

## **Ukraine: Nation-Building Revisited**

### **The Ukrainian Presidents and their Understanding of Identity Politics**

„(...) the majority of those at the top did not know how to run Ukraine“ *Leonid Kuchma*<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Does the new president of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich know how to run the country? Measures so far have concentrated on retro politics: re-establishing the Constitution of 1996, Sovietizing Ukrainian historiography, and sticking to neo-Soviet policies in general. Will this bring the desired development of state and nation? What is the desired development?

In the course of the Soviet Union disintegration, the development of Ukrainian *nezaležnist* stood in the foreground of central politics. The building of national and cultural identities (=nation-building) were considered a priority.<sup>2</sup> However, this focus neglected state-building measures, i.e. the consolidation of state (as well as social and economic) structures and the establishment of a stable democracy. State and nation-building could not be managed at the same time – therefore, a focus was first on nation-building. With this strategy, Ukraine managed to achieve a minimum of internal and external stability, but didn't become a capable, efficient state.

Ukraine is a state that struggles for the institutionalization of state structures and for democracy. Since the independence of the state, efforts of state-building have been more or less pronounced, and the results have not been convincing. The constitution remains contested; recently a retro-step has been made in re-installing the constitution of 1996 which lays much force on the power of the president.<sup>3</sup> Independent and control institutions, such as the parliament, the judiciary or the media, have neither reached a democratic nor a consolidated status. Even if identity-issues have been ranked high in Ukraine, state-building has been a constant topic.

Until today, there hasn't been reached a consensus among political elites on the constitutional fundamentals of the state. The debates and drafts on the Ukrainian constitution serve as a model example for political elite and power relations in the country. Bargaining on constitutional powers has been of high importance, more important than reaching a consensus on the very pillars of the state. This process has been characterized by highly conflictive relations between the most powerful persons in the state. Power aspects that have considered the president, the prime minister and the (speaker of the) parliament have been in the foreground. Moreover, identity-related questions have been always involved. Nation-building issues, such as historiography and language, have been used in times of real uncertainty: in particular in the early 1990s and around the Orange Revolution 2004. Ukrainian language policies for example were intended to be supportive, i.e. to unite the country against internal and external forces. However, the new president Viktor Yanukovich (and also the late Kuchma) have underlined that identity-issues can be used to hinder nation-building.

In 1991, enthusiasm was great, and the majority of the population opted for independence. The population started into independence with the expectation to become an unified nation with a strong national identity. The problem was that each side of the power elite had his/her own expectations. Concerning state-building, the overall expectation should

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<sup>1</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Ukraine Celebrates its Last Independence Day under Kuchma," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 10, 2005, accessed August 29, 2004, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=26775&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=175&no\\_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=26775&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=175&no_cache=1).

<sup>2</sup> Sharon L. Wolczik and Volodymyr Zvighyanich (eds.), *Ukraine: The Search for a National Identity* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> Kataryna Wolczuk, *The Moulding of Ukraine: The Constitutional Process of State Formation* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001).

have been to create a state with efficient institutions. This so far is not the case. Nation-building as such requires a common identity. But the nation-building topic has proved a highly sensitive issue connected to emotions and socialization. National elites don't consent on important pillars such as language, citizenship and historiography; or also religion which shall be not in the foreground here. The party leaders of the most important national parties have had divergent views on those topics and didn't hesitate to instrumentalize the differences. This fact is very evident when comparing the views of Viktor Yanukovich, the leader of the "Party of the Regions", and Yulia Tymoshenko, the leader of the BYuT-Bloc, and Viktor Yushchenko, the leader of the (now marginalized) "Our Ukraine" party.

This paper argues that state- and nation-building in Ukraine are far from completion twenty years after independence. It paper combines the analysis of state-building issues with nation-building efforts on the national level. On the one hand, political struggles around the power of the highest political representatives have dominated political (non-)decision-making, and state-building hasn't been completed until today. On the other hand, identity issues have been of constant importance, and added even more emotions to political struggles. Maybe failed institutionalization of state structures is the reason why the nation-building issue is up on the agenda again in 2010. The paper asks what the four Ukrainian presidents have done to institutionalize the Ukrainian state and nation. First, it concentrates on the notion Ukrainian state. Then, it shows the challenges of state-building, and focuses on the never-ending process of institutionalizing a constitution. The paper further outlines the different periods of nation-building strongly influenced by the ruling presidents; in particular by Leonid Kuchma, Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich. It focuses on three aspects of identity politics crucial for nation-building: language, citizenship and historiography. The latter aspect is emphasized as it has a crucial role for identity- and nation-building. The paper shows that policies haven't been designed to achieve, but mostly to prevent other political actors from capturing institutions and emotions.

