




DETERMINANTS OF UKRAINE'S GEOPOLITICAL ORIENTATION

UWARUNKOWANIA GEOPOLITYCZNEJ ORIENTACJI UKRAINY

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Abstract

The Russian side often talks about the special ties between Russia and Ukraine. This assumption underlies the Russian geopolitical doctrine. Nevertheless, Ukraine does not share this view, wishing to be a sovereign and independent state. Russia cannot understand that, however, being stuck in its imperial myth and one-sided interpretation of former and today's determinants. Meanwhile, Russians and Ukrainians were moulded by different historical circumstances, which was manifested in the emergence of two distinct languages and national traditions. In addition, historical processes tied Ukrainians more closely to the freedom traditions of the West, while the Russians were much more exposed to the impact of the despotic East, which was one of the main factors behind the distinctive features of both nations. The existence within the borders of one state for 200–300 years did not erase these differences. The emancipation of people's masses that took place from the mid-19th century made the distinctive features more visible and had to lead to political divisions. For this reason, even the USSR was constituted as a union. This fact, however, did not prevent its dissolution. As a result, Ukraine has been an independent country for three decades. Russian actions counteracting these tendencies, strengthened even more the sense of distinctiveness of Ukrainians and their western civilisational and geopolitical orientation. Owing to this fact, Russia's integrative actions against Ukraine, carried out by imperial and despotic methods, are doomed to failure.

Keywords: Ukraine, Russia, geopolitics, *longue durée*, separateness.

Kowalski M. (2022). Determinants of Ukraine's geopolitical orientation. *Czasopismo Geograficzne*, 93(3): 435–450. <https://doi.org/10.12657/czageo-93-17>



Otrzymano/Received: 26.07.2022
Zaakceptowano/Accepted: 28.09.2022

Streszczenie

Z rosyjskiej strony często można usłyszeć o szczególnych więzach łączących Rosję i Ukrainę. Przekonanie to jest podstawą rosyjskiej doktryny geopolitycznej. Ukraina nie podziela jednak tych poglądów, chcąc być suwerennym i samodzielnym państwem. Rosja nie potrafi tego zrozumieć, tkwiąc w swoim imperialnym micie oraz jednostronnej interpretacji dawnych i dzisiejszych uwarunkowań. Tymczasem Rosjan i Ukraińców kształtowały odmienne uwarunkowania historyczne, co wyraziło się chociażby w powstaniu dwóch odmiennych języków i tradycji narodowych. Dodatkowo procesy dziejowe wiązały Ukraińców silniej z tradycjami wolnościowymi Zachodu, podczas gdy Rosjanie byli bardziej wystawieni na oddziaływanie despotycznego wschodu, co było zresztą jednym z głównych czynników kształtujących odrębne cechy obu narodów. Istnienie w jednym państwie przez 200–300 lat nie zatarło tych różnic. Emancypacja mas ludowych mająca miejsce od połowy XIX w. sprzyjała uwidocznieniu się odrębności i musiała doprowadzić do podziałów politycznych. Z tego powodu już ZSRR został ukonstytuowany jako konfederacja. Nie zapobiegło to jednak jego rozpadowi. W wyniku tych uwarunkowań Ukraina jest od trzech dziesięcioleci niepodległym państwem. Rosyjskie działania przeciwdziałające tym tendencjom tylko umacniały poczucie odrębności Ukraińców i zachodnią orientację cywilizacyjną i geopolityczną. Z tego powodu integracyjne działania Rosji względem Ukrainy prowadzone metodami imperialnymi i despotycznymi skazane są na niepowodzenie.

Słowa kluczowe: Ukraina, Rosja, geopolityka, długie trwanie, odrębność.

INTRODUCTION

On 24 February 2022, Russia brutally attacked Ukraine. The majority of commentators claim that Władimir Putin's goal is to subordinate this country and make it the part of the revived Russian Empire. From that perspective, Crimea's annexation and an attempt to create a New Russia on the territory of Ukraine in 2014 might have been first steps closer to this main objective. It should be noted here that many analysts see the subjugation of Ukraine as not so much the result of the imperial power of Russia, but as something that will guarantee its power. This view was held, among other scholars, by the famous American political scientist of Polish origin Zbigniew Brzezinski. In his opinion, Russia can only remain a Eurasian empire if Ukraine belongs to it (Brzezinski, 1997).

