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# THE LANGUAGE ISSUE IN UKRAINE

## AN ATTEMPT AT A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Tadeusz A. Olszański

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CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES

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## INTRODUCTION

Ukraine has been an independent state for only 20 years and the consequence of the long-term incorporation of Ukrainian lands into the Russian/Soviet state is an ethnically mixed society. In Ukraine, alongside Ukrainians, there are very many Russians and members of other nationalities of the former Soviet Union as well as a still large group of people who identify themselves as Soviets (in terms of their nationality). A significant part of Ukrainians use Russian in their everyday life (particularly professional) while knowing Ukrainian to only a small degree or not at all. Due to this Kyiv has to implement a language policy (which does not have to be pursued in e.g. Poland or Hungary) in search of solutions to ensure the stable functioning of a modern state for a multilingual society. The language issue is therefore an important challenge for the Ukrainian state and one of the more significant issues in Ukraine's internal politics.

Since the very beginning of its independence Ukraine has been a bilingual state/society: a considerable section of its citizens irrespective of their declared nationality have used exclusively Russian in speech and particularly in writing. Despite this fact, the Ukrainian constitution of 1996 states that there is one state and official language, rather on the grounds of symbolism than pragmatism. The state from the beginning has tolerated a wide extent of the use of Russian in various spheres of public life, including in parliament. This was possible due to the mutual transparency (intelligibility) of the Russian and Ukrainian languages.

The language issue in Ukraine has four basic aspects: everyday use (communication between people), formal and official use (the functioning of the state, particularly the legal and education systems), the commercial aspect (the press, books and electronic media market, and advertisements) and the symbolic and identity aspect. The first aspect is the least important as the Ukrainian and Russian languages are similar. The crucial aspect is the symbolic one which affects the establishment of reasonable and fair solutions in the remaining aspects. On the one hand, Ukrainian national thought identifies belonging to the nation with the use of its language (thus granting this element high on complete importance). On the other hand, a section of the Russian-speaking circles believes that the use Russian in public life is a political declaration of belonging to the "Slavic/Russian community" defined as opposed to the Ukrainian national community distinct from the Russian nation. For this reason the "language dispute" is becoming a dispute over

a symbolic and ideological rule and the significance of this aspect has been growing with the passage of time.

The language issue in Ukraine reveals the contradiction between the right of a democratic country to define and impose the language which is compulsory in official, educational and symbolic areas and the right citizens have to choose the language which they want to use, including in contacts with state institutions authorities, and in which they want their children to be taught. In fundamentally monoethnic countries such as Poland or Hungary the solution is simple (limited concessions for few minority groups). In multilingual countries such as Spain and particularly in bilingual countries – Belgium or Ukraine – there appears a problem to which a good and especially universal solution has not yet been found.

A considerable section of Ukrainian citizens in daily life uses mainly or exclusively Russian; the 20 years of independence have only led to a certain reduction in number of people who admit to this. In terms of language, Ukraine considerably varies from region to region: in the west the Ukrainian language is clearly predominant, whereas in the east and south – it is Russian. It seems, however, that the process of the official (formal) Ukrainisation of social life is being accompanied by a spontaneous Russification: a stronger presence of Ukrainian in social life in the east and south of the country is being paralleled to an increased presence of the Russian language in the centre and the west<sup>1</sup>.

The possibilities for resolving the language problem are the following: tolerating the present state of “unofficial bilingualism”, legalisation of the use of Russian in public life in a narrower or wider scope in the entire territory of Ukraine or in part of the country (as long as it is recognised as an equal state language) or a planned and consistent removal of the Russian language from public life; in the short term the first option seems the most probable.

One of the leading Ukrainian political analysts, Volodymyr Fesenko stated recently that “The [language] issue does exist. Although it is not the country’s most urgent problem. The optimal option is in my opinion to maintain and consistently implement the state status of the Ukrainian language and to grant

<sup>1</sup> The examples concerning Lviv in: Ilko Lemko, *I mova tvoja vykazuye tebe*, [http://postup.brama.com/dinamic/i\\_pub/usual.php?what=8361](http://postup.brama.com/dinamic/i_pub/usual.php?what=8361), visited at 18.03.2003. This process has been confirmed by observations made by numerous people, including the author of the present report.

official status to the Russian language at the regional level in places where clusters of Russian-speaking citizens of the country live”<sup>2</sup>. This “optimal option” is in fact an attempt at squaring the circle; it could be feasible if it had not been for the symbolic and identity-related importance of the issue which makes a painless solution – one satisfactory to all parties – unrealistic.

The aim of this report is to outline the language issue in Ukraine and its social context, with a particular focus placed on important questions, which are usually overlooked in similar publications, such as the trade (commercial) aspect of language regulations in the media and the key role of the “language issue” in Ukraine’s identity policy (the symbolic, historical policy etc.).

In the first section I focus on general questions; important in order to understand the language issue in Ukraine but having a more general nature. These are followed by the main practical aspects of the language dimension of Ukraine’s social and economic life, the significance of the rivalry between the Ukrainian and Russian languages for the country’s symbolic identity. Finally, I approach the Ukrainian law relating to the language, including the draft of a new law which is underway. The appendix presents the data on Ukraine’s national minorities, including the extent to which they are Russified or Ukrainised in terms of the language.