### **The Ukrainian Nation**

The issue of nation-building has been relevant in foreign and domestic research in the first decade after independence, predominantly. Taras Kuzio, the main English-speaking author on the issue, had an optimistic view and observed an emerging elite consensus in Ukraine concerning state-building and territorial integrity.<sup>4</sup> State-building concerns the legitimacy and consolidation of political power toward the "other", i.e. international and national actors (both party political and ethnic actors).<sup>5</sup> The process of nation-building has been tied closely to this understanding of state-building. Therefore, nation-building consisted largely of identity policy with an emphasis on language or historiography and the promotion thereof. The legitimacy came from the respective presidents of Ukraine.

Overall theoretical accounts on nation-building remain rather general and focus on formal state characteristics.<sup>6</sup> A strong pillar is a common national identity: Following Anthony D. Smith, national identity means agreement on the main pillars of the national political community, which includes informal and formal institutions.<sup>7</sup> Such understandings underline the importance of informal consensus on certain cultural codes, on the use of language, inclusion of ethnic groups, the meaning of nationalism, and historiography.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Taras Kuzio, *Ukraine: State and Nation-building* (London: Routledge, 1998). He additionally pointed to the fact that the ethnic Russians in Ukraine have a territorial rather than ethnic identity.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Tilly, "Western-State Making and Theories of Political Transformation," in: *The Formation of National States in Western Europe*, ed. Charles Tilly (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Taras Kuzio, "Nation-Building in Ukraine: A Growing Elite Consensus," *Wodrow Wilson Center Events*, November 9, 1999, accessed 30 October 2010, [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?event\\_id=3835&fuseaction=events.event\\_summary](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?event_id=3835&fuseaction=events.event_summary).

<sup>7</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> George Schöpflin, *Nations, Identity, Power. The New Politics of Europe* (London: Hurst&Company, 2000).

Historiography is a crucial issue. In Ukraine, there is no lack of important historical events, mythical (state) constructs and national heroes and their politicization.<sup>9</sup> Of very importance are events and traditions that have the power to unite different ethnic and language groups of one territory; for Ukraine the Holodomor has been an example. Additionally, nation-building in Ukraine has been mostly an issue of the Russian- and Ukrainian speaking ethnic and language groups which have different understandings of history and the nation's culture. In this setting, it has been a challenge to identify commons and to ignore differences to build up a national identity. Critics of nation-building point out, that "the other" cannot participate in such a project, because there is a need to accept the cultural, social and historical ties that bind the majority together. For Ukraine, "the other" have been the "Russian"-parts of the country (which haven't presented a clear vision for the future of the country). After independence, the "Ukrainization" school predominated and left out Soviet or Russian-based narratives. Nation-building was parting from a Ukrainian citizen with Ukrainian as state language, "Western" state traditions and Ukrainian historical myths.

There is evidence that abstracts concepts of nation and history are not very relevant for most of the Ukrainian inhabitants (even less for the Russians).<sup>10</sup> Political participation hasn't been ranked high for this group, with the "Russian" group displaying more apathy. Wanner even saw the members of the Russian minority as a major obstacle to nationalizing efforts in Ukraine.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, the russified Ukrainians, which are around one-third of ethnic Ukrainians, have little ambitions to be re-nationalized. This might stand in contrast to a large group of convinced Ukrainians who are situated in the Western part of the country, overwhelmingly, but also in the central parts of Ukraine. Their ethnic identity coincides with their linguistic and cultural identity. This stands in contrast to russified Ukrainians who are largely passive on national and identity issues – but politically they are Ukrainian citizens. Many of them, including political elites, have not supported the cultural changes that have followed the formation of the Ukrainian state.

In the context of the "Ukrainianness" of the nation, thoughts based on the concept of *two Ukraines* caused much debate. This (and similar) concepts claim that the country is split into a Western Ukrainian and an Eastern Russian part. The whole debate won't be repeated here; the fact shall stand in the foreground that a majority of the country's inhabitants don't have a clear identity tied to "Ukrainian" or "Russian", as many speak both languages and come from mixed families. For example, the number of persons who consider themselves ethnic Ukrainians exceeds the number of those who have Ukrainian as their mother tongue significantly; and many of those use Ukrainian only with their family.<sup>12</sup> Inconsistent policies at the highest political level – according to the socialization of the respective president – have underlined the sensitivity of the subject.

On the political scene, the policy of nation-building was largely left to the national democrats after (and before) independence. They emphasized the "Ukrainian" character of the new state. The Ukrainian ruling elite, namely the centrist presidents Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, took over this policy. The first presidents tried to maintain the façade of an existing consensus on the "emotional" pillars of the Ukrainian nation. But this agreement between the national-democratic and the centrist political elites wasn't sustainable. Leonid Kuchma tried to balance national and identity issues between the "russified" and the

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Wilson "Myths of National History in Belarus and Ukraine. In Geoffrey Hosking and George Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood* (London: Routledge, 1997), 182–197.

<sup>10</sup> M. N. Guboglo, "The Disintegration and Synthesis of Identity in Post-Soviet Space and Time (The Case of Ukraine)," *Harriman Review* 9 (1996): 98.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Wanner, *Burden of Dreams. History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (University Park, Penns.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998). The last Ukrainian census (2001) identified over 8 Mio. Russians (out of more than 48 Mio.).