What needs to be addressed in this context is the question whether Russia has reasonable grounds for claiming the right to ruling over Ukraine or having any particular political connection with it. Why is it not considered, for example, that Turkey's annexation to Russia would bring the latter the empire status? When answering this question, one may certainly say that Russia and Ukraine originate from a common tradition which was Kievan Rus'. Since the late 18th century most of Ukraine had belonged to the Tsarist Empire, and in 1922–1991

both countries co-created the Soviet Union. On the other hand, however, there is a tradition of the separate development of the two societies, which can be observed as early as in the Kievan Rus' period, and which was strengthened by unions between Ukrainian lands and Poland, Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and later also by the existence of the autonomous territories of the Ukrainian Cossacks, while Muscovite Russia created its own country and civilisation. This article makes an attempt to find an answer to this question.

PEOPLE VS SPACE IN GEOPOLITICAL TERMS

Geopolitics is a part of political geography, which assumes that understanding spatial processes allows understanding international relations as well (Heffernan, 1998; Blacksell, 2008). Therefore, the opinions expressed sometimes that geopolitics is a separate field of science are difficult to agree with. The advocates of this thesis are primarily scholars who under the term geopolitics understand measures employed to shape the current policy and the propaganda related to it. Pretending to be impartial researchers, they are often, in fact, agents of influence or proponents of various power centres. Thus, when dealing with geopolitics, can be either a scientist or a propagandist. The latter type is represented by, for instance, Aleksander Dugin, who in his book "The Foundations of Geopolitics: The Geopolitical Future of Russia" (Dugin, 1999) tries to prove that Russia, because of its geographical situation, has been predestined to be the world empire. A critical discussion of this conception was presented by Eberhardt (2010).

This study aspires to be a scientific approach. For this reason, it distances from many conceptions focusing on the analysis of geographical situation, treating this feature schematically and superficially, not allowing for a qualitative (social) aspect of spatial phenomena. The key, however, seems to be not only the place where a given society happens to be living and building the basis of its political existence, but also what stage of development it is currently in and to what civilisational and cultural system it belongs. What also seems important is an overall, qualitative context of geographical situation, related to socio-economic features of neighbouring countries and societies (Kowalski, 2013). In this study, it is therefore a human factor which becomes a particularly significant element analysed, next to space and territory. It is people who make space meaningful and develop it. They are also a basic component of particular areas from the geographical-political perspective, where both their quantitative and qualitative features count. Among the latter, the most important are socio-economic and civilisational and cultural determinants, as well as their current shape.

The topicality of the assessment of the situation is especially important in the context of Ukraine, because the case known from the past may be invalid and additionally misidentified by biased researchers. In the short-run, it is difficult

to expect civilisational and cultural changes in the rootedness of a given society. However, its socio-economic and even more its political face may be significantly transformed. Today's capabilities of political actions may substantially differ from those of decades, let alone hundreds of years ago. The same concerns neighbouring societies and the political organisms behind, although changes may have a different meaning for them in the political sphere. This is so, because for some societies and state organisms they may bring strengthening, and for others the weakening of importance on the political world map.

Remembering about considering a human (social) factor in the assessment of the geopolitical circumstances of a given country, the impact of location (geography) on this situation cannot, of course, be ignored. Nevertheless, the location, because of the distance and possibilities of cultural or socio-economic diffusion, very often also decides about its civilisational and cultural affinity. This aspect was strongly emphasised by classical geopolitical thought. This trend was in a sense started by Halford John Mackinder, who demarcated in Afro-Eurasia (The World Island) a particularly important Heartland and its surrounding internal marginal zone (Mackinder, 1904; Eberhardt, 2011).

A more substantial role of this last area was emphasised by Nicholas Spykman, who called it the Rimland. It is in this very area, in his opinion, that the vast majority of the population and economic potential of the world were concentrated (Spykman, 1944; Eberhardt, 2014). It fits in, to a considerable degree, with the conception of the Polish historian Koneczny (1962), who placed the most important civilisations for the world development in the Rimland demarcated in this way. For him, Heartland, despite its immensity, was only the birthplace of the most primitive of civilisations, which he called Turanian civilisation.