In this text I eschew a detailed analysis of the question of Crimea as its social dynamics (also in the language area) is clearly distinct from the remaining part of Ukraine for four reasons: the short-term character of the region’s links with Ukraine, its relative geographic isolation (Crimea is almost an island), the formal autonomy of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, and the presence of the Crimean Tatar community which is demanding the recognition of its language rights.

<sup>2</sup> [www.glavred.info/archive/2011/08/02/081759-o.html](http://www.glavred.info/archive/2011/08/02/081759-o.html), visited at 02.08.2011.

## I. INTRODUCTORY QUESTIONS

The discourse about the language situation in Ukraine is heavily influenced by ideology and is largely based on currently anachronistic terms. Discussions are focused on the question of which language people speak instead of the question of whether they can use it to read and write official documents<sup>3</sup>. Numerous problems are ignored, among them the immigration-influenced nature of a substantial part of Ukrainian society, the consequences of the mutual intelligibility of Ukrainian and Russian, challenges linked to the change in the nature and the way of shaping the linguistic norm in contemporary societies etc. For these reasons I have deemed it appropriate to make certain introductory comments which go beyond the scope of the formally defined subject of this report.

### 1. The role of language in the life of a modern state

For a modern, bureaucratic state the official language is one of the main instruments of functioning. The education system, public administration offices, courts and the army must use one common medium; it must be standardised (unequivocal, codified) and commonly used. For these reasons a modern state seeks to ensure the exclusive use of one language in the official circuit and in education, thus limiting the presence in social life of both dialects and languages of minority groups. In the latter area bilingualism is sometimes accepted but not the exclusive use of the language spoken by a minority.

Modern European nations are characterised by a commonly shared culture and therefore language (culture and identity must be expressed in the language). Therefore organisations which create the national life – state organisations, independent or anti-state (irredentist) ones – aim at ensuring that the language which is considered national is used exclusively or predominantly as the medium of culture. They also seek to grant it symbolic status (as the distinctive feature of belonging to the nation). These organisations also make efforts to guarantee the highest possible degree of completeness of this language (its capacity to operate in all spheres of social life, from family contacts to the translations of leading works of science and world literature).

<sup>3</sup> I have not found data which would enable the written command of Ukrainian and Russian to be assessed.

## 2. The linguistic norm in the post-modern society

Until recently the emphasis in European languages was placed on the written (literary) standard<sup>4</sup> which ensured the harmonisation of the legislation and administration, and particularly school education. This norm was shaped above all by writers and lexicographers and implemented by teachers of general schools. Over last 20 years an important change has occurred: as the written media (press, books) have ceded their role as the main transmission channel to the spoken media (radio, TV), the cachet of spoken language – by its nature more flexible and colloquial – has increased at the expense of the written language form. In recent years this process has been reinforced by the arrival of Internet communicators and text messages which only in a formal sense use text, whereas in reality they are a form of oral communication. The second factor at play was the weakening of the authority of school as the first and main source of knowledge of the world and, consequently, as the teacher of the language which describes the world.

As a result, a new linguistic norm has emerged which is much more changing, which easily adopts dialectic elements, neologisms (including borrowed words) and slang innovations and is much less concerned about formal connectedness. This form is shaped and promoted by both journalists and celebrities.

It appears that at least in Europe the written language has lost its standardising and normative role, the more so since – as was not the case in the 1970s – innovations of the spoken language are almost immediately adopted in written language, which accelerates the wavering of the written language norm and even the administrative language norm.

The described phenomena are subject to the attention of a section of journalists and social thinkers and in several countries (such as France) they have caused the government to counteract. However it is quite unusual that reflection appears on the issue that the weakening of the linguistic norm in a country where two very similar languages co-exist (as is the case with Ukraine) leads to a particular danger: blurring distinctions between them through the same innovations adopted by both languages (especially numerous Anglicisms—usually of

<sup>4</sup> The English term as well as the Ukrainian one unfortunately refers to literature; the French term of *langue d'lettre* simply means the written form of the language.

American origin) and ignoring and the diminishing phonetic and grammatical elements which make these languages distinct.

### 3. The immigration-based nature of Ukrainian society

The south and east of Ukraine, nearly a third of the country's contemporary territory, were populated by farmers and town dwellers for the first time towards the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Donetsk was established in approximately 1860 not at the location of a former village but in the open steppe). These areas were at that time populated simultaneously by Ukrainians and Russians but also Germans, Moldovans, Bulgarians, Jews, Poles and representatives of other nationalities. Mass immigration, particularly to the east of Ukraine and to port towns continued uninterrupted until World War II. Those were, however, internal migrations whose dynamics and especially the ethnic structure have been only cursorily researched; all the papers I have come across on Ukraine's history do no more than point out this topic.