<sup>12</sup> For data see footnote 26 or directly the *2001 Ukrainian Census*, [http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/nationality\\_population/graphic#m4](http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results/nationality_population/graphic#m4).

“Ukrainian” citizens. He was largely successful in holding the country together and in providing identity for Ukrainian-oriented citizens. On the political level, he mostly supported elite groups that had little to do with those issues, in particular the Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk elite groups. Elite consensus on topics connected to the “nation” has been contested on the highest political level since the late Kuchma-presidency. One reason was his rejection to support the economically backward Western provinces in the late 1990s. Another reason was the decreasing political representation of “Ukrainian” interests that culminated in the ousting of (the successful) Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko. Ten years after independence, the page began to turn, and state presidents have been no longer standing for elite consensus on the issue.

This became first visible before and during the Orange Revolution, in which only half of the population took part.<sup>13</sup> After the Orange Revolution of 2004, the presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich provoked elite dissensus on identity policy. The current question is if the national identity policy (language, education, and historiography) favored by Viktor Yanukovich is due to the short-mindedness of a small elite (or himself) or if it is an outcome of the dissatisfaction of broader social groups with the Ukrainian nation-building. One point is clear at this stage: Twenty years after the independence of the country, there is no consensus on the main pillars of nation-building and identity policy: citizenship, language and historiography.

Of course, there also remains the aspect of nationalism in nationalising states. For Ukraine, it could be stated, that some cities and regions in the West try to be more Ukrainian, and some cities and regions in the East more Russian. What remains a specialty of Ukraine is that the titular nation of the Ukrainians hasn’t succeeded to institutionalize a nation-wide Ukrainian nationalism.<sup>14</sup> The issue of nationalism probably will gain momentum in the future. But it won’t be in the foreground here. This analysis concentrates on the link between presidential power and identity policy. It puts weight on the struggles around the national constitution that have prevented the institutionalization of overall state power and the acceptance of a democratic political system. The insights are then connected with language policy, citizenship and historiography.

### **The Institutionalization of the Ukrainian Presidency after 1991**

Ukraine has established a political system that gives the country’s president substantial power in the most important political areas. This system has been termed semi-presidential, as the president has not the immediate power to dissolve parliament. But, the president has the right to name the “power ministers”, to issue decrees and to make strategic decisions. In the short period between the Orange Revolution and the election of Viktor Yanukovich as president in 2010, a parliamentary-presidential system has been “tested”. But the institutionalization failed largely due to power struggles between the president, the prime minister and the parliament. In 2010, the “old” semi-presidential system based on the 1996 Constitution was re-installed. This process can be considered a model example to illustrate the challenge of a post-Soviet state: to build up new state structures to which all important political actors consent. Until today, this was apparently only the case in 1996 – and then just in one crucial voting, where, miraculously, a majority voted for the respective draft.<sup>15</sup> Year-

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<sup>13</sup> Taras Kuzio, “New Data Crates Demographic Profile of Ukrainian Revolutionaries, Voters,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, August 10, 2005, accessed November 4, 2010 [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_tnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=30768](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_tnews%5Btt_news%5D=30768).

<sup>14</sup> For nationalism in Ukraine see (again) Taras Kuzio, “Nationalism in Ukraine: Towards a New Theoretical and Comparative Framework,” *Journal of Political Ideologies* 7(2): 133–161, 2002. And a “real-life” polemic of Viktor Yanukovich’s education minister: Dmytro Tabachnyk, “The Spiritual Capitulation of Nationalists,” *2000 Weekly*, September 17–23, 2010 (cited in UKL 451, University of Toronto, Kateryna Shynkaruk trans.).

<sup>15</sup> Wolczuk, *Ukraine*, 120f.

long, exhausting struggles between different political groups, the parliament and the president stood before this decision – and only some months later the president started to contest the system as he was not satisfied with the scope of power granted to him. After the official introduction of the 1996 Constitution of Ukraine, the topic couldn't be closed and the document wasn't accepted as the crucial pillar for the Ukrainian state. The document has been contested, interpreted according to the respective elite needs and re-drafted. The constitution-struggles monitored that questions of state-building in Ukraine have largely concentrated on the distribution and interpretation of powers. The insufficient institutionalization of the constitution has affected all other important state realms, such as financial, economic or decentralization measures. In this sense, state-building measures (or rather the discussion of constitutional drafts and amendments) have absorbed much political power.