In the Rimland sphere, all the important civilisations for the development of Europe has been formed. First, these were Middle Eastern cultures (e.g. Egypt, Mesopotamia), then Crete, Greek and Roman civilisations, and later Byzantine and Western ones (Koneczny, 1962). Under the influence of the West, and to some degree of Byzantium, what was formed were civilisational foundations of Central and Eastern Europe (including Poland), named Younger Europe by the Polish historian Kłoczowski (2003).

Meanwhile, the interior of the continent (Heartland) was wreaking havoc by invasions of nomadic peoples: the Scythians, Huns, Pannonian Avars, or Mongols, which often threatened the foundations of the civilisations mentioned. It was only the Mongols that managed to build their own civilisation, called Turanian by Koneczny. As a result of the Mongolian-Tatar captivity, many of its mechanisms in terms of the organisation of the society and the ruling was inherited by Muscovite Russia, transformed later into Russia (Kochanowski, 1925).

UKRAINE: BETWEEN THE EAST AND THE WEST

The circumstances presented above were responsible for the establishment of the east-west differences in Europe related to the presence of Western civilisation and Russian and Turanian one. This divide was pointed out not so long ago by Samuel Huntington in his work "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order", who named the civilisation related to Russia, Russian-Orthodox. He advanced the thesis that after the Cold War and bipolar world division ended, civilisational and cultural differences would be critical in shaping domestic and international conflicts. For this reason, the conflict between Russia and the West would be also unavoidable, and one of its territories would be Ukraine. This is so, because this country, according to Huntington, was to be divided by a civilisational fault into a pro-Western West and pro-Russian East (Huntington, 1996). In a manner consistent with the ideology of Russian expansionism, a similar division in Europe, and to some extent also in Ukraine, was determined by the above-mentioned Russian ideologist Dugin (1999).

When taking into account, as predicted by Huntington, the confrontation between the West and Russia, the question arises which civilisation Ukraine belongs to, and whether one can speak of its civilisational rupture. History teaches that, politically, up to the end of the 18th century, the majority of the country was part of the Russian, and later Soviet empire. The people who remember that political order are still alive. One of them is Putin, who described the disintegration of the USSR in 1991 as the greatest geopolitical disaster of the 20th century (Bäcker, 2007). Both for him and for others, the emergence of an independent Ukraine on the political map of Europe was very surprising.

In view of this new situation, the new country and its inhabitants were very often treated objectively and patronisingly by both Russia and the West. A large proportion of the Ukrainian population could not find itself right away in a new reality as well. Even as late as in the 1991 referendum, most of them voted for maintaining the USSR. Also, presidential and parliamentary elections were won by candidates representing pro-Russian sympathies for some time. They owed such high support primarily to the voters of the linguistically most Russified south-eastern regions (Barrington, Herron, 2004; Kowalski, 2005, 2022; Katchanovski, 2006; Karácsonyi et al., 2014; Störk, 2015; Kuzio, 2018; Romaniuk, Lytvyn, 2018).

Just before the USSR dissolution, there was, in fact, an idea by the Russian writer and dissident Aleksander Solzhenitsyn, which Putin attempts to implement now in terms of territory, to unite all the former USSR republics with the majority of the East Slavic population, i.e., Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, to form a new state federation (Solzhenitsyn, 1991). It would suggest that there is some East Slavic community, whose dominating member and leader had to be Russia because of its territorial and population potential. To emphasise this idea,

the Russian imperial narrative also proclaims that Kyiv is the spiritual cradle of modern Russia (“Kyiv is the mother of Russian cities”), while Crimea, and especially ancient Chersonesos, are one of the keystones of the religious and historical heritage of Russian Orthodoxy. Moreover, Moscow’s political elite borrowed the original name of Ukraine (Rus), thus emphasising the common identity and political continuity with Kievan Rus and the status of an “older brother”, while Ukrainians were treated as a “younger brother”. In recent years, this narrative has been the cause and at the same time justification for military aggression against Ukraine (Kuzio, 2022). For those accustomed to the political order existing for more than two hundred years, such a vision was quite a natural option. However, was it actually consistent with the reality, that is with civilisational and cultural traditions of Ukraine?