For the issue examined in the present paper it is above all the immigration of the 1940s which is important as it has substantially changed Ukraine's ethnic and social makeup. According to the latest research the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (within the borders of 1938) had a population of 29 million people according to the 1926 census and estimates for the beginning of the 1930s show the population was approximately 30–31 million people. In 1933–1944 it lost almost one third of its population, approximately 10 million died, were murdered or were killed in battle<sup>5</sup>. The population of the "old" Ukraine" was estimated at 25 million in 1946<sup>6</sup>. Despite this, according to the 1959 census (the first after the war) Ukraine had (within its new borders) 42 million people. Such a rapid increase was possible only due to mass immigration. Similarly in the following decades Ukraine continued to be populated by displaced people

<sup>5</sup> Compare Timothy Snyder, *Skrwawione ziemie*, Warszawa 2011, p. 435 (original title: *Bloodlands*, Basic Books, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> According to Soviet estimates there were 31.6 million inhabitants of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (within the borders of 1938) at the beginning of 1941 and 25.4 million inhabitants in July 1946. The number of inhabitants of western districts (annexed in the aftermath of the World War II) was estimated in July 1946 (after the "exchange of populations" between Poland and the USSR was completed) at 6.7 million, later a few hundred thousand inhabitants of these lands were deported deeper into the USSR. The population of Crimea at the moment of its annexation into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (1954) stood at 1.2 million, the overwhelming majority of them being post-war immigrants. The source of the figures: Piotr Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Ukrainie XX wieku*, Warsaw 1994, table on p. 178.

from other republics and Ukrainians went to inhabit other republics, which was stimulated by the government of the USSR. The latter process also increased the proportion of immigrants in Ukraine's population.

The scale of immigration in Ukraine from other territories of the USSR has not been researched. The fact, though, that it was mass immigration is commonly recognised. Bohdan Kravchenko believes that in 1959–1970 approximately one million Russians went to Ukraine and in 1939–1970 overall as many as 9 million<sup>7</sup>. Piotr Eberhardt states that in 1959–1970 the number of Ukrainians in Ukraine rose by 10% and the number of Russian grew by 29%, which he ascribes to a large extent to the immigration of Russians, although he does not attempt to estimate the scale of this immigration. He also writes that in Donbas “the overwhelming majority of the population is not autochthonous, they came here from both Ukraine and Russia”<sup>8</sup>. Borys Levytsky claims that in 1959–1970 the number of Russians among the inhabitants of Ukrainian towns and cities increased from 5.7 to 7.1 million, which can only partly be explained by the assimilation of Ukrainians. In towns in the Kharkiv district<sup>9</sup> the number of Russians grew by 192%, in the Dnipropetrovsk district by 200%, and in the Zaporizhia district by 227%<sup>10</sup>. Finally, it stems from the comparison of further censuses that in 1959–1989 the number of Russians in Ukraine rose by 60%, whereas the number of Ukrainians grew by 16% and altogether the population of the republic increased by 23%<sup>11</sup>.

All this shows that the number of “inter-Soviet” immigrants (not only Russians) from the post-war period (1944–1990) in Ukraine amounts to anywhere from several million to over ten million people and when their children and grandchildren are included this figure could reach as much as one third of the population<sup>12</sup>. They are mainly concentrated in the large industrial centres in

<sup>7</sup> B. Kravchenko, *Social Change and National Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Ukraine*, London 1985, p. 223–224.

<sup>8</sup> Piotr Eberhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 220, 268.

<sup>9</sup> “Oblast” in both Ukrainian and Russian.

<sup>10</sup> B. Levytsky, *Politics and Society in Soviet Ukraine 1953–1980*, p. 116, 137 n.

<sup>11</sup> Not only Russians were immigrants, for example the number of Belarusians in Ukraine increased at that time by 51%.

<sup>12</sup> On the basis of available data it is not possible to justify this last figure, it however does not seem implausible, particularly when having in mind the fact that in Latvia and Estonia Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians (almost exclusively immigrants and their descendants) according to the census data accounted for approximately 30% of the population around 2000.

the east and south of Ukraine, Kiev and Crimea. There are also many immigrants from the 1940s and 1950s and their descendants in the towns of western Ukraine, where before the war Poles and Jews were predominant. The new governments had to “make use” of the abandoned towns quickly and establish an administration in what was basically a hostile environment. They were able to do it only by sending in staff from other regions of the country. A considerable part of those who arrived (both immediately after the war and in the following decades) were linked with the armed forces. An important section of those immigrants, particularly their descendants, identify themselves to a greater extent with Ukraine as a country and state but few of them identify themselves with the Ukrainian ethnic nation, which is not surprising since they are not ethnic Ukrainians.

From the point of view of the issue examined in this paper, the above mentioned question is important since, for the “immigrant” part of Ukrainian society, the Ukrainian language, even if they know it well, remains a foreign language (especially in the symbolic and identity-related sphere) and the state should take this into account. It seems, however, that this issue goes entirely unnoticed, even now when Ukraine’s prime minister is an immigrant and the country’s president is the son of immigrants<sup>13</sup>.

#### 4. *Surzhyk*

*Surzhyk* is a Ukraine-specific language phenomenon<sup>14</sup>, made possible thanks to the co-existence of two mutually intelligible languages in the same area. It is a degraded form of language communication, which is not a dialect (these are governed by a set of rules which can be described). According to Artur Branicki’s definition it is a “type of speech (...) based on the Ukrainian language and featuring strong influences from the Russian language which have formed as a result of a long-term co-existence of the two languages, this co-existence has the characteristics of asymmetrical bilingualism”<sup>15</sup>. According to sociologists *Surzhyk* is used daily by approximately 16–18% of the population

<sup>13</sup> Mykola (Nikolai) Azarov was born in Kaluga, in a Russian family, he settled in Ukraine at the age of 38. Viktor Yanukovich is the son of immigrants from Belarus and Russia, brought up in a then entirely Russian-speaking environment in Donbas.