How were the respective presidents involved? Amendments to the old 1978 Soviet Constitution had been a continuous topic during the first presidency of Leonid Kravchuk. Parallel to that a discussion started on drafting a “modern” constitution. However, this process would become a deterrent to all political observers. The lengthy drafting and re-drafting resulted in the 1996 Constitution.<sup>16</sup> Afterwards, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma claimed that state-building had been completed, and tried to turn the focus on national issues.<sup>17</sup> But he wasn't satisfied with the outcome. By turning to national issues, he “pacified” the national democratic opposition, and took the chance to gradually expand his power by informal and formal means (e.g. extensively using his power to issue decrees). This means that soon after the “institutionalization” of the 1996 Constitution, a re-discussion and (worse) an informal interpretation of constitutional “blanks” started. In the course of this process, President Leonid Kuchma evolved to a quasi-authoritarian leader claiming omnipotence on political decisions.<sup>18</sup> The authoritarian Kuchma-system was successfully contested in the 2004/2005 protests and re-elections. The re-democratization of the country was on the agenda of the “Orange” leaders, incarnated by the new Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko.<sup>19</sup> State-building continued under the prerequisite of democracy, but wasn't much more successful.

Worse, under the newly established parliamentary-presidential political framework and the democratic umbrella, the impression of institutional chaos and inefficiency was much more pronounced than before. Both the president and the prime minister jealously tried to maximally use their power possibilities. Neither the president nor the prime minister would accept restrictions of his/her powers.<sup>20</sup> As a result of constitutional insecurities, pronounced power elite struggles, namely between the president and his prime minister, political incoherence and a policy of non-decision, the “old” candidate of 2004, Viktor Yanukovich, won the presidential elections in early 2010. He wasn't ready to preside under a poorly institutionalized parliamentary-presidential system, and achieved the re-establishment of the 1996 Constitution.

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<sup>16</sup> See the text of the 1996 Constitution under <http://www.rada.gov.ua/const/conengl.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> This was justified by autonomy-politics on the Crimea, but also affected by a certain euphoria after the ratification of the 1996 Constitution. Crimea threatened to split of Ukraine in the early 1990s. An important issue was language. If Ukrainian would be the only state language this fact justified major conflict with the central state (80% Russian-speaking and Russians on the peninsula). The issue was solved by compromise: Crimea was granted autonomy status, but certain measures of nation-building had to be accepted, such as the regular chanting of the national anthem in schools and to fly the Ukrainian flag.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Levitsky and Lucan A. Way, “The Rise of Competitive Authoritarianism,” *Journal of Democracy* 13(2): 51–65, 2002.

<sup>19</sup> Incarnated is not a lapse here, as his face and body was deformed by a poison-attack, presumably orchestrated by Leonid Kuchma and his entourage.

<sup>20</sup> Nicole Gallina, “The Impact of Political Elite Conduct on State Reform: The Case of Ukraine,” *CEU Political Science Journal*, 3(2): 183f., 2009.

The above thoughts only shortly summarize the efforts to institutionalize central power structures and the large failure to do so.<sup>21</sup> The almost twenty years long struggles of the most important political representatives (not only, but pronouncedly, on the constitution) had consequences. Abstract state structures couldn't be institutionalized. Instead, the power elites managed to accumulate power and wealth. Analyzing the strategies and tactics of the four presidents, it becomes clear that power extension and preservation stood always in the foreground – at the detriment of clarifying the future institutional pillars of the state and establishing stable state structures.<sup>22</sup>

Without the consent of the most important men in power, a consolidation of the political situation turned impossible. Those have been the party leaders of the important parties (in former, the Communist Party, then the United Social-Democrats, Our Ukraine, and the Party of the Regions), presidents, speakers of the parliament, and the prime ministers and selected ministers (e.g. the current education minister Dmytro Tabachnyk). The power elite emphasized the accumulation of personal power, and this meant the strengthening of informal power groups which guaranteed at least minimal enforcement of institutional needs and political decisions. “Normal”, i.e. formal, policy-making was rarely possible due to the lack of sufficient formalization. For policy-areas in which money or power had to be distributed this has meant: placing or capturing according allies in influential positions, and a concentration on informal instruments. The result has been not elite unity, but elite disruption and a constant climate of conflict and non-cooperation. But what does this constellation so negative for state-building mean for the other important issue of nation-building and identity policy?

Authors on the national question such as Taras Kuzio considered nation-building to be completed. But constant elite disruptions remained a threat, especially after 2004, when the struggling elites were tied to certain ethnic and linguistic criteria. The difference between Viktor Yushchenko – “Western”, Ukrainophile; despite of being from the Eastern part of the country – and Viktor Yanukovych – “Eastern”, Russophile – has been most pronounced. The purpose of being attached to certain “national” criteria has been important twofold: as a signal toward Russia and Europe (either enforcing the “Ukrainianness” or “Russianness” of the country), and an internal signal; mostly to underline the singularity and unity of the Ukrainian nation.

Most importantly, elite conflict on national issues hasn't been relevant on the highest political levels in the period of the first two presidencies (Kravchuk and Kuchma). Even if both come from a “Russian” context, they have supported measures of “Ukrainization”, for example in historiography, citizenship and language politics. Notably Leonid Kuchma became an expert in balancing the various interests. He succeeded in creating an umbrella for divergent groups. One can speak of an elite unity on the highest political level to form and stabilize the nation. Even if Leonid Kuchma made concessions towards Russia and Europe in form of two-vector policies (which besides hadn't much stabilizing effects on long-term relations with both partners). After 2004, the interesting question has been if this elite unity in the “emotional” realm of identity policies – such as language or historiography – could be maintained by the Orange leaders.