The conception introduced to social sciences by the French historian Fernand Braudel helps to find the answer to this question. It assumes that phenomena and socio-economic processes should be considered in the perspective of the long term (*longue durée*), understood as the time of long-term and slow cultural and civilisational changes, imperceptible from an individual perspective (Braudel, 1982; Szczepański, 1999).

In this context, it should be emphasised once again that most of the area of present-day Ukraine became part of the Russian state and the influence of Russian civilisation as late as at the end of the 18th century (almost simultaneously with the majority of ethnically Polish lands). However, this was not the case for all lands, because Galicia, Bukovina and Carpathian Ruthenia up to World War II were outside this influence. Additionally, such lands as the Cossack Hetmanate (Hetmanshchyna), Zaporizhzhia and Sloboda Ukraine, although seceded from the Republic of Poland already in the 17th century and subsequently came within the Moscow Empire, were autonomous with separate laws and institutions for a long time. The same applies to the Ukrainian land of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which became part of Russia following the Partitions of this country (Jakowenko, 2011).

The fact that Ukraine belonged to the Russian Empire should not be also identified with its being part of Russia and Russian civilisation. The countries of that time were often multicultural organisms which were territorially complex. This was the case with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Ottoman Empire or Habsburg Empire, and perhaps above all, in the case of the Russian Empire. It can be even observed in the complex titlature of the rulers of the latter (Emperor and Autocrat of All the Russias, Moscow, Kiev, Vladimir, Novgorod, Tsar of Kazan, Tsar of Astrakhan, King of Poland, Tsar of Siberia, Tsar of Tauric Chersonese, Lord of Pskov and Grand Prince of Smolensk, Lithuania, Volhynia, Podolia and Finland, Prince of Estland, Livland, Courland and Semigalia etc.) (*Polnoye sobraniye zakonov...*, 1915). Contrary to what has been recently stated by the pres-

ent ruler of Russia (*Obrashcheniye Prezidenta...*, 2022), a unitary nature of the Russian Empire before the Bolshevik Revolution is a myth. Next to the traditionally Russian lands, it included, *inter alia*, former Tatar khanates (Kazan, Astrakhan, Siberian and Crimean), Central Asia (with the protectorates of Bukhara and Khiva), Caucasus, Baltic governorates (Estonia, Livonia, Courland), Bessarabia, Lithuania (with Belarus), Kingdom of Poland (formally a separate state), Finland and the very Ukrainian lands. These communities very often differed from one another in terms of their civilisational and cultural affiliation and the socio-economic system (Zajączkowski, 2009).

KIEVAN RUS' AND MUSCOVITE RUSSIA

Despite partially common roots (Rus), the paths of Kievan Rus' and Muscovite Russia diverged as early as the Middle Ages. The latter grew in the north-eastern peripheries of Russia, in the upper Volga river basin (therefore also among other natural conditions than Dnieper Kievan Rus'). This happened as a result of the conquest and assimilation of Finnish and Baltic peoples (e.g. Merya, Meshchera, Muroma, Zaboloshka Chude, Golyad). Consequently, in these new and peripheral areas, different ethnic groups and traditions built the demographic, economic, social, cultural and political foundations for later Russian society (Kowalski, 2019a). Enormous distances and the district disintegration of Rus' (Ruthenia) fostered cultural differences and the development of separate centres.