<sup>14</sup> *Trasianka* present in Belarus has a similar nature.

<sup>15</sup> Artur Bracki, *Surżyk. Historia i terażniejszość*, Published by Uniwersytet Gdański, Gdańsk 2009, p. 14. This work is the first attempt in the world’s literature at a complex scientific analysis of this phenomenon. The fact that Ukrainian language experts have so far written merely a few more serious articles about it seems significant.

of Ukraine, mainly in the central part of the country, where 40% use “more or less correct Ukrainian” and 42% – “more or less correct Russian”<sup>16</sup>. Together with the generational change and the weakening of the linguistic norm (both the Ukrainian and the Russian ones) shaped by literature, a new phenomenon has appeared, still escaping the attention of sociologists<sup>17</sup>; a weaker sense of the distinctiveness of the two languages (particularly their spoken versions). The older generation was genuinely bilingual and was aware of using one or the other language at a given moment; young people (also younger journalists) more and more often mix elements of the two languages, they “just” speak, although they take offence when this type of speech is called *Surzhyk*.

Contrary to the above mentioned term, “speech”, *Surzhyk* is also employed in writing, albeit in the non-official circuit (especially in private correspondence). Until recently it was a shameful, hidden phenomenon. This is, however, changing under the influence of its commonplace use by popular music artists and comedians, particularly by Andriy Danylko under the pseudonym of Verka Serdutchka<sup>18</sup>. For the time being *Surzhyk* has not appeared in popular literature as a narrative instrument (although it is used in dialogues as a feature of characters); if this occurred, it would mean the beginning of the normativisation of *Surzhyk* and the emergence of a new linguistic standard – the “Ukrussian language”<sup>19</sup>. It cannot be ruled out that a section of Ukraine’s society is instinctively seeking to create such a language, which is hampered by the lack of social and especially political consent to use it in writing. This tendency is being noticed by several politicians such as Oles Doniy who as early as in 2000 announced that *Surzhyk* is a legitimate variety of the Ukrainian language and it has to be used in writing because “*Surzhyk* is better than Russian”<sup>20</sup>. For the time being, however, *Surzhyk* is only blurring the Ukrainian linguistic norm while not establishing an alternative norm, which is the main threat linked to it.

<sup>16</sup> See: <http://2000.net.ua/2000/aspekty/slovo/72876>, visited at 11.04.2011 and Mykola Riabchuk, *Dve Ukrainy*, Wrocław 2004, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> I am referring here to the opinions of Kyiv’s writers of the young generation, expressed in private talks.

<sup>18</sup> Danylko popularised the character of Serdutchka – a primitive, *Surzhyk*-speaking Ukrainian woman in advertising spots for Pryvatbank. Later he launched an independent and enormously successful stage career. The ostentatious kitsch of his songs was aimed at ridiculing Serdutchka, her way of living and speaking but as a result of this it was ennobled.

<sup>19</sup> The term coined by Kyiv’s writer Volodymyr Arenev (*Zobrazit’ meni ray*, Kyiv 2009, p. 136).

<sup>20</sup> Oles Doniy, *Khaj zhyve surzhyk!*, [www.molodaukraina.org/news.asp?IdType=12&Id=229](http://www.molodaukraina.org/news.asp?IdType=12&Id=229), visited at 11.01.2005.

## 5. The terminology problem: the state/official language<sup>21</sup>

In English the term “state language” is seldom used, whereas the term “official language” means the language which is compulsory in the state in all spheres of its functioning. In Ukrainian and Russian there is however a clear difference between the state language (in Ukrainian *derzhavna mova*, in Russian *gosudarstvenny yazyk*), and the official language (in Ukrainian *ofitsiyna mova*, in Russian *uriadovy yazyk*) which denotes the language used by the administration and can be different from the state language.

These reasons explain the demand – which is difficult to translate into English – to grant the Russian language the status of the “second official/administration language”, which is different from the demand of granting it the status of the “second official/state language”. The first demand means that Russian would be introduced in public administration offices, courts and schools as equal to Ukrainian (granting these institutions bilingual status), which can be implemented without an amendment to the constitution and applied locally also with regard to several other minority languages. The second demand means that the state would become, also in the symbolic sphere, bilingual; this can be implemented only through the amendment of the constitution and will necessarily discriminate against the languages of the remaining minorities.

## 6. The terminology problem: the native language

The Ukrainian and Russian terms “*ridna mova / rodnoy yazyk*” are usually translated as the “native language”. However, this term does not necessarily mean the first language learnt. The word “*ridny / rodnoy*” denotes both “native”, “family” and also “familiar”. In the present text the word used is “native language” but it has to be borne in mind that this is only an approximate translation.