An interesting feature is the analysis of Ukrainian president speeches on Independence Day which have concentrated on identity topics. Taras Kuzio has listened to every single speech and noticed that speeches given by the presidents Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko didn't radically differ, because they focused on the importance of being independent. They assessed independence as a culmination of the 1000-year tradition of

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<sup>21</sup> For a general assessment of the situation in Ukraine see the *Nations in Transit* website on <http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=17>.

<sup>22</sup> Kostjantyn Bondarenko, *Леонід Кучма: портрет на фоні епохи* (Kharkiv: Folio, 2007) and the articles of M. Karmazina in *Political System for Ukraine: Historical Practices and Current Challenges*, edited by V. Lytvyn (Kyiv: Nika-Tsentr, 2008), 769f.

Ukrainian statehood. Kuchma delivered such speeches because of political reasons. Yushchenko was convinced of the necessity to do so. With the fourth president, Viktor Yanukovich, this “tradition” changed. He is neither convinced of the necessity to do so nor has political reasons for similar speeches: On the anniversary of the 16 July Declaration of Sovereignty in 1990 he didn’t mention Kyiv Rus, the Cossack era, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) or Ukrainian dissidents in the Soviet period. Instead, the new president saw the Soviet Ukrainian republic as the pre-cursor of Ukrainian statehood what has been considered a turn away from emphasizing Ukrainianness and ancient Ukrainian state traditions.<sup>23</sup>

### **Identity Policies in Ukraine: Historiography, Citizenship and Language**

The above independence speeches are a small hint to the respective (political) understandings of Ukrainian identity. Hasn’t the very identity of the ruling presidents been decisive for shaping national identity policies? In this line, more evidence has to be collected to strengthen the impression of different approaches to identity on the highest political level, and the respective approaches to state-building and policy-making.

The national democrats (of Rukh for example) didn’t manage to take over power in the new state. But they nevertheless contributed to the new state. Those persons were in general “convinced” Ukrainians and had the necessary symbols, traditions and narratives ready to support the building of the new Ukrainian state. The old communist elite that came into power positions in the 1990s mostly accepted this set as necessary tools to build up the new nation and state – in particular the two first state presidents. Ukraine’s ruling elites stuck to the Ukrainophile approach which established a dominant position. Kuzio sees this as part of an elite consensus on the need for history writing that fosters nation-building.<sup>24</sup> There was a need for Ukrainophile commemorations, symbols and national heroes. But the ruling elites who largely came from the old nomenklatura never fully identified with this Ukrainian identity policy, especially the laws on language and citizenship. Ukraine adopted its first citizenship law on 8 October 1991 in which citizenship was defined territorially, and dual (or multiple) citizenship wasn’t recognized. Major changes were made in 1997 and enabled FDPs (Formerly Deported People) to become Ukrainian citizens; in 1998 Soviet passports became illegal. The elite accepted the view that dual citizenship could bring problems with Russia and for the territorial integrity of Ukraine.<sup>25</sup> The issue of Russians (and other minorities) in Ukraine remained relevant and has been manipulated before national elections as electoral strategy. Politicians counting on Russian-speakers (East and South) frequently have made promises to introduce dual citizenship: For example former president Leonid Kuchma in 1994, and Viktor Yanukovich in meetings with Russian media or during election time.<sup>26</sup>

The ruling elites have considered the Ukrainian language a cornerstone of nation-building and seek to broaden its use. Since 1991, Ukrainian has been the official state language in Ukraine. In the East, especially in Donetsk, the language preferred remained Russian, in contrary to the fact that Russian is neither state nor official language.<sup>27</sup> However,

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<sup>23</sup> Kuzio goes even further: “(...) = a similar model of national identity is being introduced as in Belarus where President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, like Yanukovich, sees the Soviet era as the most important era of his country’s nation-building. It is not surprising therefore that Donetsk was often seen as ‘Ukraine’s Belarus’,” Taras Kuzio, “The President’s Independence Day Speech Reveals what Ukraine is Being Built,” *KyivPost*, September 6, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> Taras Kuzio, “National Identity and History Writing in Ukraine,” *Nationalities Papers* 34(3): 408, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> <http://eudo-citizenship.eu/country-profiles>. And: Shevel, Oxana, “The Policy of Citizenship Policy in New States,” *Comparative Politics* 41(3): 273–291, 2009.

<sup>26</sup> Just an example is Halia Pavliva „Ukrainian Supreme Court Agrees to Probe Vote Agrees,” *Bloomberg*, November 25, 2004, accessed October 30, 2010. <http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news? pid= news archive&sid=amDoEiWf.hhg&refer=europe> .

