re-emerged from underground. The legitimacy of each is sometimes questioned by the other, especially by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate).

As one may deduce, the monolith Orthodox Christian tradition does not construct a national identity pillar in Ukraine, as it does in Russia. Instead, the Ukrainian tradition questions the doctrine of one true creed, as well as allows the existence of a multi-religious environment. The drastic recent growth of Protestantism, which is historically atypical for the Eastern European region, provides another proof for this.

Coming back to the statement by Kuchma, Ukraine may seem alike, but it is not Russia. Albeit Ukraine was significantly influenced by Russian culture and both states were interdependent throughout history, the differences between them remain essential. Moreover, with every year of Ukrainian independence and identity-building, these differences become even more distinct. Thus, it is not entirely appropriate to perceive Ukraine as the state grounded on three "Byzantium pillars": Orthodoxy as the true faith, autocracy as the best system of governance, and Russian identity as the exclusive identity. Ukraine is more about a multi-religious environment allowing various interpretations of Orthodoxy (which remains dominant); about sporadic grassroots democracy

allowing multiple loyalties (some of which may be authoritarian, for instance, the support of oligarchs); and about non-conflicting multi-national relations based on trust and coherency, what evolves – in some cases – into family-type social relations. This does not discourage, though, Putin from claiming that Russians and Ukrainians are the same nation and are doomed to the same fate (Putin 2014; Euromaidan Press 2015).

The history of Ukrainian statehood – much shorter and more ambiguous than Russian – does not contain elements of imperial expansion. On the other hand, it may be treated similarly to the history of a semi-sovereign entity – or entities – defending against eastern and western powers. Through recognizing Ukrainian claims for secure statehood, understanding Ukrainian post-colonial complexes, and fostering Ukrainian democratic aspirations, the contemporary West may find a reliable partner in dealing with the recently re-emerged "Russian fundamental challenge" (NATO-Warsaw Summit Communiqué 2016).

5. Ukraine as an anchor for Russian expansion

Contemporary Ukrainian political culture – though having its unique national flavor – remains typically post-communist. The majority of citizens are politically apathetic and lack legal education; they are thinking within ideological frames, favoring selected national myths, and prefer simple explanations to complex issues. This makes them amenable to occasional manipulations and, in some cases, to sporadic emotional behavior. Moreover, the majority of citizens have no proper understanding that reforms initiated from "below" may improve the well-being of their state and, consequently, their well-being in the long run; in particular, this applies to the citizens of Eastern and Southern Ukraine.

The conscious minority – representatives of the civil society and the middle class – cannot be defined as a sufficient force of change and control (though, the EuroMaidan experience

reinforced the self-esteem of many). Active citizens are comparatively few in numbers and reside predominantly in Central and Western Ukrainian cities. Moreover, not all of them are ready to dedicate significant amounts of time to addressing social issues.

Ambitious grassroots leaders, who can rally people around them on the streets, have a comparatively weak idea of how the state functions and how it should be governed. So even if they are appointed or elected to official posts, they cannot become efficient political decision-makers instantly. What is worse, they are constantly challenged by the oligarchs, opponents from the middle class, and former state functionaries, who managed to preserve significant power and tend to sabotage reforms on various levels.

In a word, contemporary Ukrainian political culture is immature and characterized with disorganization, inappropriate governance, corruption, and sabotage. This said the revolutionary experience did not disappear without a trace; it led to the emergence of a particular mythology and an enriched Ukrainian identity. The revolution demonstrated that the Western-originated values are not foreign for Ukrainians; during the Euromaidan, Ukrainians were raising flags of the EU, which symbolized democracy and freedom for many of them.

Many more citizens, as if to compare with pre-revolutionary times, became ready to initiate, demand, and introduce reforms. With the annexation of Crimea and the eruption of insurgency in Eastern Ukraine, the number of these citizens even increased. The focus on developing a sovereign nation-state, strengthening ties with the West, and diminishing Russia's presence in domestic politics became a factor in the unification of Ukrainian society. The problem, though, remains that a majority of Ukrainians neither fully understand the real value – and necessity – of reforms, nor knows how to make them work. There also exists a vast number of citizens who draw a distinct line between "myself" and "the state" with the latter sporadically perceived as the adversary of "myself."