In the view of Ukrainians and Russians themselves this term is not unambiguous—surveys reveal that 34% of respondents understand the term “native” as referring to the language in which they think and talk freely; for 32% of those surveyed it refers to the language of the nation they belong to; for 24% it is the

<sup>21</sup> The present and the following sub-chapters are not an exact translation of the Polish text but an adaptation for English-speaking readers. Also in the following parts some excerpts, which are intelligible only in the Polish language, have been altered or removed.

language of their parents; and for 9% it is the language they use most often<sup>22</sup>. This ambiguity calls into question the results of all research which looks into the native language without examining the significance respondents accorded to this term, above all the value of all the data on the degree of identification with the nation and the language recorded in censuses.

In certain Soviet censuses the notion of the native language was defined in various ways. In 1920 it was the language spoken at home by the family of the person subject to the census (*yazyk v bytu*) and in mixed families it was taken to be the language spoken by the mother. In 1926 the native language was considered the language which the person subject to the census commands best or usually uses (*golovny rozgovorny yazyk*), in 1939 it was the language which the person interviewed perceives as the native (*rodnoy*) language, in 1959–1979 the people interviewed for census purposes were granted the right to determine which language they considered native and when doubts arose it was ordered that the language they knew best or which they used in the family be recorded<sup>23</sup>. Similar rules were used in the last Soviet and the first Ukrainian census. Thus in censuses a given language was ascribed to both the people who deemed it native (in general the language of the declared nationality) even if it was not necessarily used in everyday life, and also to the people who considered it native (used everyday) but it was not necessarily linked to their declared nationality or that of their spouses (in mixed families Russian was generally declared as the language used at home also in families where nobody in the family was Russian).

<sup>22</sup> Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy, *Zerkalo Nedeli*, nr 34, 2010.

<sup>23</sup> V.I. Kozlov, *Natsionalnosti SSSR. Etnodemograficheskiy obzor*, Moscow 1982, p. 236n.

## II. THE UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN LANGUAGES IN UKRAINE'S SOCIAL LIFE (SELECTED ASPECTS)

### 1. Linguistic identification in the light of sociological research

Before we proceed to outline the language situation in Ukraine, it is worth making a review of certain facts about the Soviet language policy. After Stalin's death the "repressive" Russification ceased and its place was taken by a policy which was pursued without larger changes until the end of the USSR. The "republican" languages were granted formal primacy but Russian gained the title and status of the "language of inter-nationality communication", which in fact was the state language<sup>24</sup>, and to an increasing degree the administrative language across the country. As time passed a concept appeared that the Russian language is the "second native language" of citizens of the USSR, which corresponded to the thesis about the emergence of the "Soviet nation, the new historical community of peoples". In Ukraine this process was met with a weaker resistance than in Baltic or Transcaucasus republics mainly because the two languages were close to each other and because of the huge number of Russian immigrants. In consequence, the Ukrainian language was systematically ousted from all spheres of social life.

The dominance of the Russian language in the life of non-Russian communities was encouraged by the fact that Russian was the language of the majority of the population of the USSR, the only language used in the army and a natural *lingua franca* on great industrial building sites which grouped together migrants from various regions. Russian teaching was also compulsory in all schools with non-Russian language used for teaching and, since two languages from within the USSR were not taught, children from schools for minorities (e.g. Polish schools in Lithuania or Ukraine) did not learn the "titular" language of their particular republic.

In line with the last Soviet census of 1989 Ukraine had 51.5 million inhabitants, including 37.4 million Ukrainians (72.7%) and 11.3 million Russians (22.1%)<sup>25</sup>. Among the Ukrainians 32.8 million (84.3%) considered Ukrainian to be their native language, for 4.6 million (5.6%) it was Russian, whereas among Russians 11.1 million (98.9%) declared that Russian was their native language and only 0.2 million said it was Ukrainian. Additionally, 23.2 million Ukrainians

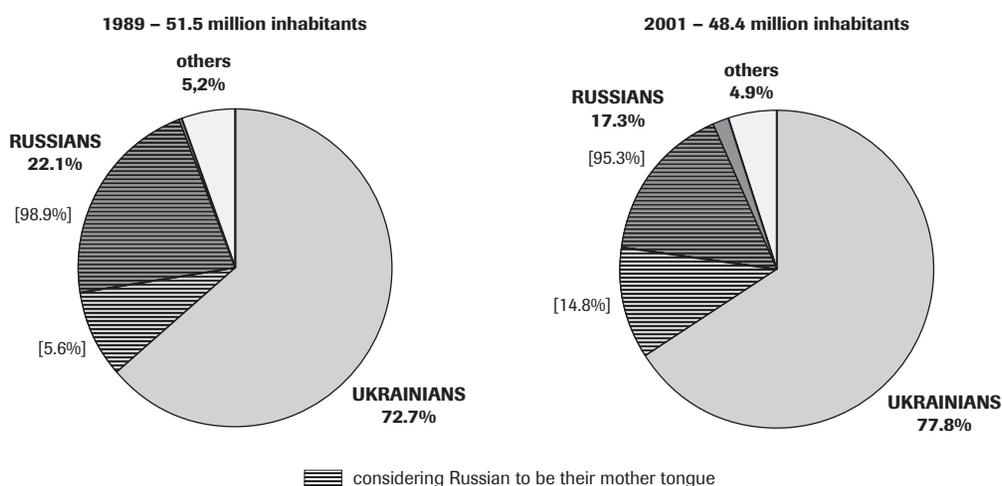
<sup>24</sup> The USSR constitution of 1977 did not define the state language or the official language.