<sup>27</sup> Ukrainian Census 2001. <http://ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language/>. According to this census (the next one is scheduled for 2012), 67.5% of the population of Ukraine consider Ukrainian their native language and 29.6% name Russian as their native language. According to social monitoring studies undertaken by the

the Ukrainian language was promoted. This essentially signifies that the Russian language problem was ignored for years. Russian language has not been emphasized, although Leonid Kuchma himself was born in a Russian speaking region. The ratification of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* in May 2003 revived the debate on language policies. A few months later, however, national television and radio broadcasters were mandated to use Ukrainian only.<sup>28</sup>

The “Orange” President Viktor Yushchenko continued with this line as he pushed Ukrainian language, and strived to maintain it as a single state language.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the “Orange” government mandated an increased role for Ukrainian in the media and commerce. For example, during 2006, the ministry of culture organized a campaign to promote Ukrainian; and since 2008, films have been shown in their original language or have been dubbed in Ukrainian. In Russian-speaking cities the strange situation has emerged that the language façade has been Ukrainian, but real interactions in Russian.<sup>30</sup>

The strong support for the Ukrainian language, especially during the “Orange” period, wasn’t ingested readily, and provoked counterreactions in Russian-speaking regions. For example, in May 2006 the Party of Regions-dominated Donetsk regional council followed the example of the Luhansk, Kharkiv, and Sevastopol councils (that have been Party of the Regions dominated) which had approved regional-language status for the Russian language.<sup>31</sup> Debates on the status of the official language for both Ukrainian and Russian broke out especially on the eve of the presidential election in October 2004 and again during parliamentary elections in 2006. In sum, the language issue was instrumentalized against the government, in the “West” against the pre-dominance of Russian in the media, in the “East” against the Ukrainization of public life, education and public media.

So, the Donetsk Council decided in 2010 to support the Russian language and to extend the study of Russian language and literature in some schools, which provoked much discussion (as only a fifth of Donetsk schoolchildren study at Ukrainian-language schools). Moreover, a draft law on languages was brought into the national parliament in September 2010 to enhance the position of the Russian language.<sup>32</sup> Overall, language policy has been erratic and not very practical. It has not much changed on the situation that even if Ukrainian is the only state language, nearly half of the “Ukrainians” prefer Russian in daily communication.<sup>33</sup> The above Donetsk example is just one that proves the conflict potential of the issue.

Historiography is maybe the “hottest” topic, as historical events/periods interpreted reverse. The two centrist presidents who ruled Ukraine until 2004, Leonid Kravchuk and Leonid Kuchma, supported the introduction and expansion of the Ukrainophile historiography. Personally, both have been closer to views that are part of the so-called

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Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences, the Ukrainian language is used in daily communication by 42% of families, Russian by 36%, and both languages by 21%.

<sup>28</sup> Kyiv Imposes Controversial Ban on Russian-Language Broadcasts, *RFE/RL*, 16 April 2004, accessed November 5, 2010. <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1052346.html>.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Viktor Yushchenko, “The Problems Began After the Orange Revolution,” *Der Spiegel*, July 9, 2009, accessed November 3, 2010, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,647401,00.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Dmitry Babich, “No Russian in the Land of Potemkin,” *Russia Now*, August 4, 2010, accessed October 30, 2010, [http://rbth.ru/articles/2010/08/04/no\\_russian\\_land\\_potemkin.html](http://rbth.ru/articles/2010/08/04/no_russian_land_potemkin.html).

<sup>31</sup> Oleg Varfolomeyev, “Inconsistent Language Policy Creates Problems in Ukraine,” *Eurasian Daily Monitor*, May 24, 2006, accessed November 10, 2010, [http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=31707](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=31707).

<sup>32</sup> Vadym Kolesnichenko, “Governing Coalition Submitted Draft Law on Languages to Verkhovna Rada,” own website, accessed November 5, 2010, <http://r-u.org.ua/en/news/52-news.html>. See the “other” side on the same website: <http://r-u.org.ua/>.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Bowring, “Language Policy in Ukraine: International Standards and Obligations.” In *Language Policy and Language Situation in Ukraine: Analysis and Recommendations*, edited by Juliane Besters-Dilger (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 57f.

Eastern Slavic school. A positive interpretation is that they supported the other direction for the sake of nation-building.<sup>34</sup> A more negative interpretation sees their approach as ambiguous or even opportunistic. Officially, they identified with the new state, myths, traditions and symbols of the “old” Ukraine.<sup>35</sup> Practical policy-making often spoke another language. A two-vector policy that balanced divergent interests making concessions to all sides (that became so famous in foreign politics) was a characteristic of this area. As Riabchuk states “(...); the lack of a clear commitment signified that nothing was predetermined, everything was subject to reconsideration, and it was up to the ruling elite to decide whether to continue the pending project or to retreat to its opposite”. The approach of the old elite has been ambiguous or even opportunistic.<sup>36</sup>