To accelerate the post-communist transition of Ukraine and contribute to the maturation of a national political culture, Western States should support Ukraine in areas which are problematic for

every young democracy. In particular, one should stress here the sharing of knowledge about proper statecraft and governance, educating citizens about the nature of democracy through demonstrating its best achievements (which also includes visa liberalization with the EU), as well as coordinating Ukraine's efforts in economic transformation. The multifarious financial aid to secure the smooth transition is also decisively important.

One of the major challenges standing in the way of Ukraine's democratization is the existence of a tradition of multiple loyalties'. Western support may be misinterpreted by grassroots leaders and politicians, which will lead to the questioning of its efficiency and nature by many citizens. In a word, albeit the multiple loyalties' and traditions, ensured the preservation of Ukraine's identity throughout its history, its influence on the contemporary political culture may become destructive.

Apparently, Western states may adopt a neutral stance. This reinforces Russia's assertive *modus operandi*, solidify Putin's power on the domestic level, and encourage further breaches of Ukraine's sovereignty. Ukraine with its contemporary weaknesses will likely fall again into Russia's geopolitical orbit, as it has numerous times in its history. Such a turn will arguably bring more stability to the region. On the one hand, it will provide new opportunities and motivations for Russian expansionism, predominantly in former Soviet satellite states. On the contrary, it may undermine the "value" of Western values, one of which resides in the right of nations to self-identify. Not to mention that the Western alienation from the Ukrainian crisis will deteriorate its image in the eyes of other young democracies, as well as question its overall efficiency on the global level.

As the resolution of the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine is concerned, one should bare in mind the deduction by Kennan (1998, 62) that Russia "is highly sensitive to the logic of force." Therefore, the Ukrainian military should *a priori* be strong and capable enough to defend their land. Apart from this, the continuous and consistent defensive cooperation between Ukraine and its

Western allies should be ensured. This will allow the invention and implementation of a multi-component “smart” strategy against Russian “hybrid” expansionism.

The aim of Ukraine is not to defeat Russia and Russian proxies on a battlefield, but to exhaust Russia and make its engagement into Ukrainian affairs unprofitable and very unattractive. This is what Andrew Mack (1975: 177) advocated forty years ago as the only way for the small post-colonial states to gain victories – mainly in asymmetric conflicts – over much stronger aggressors: “... success for the insurgents arose not from military victory on the ground – though military successes may have been a contributory cause – but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' *political* capability to wage war. In such asymmetric conflicts, insurgents may gain a political victory from a situation of military stalemate or *even defeat*.” The financial pressure on Russia along with its discretization – and stressing the cost – of its expansionist policies seems to provide a suitable ground for building up a “smart” strategy. At least, a similar combination of factors worked out in the late 1980s forcing Soviet forces to withdraw from Afghanistan. The successful application of this strategy, though, requires the tight cooperation of Ukraine with its Western allies.

In a word, Western guidance in the democratization of Ukraine – which demonstrates the proneness to democratize – may become a serious hit to Russian Byzantium-type expansionist ambitions. Primarily, it may question the value of historical and cultural heritage connecting both nations, thus undermining the whole concept of the Russian “civilizational space.” Secondly, it may provide proof for other post-Soviet republics that the Russian factor should not be overestimated in setting the state's objectives, as well as that Russian aggression may be contained. Finally, it may also allow Ukraine to grow into one of Eastern Europe’s powerhouses and security guarantors aligned with the West.

Conclusions

According to Horbulin and Litvinenko (2009), after the collapse of the USSR, Russia attempted to implement democratic values, transparent governance, and the free market. However, these attempts were devastating and nearly caused the partition of the state. It is no surprise, though, that the late 1990's political and economic crisis evoked the restoration of the Byzantium-type authoritarian rule which overlapped in time with Putin's coming to power. This restoration embraced the adoption of a refreshed Soviet national anthem, the proclamation of a neo-imperial course solidified by energy exports, quazi isolationism and spy hysteria of 2005-2007, occasional confrontation with the United States, the proclamation of the post-Soviet region as a zone of Russian privileged interests, rehabilitation of Stalinist policies, and other issues.

To the word, it was in the 1940s that Lypa defined the Russian system of governance as invariably nurtured by absolute autocracy and imperial thinking. Such a kind of ruling was typical for Russians regardless of historical epochs and political regimes, creating a distinguishing feature of their policy, since the times of Ivan the Terrible. Having adopted this perspective, Lypa never drew a line between what was Russia, the Russian Tsardom, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union (Kushnir 2013: 128). In 1948 Toynbee adopted a similar perspective.