<sup>25</sup> Here and further in the text I overlook data on other declarations concerning nationality and language.

claimed that they “speak Russian fluently” and 3.7 million Russians said the same about Ukrainian<sup>26</sup>.

According to the Ukrainian census of 2001<sup>27</sup> Ukraine had 48.4 million inhabitants, including 37.5 million Ukrainians (77.8%) and 8.3 million Russians (17.3%). Among Ukrainians 85.2% recognised Ukrainian as their native language and 14.8% said it was Russian, whereas among Russians 95.3% declared it was Russian and only 3.9% said it was Ukrainian (absolute figures were not published). The question about the command of a second language was not asked in that census<sup>28</sup>.

**Diagram 1.** Ukraine’s ethnic-linguistic structure according to censuses from 1989 and 2001



Source: Natsyonalny sostav naseleniya SSSR po dannym vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya, Moscow 1991; [www.ukrcensus.gov.ua](http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua)

As can be seen, within a decade the nation-state identification has substantially increased. Such an important decline in the number of “census-recorded” Russians cannot be explained solely by migration processes. It is rather due to some opportunist Ukrainians and people with unstable national identity who declared Russian nationality under the USSR but Ukrainian identity in the recent census, in several cases also on opportunist grounds. Similarly – and for similar reasons – the language-state identification also intensified.

<sup>26</sup> After: Natsyonalny sostav naseleniya SSSR po dannym vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya, Moscow 1991, p. 78–79.

<sup>27</sup> Another census is scheduled for December 2012, therefore its results in the area of interest to us will be made available not earlier than in the second half of 2013.

<sup>28</sup> After: [www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results](http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results), visited at 4.08.2004.

However, answers are dependent on the questions asked. Neither Soviet censuses nor the Ukrainian one admitted the declaration of Soviet nationality or dual nationality or language identification, whereas sociological research indicates that such options have occurred and are still present. In 2002 as many as 13% of Ukrainian respondents considered themselves above all citizens of the former USSR (41% saw themselves as citizens of Ukraine, 3% as members of their nation/ethnic group; the remaining respondents declared the primacy of regional identifications)<sup>29</sup>. In a different survey 16% of the respondents thought of themselves as connected mainly with Soviet culture (56% with Ukrainian culture, 11% with Russian culture and 7% with European culture)<sup>30</sup>. Andrew Wilson quotes data which shows that only 56% of those surveyed perceive themselves as “Ukrainians only”, 11% as “Russians only”, whereas almost 27% qualified themselves as “both Ukrainian and Russian”<sup>31</sup>. The case is similar with the language: 16% of Ukrainian respondents recognise that Ukrainian and Russian are their native languages to an equal extent (52% declare only Ukrainian, 31% only Russian)<sup>32</sup>.

**Diagram 2.** How Ukrainians identify themselves



**Source:** Institute of Sociology, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the company Socis; *Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 31, 2006

<sup>29</sup> The research was conducted by the Institute of Sociology, the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and the company Socis, after: *Den*, 11.12.2002.

<sup>30</sup> After: Lyudmila Shpangina, O strane, gosudarstve i grazhdanakh w perekhodnom vozraste, *Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 31, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Wilson, *Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation*, New Haven and London 2000, p. 219.

<sup>32</sup> After: L. Shpangina, *op. cit.*

In the light of what is mentioned above and also the body of other sociological research, not referred to here, the issues are however quite different than presented in the last census. According to various research regarding the native language at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century over half (52–65%) of those surveyed indicated Ukrainian, one third (32–36%) said it was Russian and the remainder mentioned languages of national minorities, however one research recorded 2% of people who hesitated with their declaration<sup>33</sup>. On the other hand, there was a fairly even three-way split of respondents who declared the use of Ukrainian, the use of Russian or the use of both languages depending on the circumstances in everyday life (that is family life<sup>34</sup>). Both divisions are quite stable and the disparities between particular research seem to stem from the use of different methodologies, not the volatility of social options.

Long-term research reveals that the percentage of citizens using only Ukrainian in their family life grew from 37 to 42% between 1992 and 2010, the percentage of those who used only Russian decreased from 39 to 35% and the share of those using both languages declined from 32 to 22%. Nevertheless, the percentage of Ukrainians declaring the use of Ukrainian at home at the same time fell from 51 to 42% and the percentage of those who used Russian more than doubled from 13 to 28%<sup>35</sup>. Results of long-term research into language preferences are however slightly different; its respondents were asked not about their native language or which language they used daily but which language they chose (which language was the most comfortable to speak). Here we can observe a very stable division into almost equal parts: 44% declared the use of Ukrainian in 1991 and 46% in 1998; the use of Russian over this period fell slightly from 56% to 54%, whereas the percentage of those stating Ukrainian was never higher than 49% and those stating Russian was never lower than 51%<sup>36</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> The research conducted by the Ukrainian Institute of Social Research, after: *Den*, 31.08.2000.