The Great Famine has been a model case.<sup>37</sup> On the one hand the famine was included into school textbooks, and some monuments were erected, on the other hand the old elite did not participate actively in the commemoration festivities of the sixtieth anniversary of the Great Famine in 1993. Ten years later, the parliament condemned the famine as a crime against humanity. President Leonid Kuchma signed a decree to establish a day of commemoration of the victims on November 22 and delivered an official speech in which he underlined the importance of the event. However, voices termed his steps as opportunistic, as he was facing a major scandal (which was later termed *Kuchmagate*), and elections were approaching. In the regions, still, authorities declined to participate. The two-vector policy became evident, when state television didn’t broadcast a special programme on 22 November. The opportunistic nature was underlined by the parliamentary statement that condemned the famine as a crime against the Ukrainian people which was supported by 226 members of parliament out of 450. This was the narrowest result possible. The majority of the government (= pro-Kuchma) fractions abstained, and the public was well aware that the president could have activated the missing votes.<sup>38</sup>

Viktor Yushchenko established the Institute of National Memory in 2006 to support research on the famine. In the same year the Security Services of Ukraine declassified over 5000 documents on the famine. The election of Viktor Yushchenko as president in January 2005 reinforced the position of the Ukrainophile school in Ukrainian history writing, and he took various measures to underline his support for the Ukrainian cause.<sup>39</sup> Historiography and language policy were priorities on his presidential agenda. He supported the development of the Ukrainian language in Russian-dominated regions. That stood in contrast of oppositional efforts to institutionalize the Russian language as second state language. Critical voices considered him Ukrainian nationalist and accused him of anti-Russian stance.<sup>40</sup>

While Viktor Yanukovych and his Party of the Regions were in opposition they largely followed the Kuchma-example: to take ambiguous stances on national and identity issues at national and international levels, but to behave quite the contrary behind those facades to attract the Soviet- and Russophile population. This opportunistic stance was abandoned with the election of Viktor Yanukovych as president in early 2010. Presumably, he was ready to challenge the so far achieved nation-building in Ukraine. His most pronounced statement was made before the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe: He denied

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<sup>34</sup> Georgiy Kasianov and Georgiy Ther, *Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> For the example of Kyiv Rus: Taras Kuzio, “Nation-State Building and the Re-Writing of History in Ukraine: The Legacy of Kyiv Rus,” *Nationalities Papers* 33(1): 30–58, 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Mykola Riabchuk, “Holodomor: The Politics of Memory and Political Infighting in Contemporary Ukraine,” *Harriman Review*, 16(2), 2008.

<sup>37</sup> Liudmyla Grynevych, “The Present State of Ukrainian Historiography on the Holodomor and Prospects for its Development,” *The Harriman Review* 16(2), 2008.

<sup>38</sup> ArtUkraine.com, accessed November 11, 2010, <http://www.artukraine.com/famineart/index.htm>.

<sup>39</sup> Kuzio, *National Identity*, 408 and Riabchuk, *Holodomor*.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Viktor Yushchenko.

the famine was genocide of the Ukrainian people. He also replaced the former director of the Institute of National Memory with a Communist Party member who denied that the famine was deliberately caused.<sup>41</sup> His turn can be called neo-Soviet that ignores the importance of national identity. This aim reaches into all national and cultural aspects of the state, but most significantly concerns the interpretation of history and the use of documents. The historian who has headed the Lviv National Memorial Museum of Victims of the Occupation Regimes was detained in the capital by state security officers on the accusation of having published secret material.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the new presidential view on history shall be transmitted to a broader audience. With support of the education minister Dmytro Tabachnyk new school textbooks were introduced into Ukraine's schools in 2010. The changes have not been discussed with historians. The new books are silent on the support for the Ukrainian nationalist and don't mention the artificial nature of the Holodomor. Periods when Ukraine fought against Russia for independence or the Orange Revolution (sic!) don't exist.<sup>43</sup>

The new president has begun to change historiography and language policy. This fostered discussions that he intends to promote Russian to a second state language, and probably dual citizenship. This would challenge the territorial and ethnic interpretation of the country most severely. In Ukraine, there is a narrow conception of citizenship which translates in a respective law applied in a strictly territorial way, not allowing dual citizenships. This might stem from fears of the large Russian minority which could become more attractive for Russia with legalized Russian passports. This interpretation of being only Ukrainian citizen has always been questioned by ordinary citizens.<sup>44</sup> However, those "emotional" discussions might have been only lanced to politicize on the national issue and to distract from the political (and socio-economic) problems of the country.

### Conclusion

In the identity-complex of Ukraine, historiography has been one of the most important issues. The Holodomor has been the example here – the different perception of the Orange Revolution or the UPA by Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich are similarly interesting. Issues of citizenship and language have been much discussed, more in the last ten years than in the first ten years of independence. So far nothing has been changed on the official policy of one country, one language and one passport. In historiography the Holodomor has been a crucial issue. In fact, it has been the most contested topic of Ukrainian history, as it is strongly attached to Communism and the Stalinist regime, and the old communist-socialized elites who still have much power in Ukraine. Those elites strain away from critically reflecting the ideological bases of the system. This has been a threat to nation-building, because old values and traditions challenge the build-up of common narratives. The old elite is a danger to state-building, as the re-installation of the 1996 Constitution might again support authoritarian policy-making and neo-Soviet domestic and foreign policies.