Contemporary Russia behaves as a neo-imperial expansionist power due to a mixture of reasons. Primarily, it is “feeling uncomfortable” with a growing Western presence in what is considered to be the Russian zone of privileged interests or, according to Narochnitskaia (2003: 128), the Russian fiefdom. Secondly, it is “feeling threatened” due to the lack of efficiency of its Byzantium type political tradition and the successful democratic transitions of post-communist states. Thirdly, it is “feeling offended” in the same way as it felt after the collapse of the USSR when the West launched active cooperation with post-communist states; some of these states joined the EU. Which is later on considered by the Kremlin as a geopolitical defeat; the Cold War “balance

of powers” was undermined. Fourthly, current Russian leaders have accumulated enough resources to “feel” themselves “confident” in pursuing expansionist policies regardless of Western condemnation. They are also securing their domestic political gravity through achieving successes on the international arena. To summarize, contemporary Russian expansionism is fueled by attempts to restore historical, cultural, and geopolitical justice as Russia perceives it (Kushnir 2016a).

This said, no neighboring state is safe in the Russian game of thrones. Dugin points out a range of battlefields where the Third Rome (Russia) will fight the global Carthage (the Western World and – in particular – the U.S.). These battlefields are Belarus, Eastern Ukraine, Moldova, Mongolia, parts of China (Siankiang, Tibet, and Manchuria), large areas of Central Asia, the Caucasus, Finland, and some northern parts of Norway and Sweden (Østbø 2011: 134).

Russian aggression towards Ukraine is not solely triggered by the democratic aspirations of Kyiv, but by Russian strategic objectives and interests. Regardless of Ukraine’s political preferences, Russia will aim to establish efficient supervision over its neighbor, either through conquest or negotiating unions (as it happened with Belarus). Edvard Lucas (2015) states that Russia is building a "soft empire" on the post-communist space solidified by secret services, corruption, financial inflows, economic ties, and propaganda. This empire should be more robust and more dangerous than the USSR; this realm may include more states than the USSR did.

As Ukraine is concerned, it has always been more democratic and less Byzantine than Russia. Ukraine’s national idea did not demand exclusiveness and unification around a specific title ethnicity. Van Hagen (1995: 667) states that on the territory of Ukraine always lived significant Russian, Jewish, Polish, and German populations making it comparatively multicultural. Apart from this, historical Ukrainian states and semi-states, unlike Russia and the USSR, did not tend to prohibit other religions. Indeed, Orthodoxy was always dominant there and interfaith frictions regularly emerged, however, no dwellers were forced to abandon their faith; as there were no brutal religious reforms. Finally, an authoritarian tradition is not common for Ukraine. Instead, the

democratic legacy of Kyivan Rus and the Cossack Hetmanate supported the environment of multiple loyalties where numerous sources of power existed and competed with one another.

Speaking of contemporary Ukraine, the historical democratic experience is not enough for the state to prosper and feel itself secure. The post-communist post-colonial Ukraine should develop and implement reforms which it has missed throughout the centuries. This – above all – includes strengthening democratic institutions to ensure the constitutional rights of every citizen; updating and amending legislation to meet the highest world standards; optimizing state governance through appointing competent people to decision-making positions; fighting corruption in the state apparatus and business environment; improving the business environment through diminishing the influence of oligarchs; completing the reformation of the armed forces, domestic security services, intelligence, and counter-intelligence; ensuring the independence of the judicial branch of power; ensuring the freedom of speech; explaining the national interests of Ukraine to its citizens and foreigners better, and other steps.

Western guidance in the democratization of Ukraine – which demonstrates the proneness to democratize – may become a noticeable strike in Russia's neo-imperial expansionist ambitions (Kushnir 2016b). Primarily, it may question the value of historical and cultural heritage connecting both nations, thus undermining the entire concept of the Russian "civilizational space." Secondly, it may provide the proof for other post-Soviet republics that the Russian factor should not be overestimated in setting the state's objectives, as well as that Russian aggression may be contained. Finally, it may also allow Ukraine to grow into a regional powerhouse and security guarantor aligned with the West.

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