In the 13th century, Rus' was destroyed and subjected to the Tatars. Its original civilisation drawing on Byzantine culture and that of indigenous Slavic peoples declined. The distinctions resulting from the origins of the local population and caused by the weakening of mutual contacts were subsequently strengthened by a separate political affiliation and the civilisational and cultural determinants that stemmed from it. This was so, because two centres started to integrate Rus land: Moscow and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Jakowenko, 2011). Moscow gradually integrated duchies in the Volga basin. Its culture was formed at the periphery of former Rus and was significantly affected by a Mongolian-Tatarian influence (Turanian civilisation) and the Finnish and Baltic ethnic substrate (some scholars also indicate Tatarian-Mongolian). The expansion that initially went eastward consisted in connecting the successively conquered Tatar khanates, consolidating in Muscovite Russia oriental influences and typical methods of social organisation and ruling. Under these circumstances, the beginnings of the civilisation which is currently called Russian were formed. Western Rus' (Dnieper, Dniester and Dvina basin), that is today's Ukraine and Belarus were instead incorporated into the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kingdom of Poland (Halych Rus'). Owing to the lack of superior culture in Lithuania at the time, it is the very Ruthenian language that became the official one, and Ruthenian lands as well as

the Ruthenians made up the majority in this country. Local Byzantine-Slavic culture, unlike in Muscovite Russia, was separated from the impact of Turanian civilisation (Kochanowski, 1925; Koneczny, 1962; Jakowenko, 2011; Kowalski, 2019a).

OPENING UP OF UKRAINIAN LANDS TO WESTERN CIVILISATION

The fact that Ukrainian lands opened up to the impact of Western civilisation was critical for the further stages of civilisational and cultural relationships. This applied particularly to Halych Rus', which had numerous relations with the West long before it became part of the Kingdom of Poland in 1340. As a result of the Union of Krevo (1385), this process also took place in the remaining part of Western Rus' (today Belarus and Ukraine). The long-term unification of both political and socio-economic systems was culminated in the Union of Lublin, whereby Polish, Lithuanian, Belarusian and Ukrainian lands were incorporated into a common state, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Jakowenko, 2010; Kobyleckyi, 2019).

Western cultural patterns continued to have an impact on Ukrainian lands. Combined with local Slavic-Byzantine culture they formed the civilisational foundations of today's Ukrainian society. Despite the conflict with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and remaining faithful to the Orthodox religion, the countries and autonomous Ukrainian provinces that separated from the Commonwealth as a result of the Cossack uprising of 1648 derived their organisational principles from the same traditions (Jakowenko, 2010, 2011; Kowalski, 2022).

The freedom aspirations of Ukrainian Cossacks which grew in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, mostly under the influence of Western civilisation, contrasted strongly with the Russian attachment to despotism. Although Cossacks' actions contributed in some way to the subordination of Ukraine to Russia (the Pereiaslav Agreement 1654/1659), civilisational and cultural as well as socio-economic systems of both societies differed markedly. Similarly, Polish-Russian relations were alike when, a little later, a large part of Poland also came under the influence, and then under the rule of the Russian state.

What turned out to be decisive were long term processes as a result of which in the early modern period, Polish and Ukrainian society consolidated their civilisational and cultural identity under the influence of Western civilisation, although each in its own way. The elements of this rootedness included privileges of the gentry (Cossacks), organisation of the urban life (Magdeburg Law), common law (Statutes of Lithuania in Ukraine), rural self-government, individual and hereditary land ownership by peasants. An important thing was also the perception of the church (both Catholic and Orthodox) as an element of freedom tradition and the idea of freedom itself as the basis for historical tradition (Wilson, 2002; Szporluk, 2003; Jakowenko, 2010; Kowalski, 2022).

This all was foreign to Russia, organised on the principle of tsarist autocracy, with the absolute subjugation of the gentry and the Orthodox Church to the tsar, lack of European municipal law, individual peasant property and local government developed in various areas of social life. There were no grounds for the formation of a modern nation, based on bottom-up civil traditions, replaced here by top-down ruling, typical of eastern despotism. It was primary under its influence, and not due to society's own endeavours, that modernisation and superficial occidentalisation of Russia (e.g. a well-known command to shave beards, issued by Peter the Great to boyars) took place from the second half of the 17th century (Kucharzewski, 1925; Bratkiewicz, 1991; Abassy, 2013).