So how did the presidents run the country? The interesting (and somehow disappointing) result is that the two first presidents who couldn't be termed democrats managed much more to support and balance the Ukrainian and the Russian features of the young state than their successors. They combined state- and nation-building; in the end they

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<sup>41</sup> With the denotative name Soldatenko. Askold S. Lozynskyj, "Yanukovich's Personal War against the Holodomor," *KyivPost*, November 2, 2010. "Communist Ukrainian Institute Head Denies Famine was Deliberate, *RFE/RL*, July 29, 2010, accessed November 5, 2010. [http://www.rferl.org/content/Communist\\_Ukrainian\\_Institute\\_Head\\_Denies\\_Famine\\_Was\\_Deliberate/2112870.html](http://www.rferl.org/content/Communist_Ukrainian_Institute_Head_Denies_Famine_Was_Deliberate/2112870.html).

<sup>42</sup> Natalia A. Feduschak, "Harassment of Historian Raises Censorship Fears," *KyivPost*, September 16, 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Катерина Каплюк, "Переписана історія України. Версія епохи Дмитра Табачника," *Українська правда*, 26 серпня 2010, accessed November 10, 2010. <http://www.pravda.com.ua/articles/12010/08/26/5332444/>.

<sup>44</sup> Yuliya Popova, "Dual Identities," *KyivPost*, July 9, 2009 and *Shevel Policy*.

didn't have democratic ends, but identity was combined with state issues. The elite consensus on balancing identity interests, i.e. favoring an Ukrainian interpretation, seemed to be a success. But by the late 1990s it became clear that this consensus was opportunistic and would only be temporary. After the Orange Revolution, identity was separated from the state. This means that the Russian-oriented part of the country was somehow forced to decide to become Ukrainian, to protest, or to hide in their regions. The people who are home in both cultures have remained largely passive. Now, pressure is on the Ukrainian part of the population. The last years have aggravated the alienation of Ukrainians and Russians.

This analysis shows that nation-building problems are elite created and originate in the presidential offices of the country. At the heart of nation- and state-building problems lay elite disruptions. Personal interests and group animosities (e.g. between the national democrats, centrist forces and communists) have been too powerful to be overcome in twenty years. Those disruptions concerned issues of political power in the first place, but identity-issues were of considerable importance: especially, the "handling" of the Holdomor. Elite disruptions that didn't aim at nation-building in the first place, but "only" at state-building (in particular the constitution) have now translated into national issues. There has never been an elite consensus on the nation's political system and constitution – but there has been an agreement, even if it was opportunistic, but still consensus on the Ukrainian identity of the nation under Kravchenko and Kuchma. If this consensus had been to a large extent opportunistic, the emergence of a successfully consolidated nation has been delusive. But since 2004, the reign of Viktor Yushchenko and the opposition of the Party of the Regions and Viktor Yanukovich underlined their willingness to polarize the national question. This has questioned the former "Ukrainian consensus" on the nation openly.

Under Viktor Yanukovich elite disruptions have translated into national issues and nation-building is up on the agenda. The policy of the new president challenges the Ukrainophile understanding of the three first Ukrainian presidents. But the problem goes deeper. The fact is that Russian traditions and narratives (and a "Russian-Eastern" mentality) co-exist with traditions and narratives that are characterized as more "Western", "European" or attached to "Ukrainian nationalist". Much has been written about whether a West-East divide does exist in Ukraine or not. This question should not stand in the foreground of this conclusion. The two languages are both relevant and have strong regional bases.

The current president is able to question the achievements of a quasi twenty-year long nation-building process (and he started to question the process right after the Orange Revolution). But why is he able to do so? This is the sore point: Even three presidents have not managed to unite the nation and provide a common national identity. The first two ones stuck to a Ukrainian-oriented identity-policy because of political reasons, the third one because of "egoistic reasons." All of them haven't succeeded with their nation-building efforts. Opportunistic and one-sided policies have been one reason. Other reasons are different cultural and historical legacies.

Which effects will the new policy have? Will the nation-(re-)building measures just be ignored or will they split the nation? In fact, the situation of Ukraine reminds of a comparable Western European example: Belgium. Here, disruptions have both economic and linguistic-cultural causes, and might be quite similar to Ukraine. In Belgium, a split of the country becomes possible. In Ukraine so far, the people have saved the day – maybe also this time. In 2004, the Ukrainian people decided on how the country will develop. Their protests made clear that they wouldn't tolerate an authoritarian president and hypocrisy-policy. The current president who manipulated the results couldn't assume office then because of the public protest. He knows that the people won't tolerate excesses concerning state and nation-issues. The winter 2010 protests on the new tax code have been a warning and protests that erupted against measures in the realm of state-building could also erupt in the realm of nation-building.

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