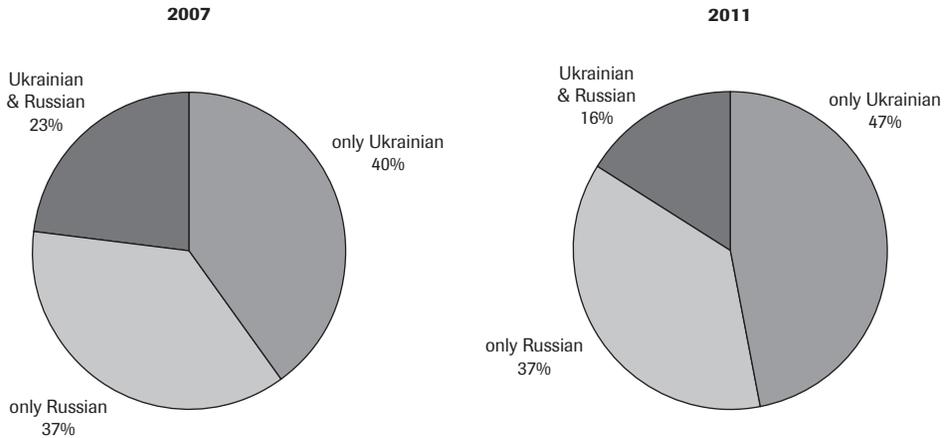
<sup>34</sup> The evidence for this is in the results of the research into the language of the inhabitants of Kyiv: in 2003 24% of them spoke Ukrainian at home, 8% at work, 4% on the street; [http://postup.brama.com/dinamic/i\\_pub/usual.php?what=8261](http://postup.brama.com/dinamic/i_pub/usual.php?what=8261), visited at 18.03.2003.

<sup>35</sup> Roman Solchanyk, *Ukraini 20 rokiv: mova*, <http://zgroup.com.ua/pront/php?articleid=4844>, visited at 15.07.2011.

<sup>36</sup> *Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy*, *op. cit.*

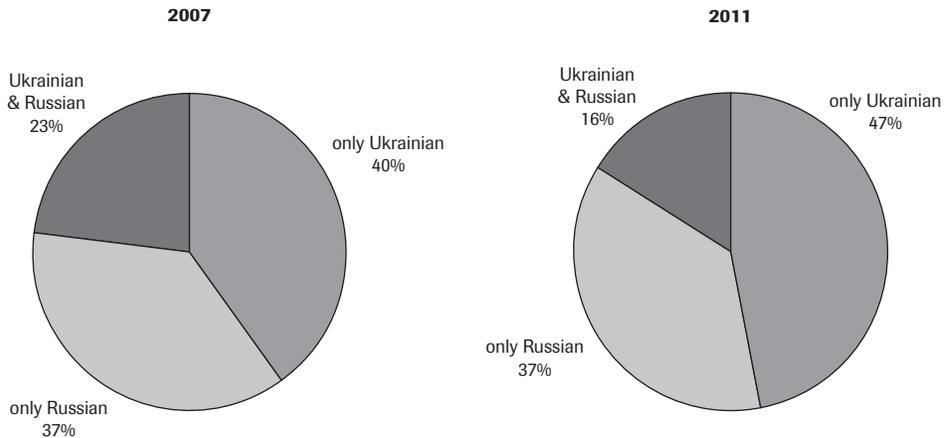
**Diagram 3.** Everyday language of Ukraine’s citizens

What language do you use at home?



Source: <http://www.rb.com.ua>

What language do you use at home?



Source: <http://www.rb.com.ua>

The latest research of Donetsk’s R&B Group point out that in 2011 the Ukrainian language was used at home by 47% of respondents (in 2007 this figure stood at 40%), Russian was used by 37% of respondents (37% in 2007), and both by 15% (22% in 2007). Ukrainian was used at work and in education by 45% (41% in 2007), Russian by 35% (35% in 2007), and both by 18% (22% in 2007), 2% (2% in 2007) of respondents declared that it was difficult to answer this question<sup>37</sup>.

<sup>37</sup> <http://www.rb.com.ua/rus/projects/omnibus/7859/>, visited at 3.11.2011.

This research paints a picture of a clear stabilisation and of a shrinking group of people who declare themselves to be bilingual. This picture is confirmed by a large body of other research; none of it however asks about the capacity to use the language in writing or about *Surzhyk* (a further problem is that it is difficult to expect *Surzhyk*-speakers to admit they speak it in sociological research).

In western districts where ethnic Russians are a migrant population from the post-war time, only 5% of inhabitants considered (according to the census of 2001) Russian to be their native language. In central districts it is 10% (and these are mainly inhabitants of towns), in the east: from 32% in the Dnipropetrovsk district to 75% in the Donetsk district<sup>38</sup>. As far as everyday language is concerned, Ukrainian is mainly or exclusively used by 89% of the population in western districts, 62% in the central districts, 16% in the eastern districts and 21% in southern districts<sup>39</sup>. According to different data in the Donetsk district, Russian was used at home by as many as 91% of those surveyed<sup>40</sup>. The social differentiation is also clearly visible: Ukrainian (apart from in the western districts) is used above all in villages and in small towns and Russian in big cities. Only 13% of the people who declared themselves Russian-speakers in the census lived in villages; respectively 47% of Ukrainian-speakers lived in cities<sup>41</sup>.