Ukraine's own deeply rooted civilisational traditions could not have been obliterated by the period of its being part of the Russian Empire, and later the Soviet Union. Although the impact of the latter was the most pernicious. The Tsarist Empire did not employ social engineering on such a massive scale. Life went mostly on according to age-old principles. The state and legal discrepancies were eliminated gradually. Additionally, the occidentalisation of Russia that started in the 17th century continued slowly influenced by internal and external powers. It was markedly different from the policy implemented by the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, Tsarist Russia also pursued a policy of weakening the foundations of the political and cultural distinctiveness of Ukrainian society. In the second half of the 18th century, the remnants of the autonomy of the Cossack territories were liquidated, and in the second half of the 19th century, publishing in Ukrainian was forbidden (e.g. the Valuev Circular, the Ems Ukaz) (Wilson, 2002).

UKRAINE IN THE PERIOD OF THE SOVIET UNION

During the Soviet times, Moscow power centre turned to radical and at the same time despotic forms of governance, which proved that the civilisational impact of the West was very shallow. In the 1930s, Stalin decided to suppress traditions of particular nations, including Ukraine, and socio-economic foundations of their functioning (Stroński, 1998; Wilson, 2002).

In Russia, it was not individual farmers, but an entire rural community (*mir*) that had a hold over an agricultural land, even after the abolition of serfdom and peasant submission (1861). Therefore, the system of *kolkhozes*, that is agricultural cooperatives, was introduced there without any major problems (Brzeziński, 2010). In Ukraine, enforced collectivisation was fiercely resisted, because Ukrainian peasants were strongly attached to their inherited farms. Their resistance needed to be broken by repressions and the Great Famine (the *Holodomor*). As a result, several millions of people died. The progressive Russification was implemented alongside the concurrent elimination of Ukrainian intellectual elites (Wilson, 2002).

Fortunately, the western regions of today's Ukraine: Galicia, Volhynia, Carpathian Ruthenia, Bukovina, were not part of the interwar Soviet Union, which allowed Ukrainians living there to keep the foundations of their own culture in much better shape. Although the consolidation of both parts after World War II weakened national traditions in the west, but at the same time strengthened the country as a whole. The most difficult ordeal for Ukrainians was the period of being part of the USSR because the system wanted to destroy not only the distinctiveness of the nation, but also its civilisational and cultural as well as socio-economic foundations (Wilson, 2002; Olszański, 2013). Other nations forcibly incorporated into the system experienced it in a similar way. The USSR itself was finally unable to withstand this civilisational experiment, which led to its socio-economic collapse and ultimate dissolution.

THE REVIVAL OF UKRAINE IN THE LATE 20TH CENTURY

Despite losing its elites (the gentry was Polonised and Russified) and incorporating into the Russian Empire, the Ukrainian society maintained its distinctiveness. In the country of tsars, they were called 'Little Russians' and 'Malorussian'. This very language, Malorussian, as a mother tongue, was declared by the majority of people, including a significant proportion of gentry and townspeople from all the first-level administrative units (governorates) in the territory of today's Ukraine during the 1897 census (Chorny, 2001). A modern Ukrainian nation started to develop—based on the people's masses—with the advent of the nationalism era in Eastern Europe (mid-19th century). During World War I, as a result of defeats suffered by the Russian army, the Ukrainian People's Republic was declared. This state, however, was conquered by Bolshevik Russia. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of Ukrainians, as well as other nations subdued in a similar manner, could not have been contested. For this reason, Soviet authorities were forced to formally transform their country into a union and to establish a group of republics that would belong to it. One of them was Ukraine. The empowerment of these units in the Soviet Union turned out to be largely a fiction (a strong dependence on the decision-making centre in Moscow), although it was formally binding. Therefore, the moment the system built by communists collapsed, all republic nations, including Ukrainians, chose independence (Wilson, 2002; Szporluk, 2003).

In 1991, Ukraine held referendum, in which a substantial majority of citizens, including most voters from Crimea and Donbas, opted for Ukraine's independence. As it turned out, for Ukrainians the tradition of the civil nation was closer than a despotic imperial idea offered by Moscow and characteristic of Russian civilisation. The revival of the Ukrainian national state in the 1990s allowed rebuilding in a short time the foundations of national culture. Handed down from generation to generation in the cultural code, the national tradition

survived, despite the imposed development model. It only took one generational cycle (from the beginning of Perestroika until now) for the civilisational roots of the Ukrainian nation to be recovered (Kowalski, 2019b, 2022). At the same time, Russia still could not overcome its despotic traditions (Acemoglu, Robinson, 2019; Kuzio, 2022).

Initially, in the 1990s, primarily the inhabitants of the least Russified and Sovietised Western Ukraine were faithful to the Ukrainian national idea. Others very often failed to find their place in the new reality after the USSR dissolution. Gradually, however, as the national revival progressed, the situation was changing. In the first decade of the 21st century, the western geopolitical vector of Ukraine received majority support in the central part of the country, and as a result of the Russian aggression that has continued since 2014, the sense of belonging to the Ukrainian nation has prevailed also among the most linguistically Russified inhabitants of the south-eastern regions. Only in Donbas, controlled by the Ukrainian authorities, were both options, pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian, balanced. Russia's imperial plans concerning Ukraine strengthened the relations between the south-eastern population and the Ukrainian nation, with its civilisational rootedness and geopolitical orientation. Sovietisation combined with Russification turned out to be superficial which shows that it is difficult to say about Ukraine's civilisational rupture as prophesied by Huntington. According to the researcher, the country was supposed to be divided roughly in half, with the Cherkassy and Kiev Oblasts (with Kiev) as the eastern borderlands of the western part. This idea was based on the spatial variation in the results of the 1994 elections. As the earlier and later elections show, however, the 1994 elections recorded only an intermediate phase in the spread of Ukrainian national revival, which began after the collapse of the USSR. The election results suggest that in 1991, the majority of the population embraced this revival only in Galicia. In 1994, it already reached the Cherkasy and Kyiv regions, in 2004, it also included the historic Left-Bank (Hetmanshchyna), while in 2019, it covered practically the entire country. The results of the successive elections show that the line drawn by Huntington turned out to be only a relatively permanent boundary with varying degrees of support in successive presidential elections, not a permanent boundary of the influence of Western and Russian civilisation (Fig. 1) (Kowalski, 2022; see also Karácsonyi et al., 2014, Smoor, 2017).

In this context, the now completely different geopolitical orientation of Ukraine compared to Belarus may be puzzling, even though the lands of both countries were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The explanation for this contrast lies probably in both the weaker rooting of Western traditions in Belarus and the weaker consolidation of Belarusian national tradition and cultural distinctiveness. Western influences reached the Ukrainian lands much earlier than the Belarusian lands, and this flow was reinforced by the direct af-

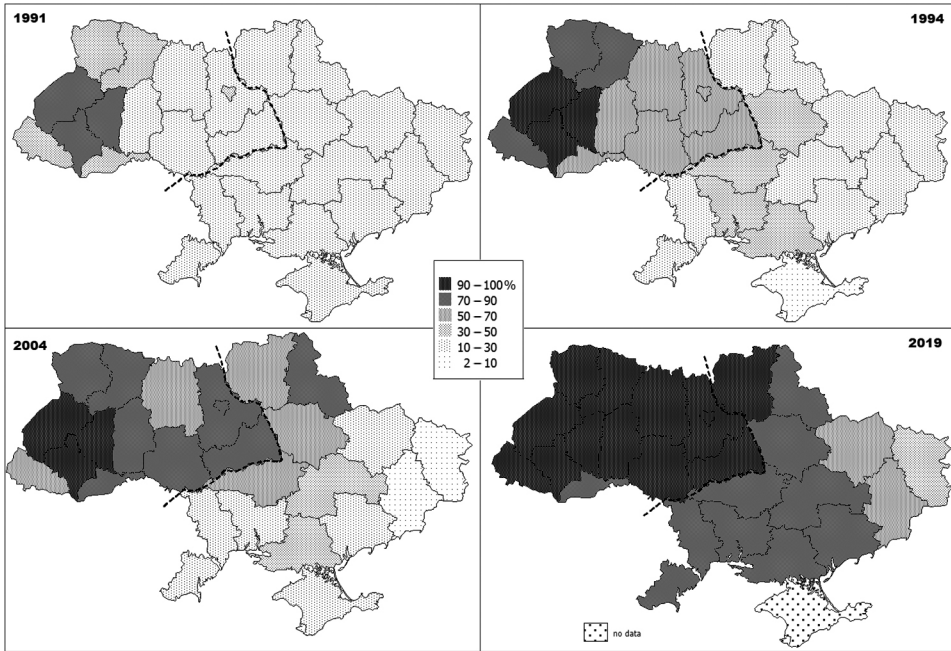


Fig. 1. Change in support for candidates distancing themselves from closer cooperation with Russia over the past 30 years. The civilisational cleft suggested by Huntington marked by the dotted line
Source: own compilation.

filiation of the lands of southern Ruthenia (Ukraine) to the Polish Crown. The Byelorussian lands (northern Ruthenia) were at all times associated with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which entered the path of union with the West later than Poland. In addition, the persistence of ethnic separateness between Belarusians and Lithuanians did not translate into the emergence of strong traditions of Belarusian distinctiveness. The traditions of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania came to be identified primarily with the Baltic Lithuanian nation, while no other distinct tradition emerged (similar to the Cossack tradition in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth or the Halychyna/Galicia tradition in the Habsburg state) with which East Slavic Lithuanians (Belarusians) could identify. Therefore, despite the clear distinctiveness of the organisation of Belarusian collective life compared to the Russian model, cultural similarities (language, religion) and the incorporation of all Belarusian lands into the Russian Empire fostered a greater identification with Russian political and cultural centres than in Ukraine. Nevertheless, even the current Belarusian supporters of ties with Russia recognise their civilisational difference from Russia, which was also expressed by Alyaksandr Lukashenka when he said that Belarusians are Russians, but with a quality mark (Ioffe, 2014).

The events of August 2020 have shown that this is a legitimate claim also with regard to the political attitude of Belarusians (with the proviso that Belarusians do not identify themselves as Russians, as evidenced by the official Belarusian population census). Nevertheless, the strong economic and political ties with Russia already established in the 1990s (which are the mainstay of Lukashenka's power) are now more difficult to sever because of a lower economic and demographic potential than Ukraine.

SUMMING-UP

For the last 30 years Ukrainians has shown that they are a sovereign nation rooted in European civilisation. This is a crucial element of geopolitical order due to Ukraine's location, its area and the population number. This issue, apparently, cannot be discerned or accepted by Russian authorities, still emphasising the role of special relationships that would link Russia and Ukraine (and Belarus). This attitude has its historical background, related to the fact that Ukraine belonged to the state of Russian tsars and the Soviet Union. However, it does not allow for the more crucial determinants of long term processes. What has been ignored are first of all distinctive civilisational and ethnic features, formed throughout the centuries. There was a time when they did not play a significant role as a political factor. That was the case in the modern times (18th c.) and early modern (19th c.), when the majority of society were serfs, unable to articulate and implement any political ambitions. Their passiveness made it easy for despotic and strong central authorities to subdue a small minority of upper classes. For this reason, not only was Ukraine subjugated to Russia, but also the Baltic countries and Poland. A gradual emancipation of people's masses, however, changed that situation. In view of that, even the Soviet Union was forced to acknowledge the distinctiveness of the nations living in this territory, transforming the former Russian Empire into the union of republics. The dissolution of this country was the next stage in this process, showing that there were more differences than similarities between the nations that constituted it.

In this context, Russia's action against Ukraine is ineffective and counterproductive. While using its imperial and despotic operation methods, not only is Russia unable to win over the Ukrainian society, but on the contrary, it strengthens the distance between the two countries. This is because imperial and aggressive Russian action consolidates in a natural way a sense of Ukraine's national identity and its pro-West orientation. This pro-westernness is even stronger, because it corresponds to the impact the western civilisation and its element which is self-organised national society have had on the Ukrainian society for centuries. Owing to that fact, Russia's attempts to subdue this country are not only unfounded, but also doomed to failure. One should assume that in view of the exhaustion

of political options and propaganda, Russia has set its sights on military action, not being able to verify its policy towards Ukraine and depart from imperial traditions. When making a decision about using force in 2014, and then attacking much more violently in 2022, it has become part of the infamous tradition of other empires which did not understand in time the meaning of historical processes and their own passing. Regardless of the war outcome, its consequences will be far-reaching, constituting a new geopolitical order and marking a new stage in the history of Europe and humanity.

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