It needs to be added here that sociological research indicates an intensification of the regional differentiation of views on language (not only declared language preferences) and other symbolic matters, which a section of sociologists link with a significant decline in social mobility (between 1990 and 2005 the volume of passenger transportation in Ukraine halved)<sup>42</sup> and thus a decrease in inter-regional contacts<sup>43</sup>.

The overwhelming majority of Ukraine's inhabitants claim they know Ukrainian and Russian well. In a 2002 survey 74% of Ukrainians claimed they knew Ukrainian well and 82% claimed they knew Russian well. Results from the

<sup>38</sup> Vitaliy Nakhmanovych, *Dynamika etnonatsionalnykh protsesiv v Ukraini i zavrshchennya derzhavnoyi etnopolityky* [in:] Aktualni pytannya vitchyznianoyi etnopolityky: shlahy modernizatsii, vrakhuwannya mizhnarodnoho dosvidu, Kyiv, 2004, p. 94.

<sup>39</sup> After: L. Shpangina, *op. cit.*

<sup>40</sup> Ukraina dla rossiyan, *Polityka i Kultura*, no 25, 2000.

<sup>41</sup> Russkiy yazyk w Ukraine bez emotsiy, *op. cit.*

<sup>42</sup> L. Shpangina, *op. cit.*

<sup>43</sup> It has been/was confirmed by observation that for a significant part of the participants of the Orange Revolution that it was the first time they had been to the capital of their own country.

same survey revealed that 22% of respondents claimed they knew Ukrainian at a low level with 16% stating the same about Russian. Finally, 4% claimed no knowledge of Ukrainian with the figure for Russian standing at 2%<sup>44</sup>. However, with the lack of criteria for a “good command” of a language, this research measures only the subjective views of those surveyed. There is a difference between using a language in everyday life and between knowing it well enough in order to use it for learning at an intermediate and higher level, in professional communication, for purposes of high culture and finally between using it in private correspondence, court and official documents and for teaching this language.

The majority of Ukraine’s inhabitants do not see the language issue as important: in 2001 only 7% thought that it needed to be resolved immediately<sup>45</sup> and 10 years later 70% did not notice this problem at all<sup>46</sup>. In 2004 44% of respondents claimed that Ukrainian needed the state’s support, 21% thought that was Russian to be supported and 28% – that neither of the languages needed any support<sup>47</sup>. A year earlier 27% of those surveyed believed that the position of Ukrainian in an independent Ukraine improved, 6% claimed that it was in a worse situation, 26% that it had not changed and as many as 30% deemed the question formulated in this way artificial, unjustified<sup>48</sup>.

The support for granting Russian the status of an equal state language is considerable: in 2002 it was declared by 40% of respondents, whereas 39% said it would be appropriate to give it access to the official circuit following the wish expressed by local communities and only 17% said it should be entirely removed from this circuit<sup>49</sup>. Later research shows the stability of this division: in 2010, while answering a slightly different question, 43% of respondents backed the possibility of communicating with officials in Russian in the whole country and 34% supported this in selected districts while 17% of those surveyed were

<sup>44</sup> The research conducted by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine and Socis, after: *Den*, 12.11.2002.

<sup>45</sup> People’s Attitude to the Language Situation in Ukraine [in] National Security & Defence 3/2003, p. 36–39.

<sup>46</sup> After: [www.from-ua.com/adds/print?phpvoice/ea41a956b72cf](http://www.from-ua.com/adds/print?phpvoice/ea41a956b72cf), visited at 23.02.2011.

<sup>47</sup> Research conducted by the Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology APN Ukraine, after: *Den*, 31.01.2004.

<sup>48</sup> Research conducted by the Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology APN Ukraine, after: *Den*, 28.05.2003.

<sup>49</sup> Research conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology and the faculty of sociology at the Kyiv-Mohylan Academy, after: *Den*, 10.04.2002.

totally against it<sup>50</sup>. Certainly, in western districts proponents of full Ukrainisation are dominant and in eastern districts advocates of Russian being granted the status of state language are prevalent. The second option, though, also has an important following there.

Research indicates that the majority of Ukraine's inhabitants have a tolerant-indifferent attitude to the language question, which is in contrast to the radical, intolerant approach of the intelligentsia (particularly those from *the humanities*), both Ukrainian- and Russian-speaking. A substantial section of the Russian-speaking community displays a loyal/conformist attitude to the state; they want to remain to a large extent Russian-speakers but they are not opposed to the Ukrainisation of their children<sup>51</sup>.

## 2. Everyday speech in practice

There is not a problem with communication in everyday life in Ukraine. Spoken colloquial Ukrainian and Russian are mutually intelligible, which is proven by the common use of both languages in the media (a typical situation: a journalist asks questions in Ukrainian and receives replies in Russian; there is no translation). Furthermore, no problems are caused by the fact that in the Verkhovna Rada (Ukraine's parliament) some members use Ukrainian and others use Russian. In sociological research and conversations the argument that "everybody should speak the language they feel more comfortable using" is quite common, and this confirms the lack of difficulties in oral communication.

Numerous observations (also those made by the author of this text) reveal that the clear dichotomy in the use of the colloquial language between the east and the west of Ukraine is slowly fading. In the east the demonstration of the inability to use Ukrainian, which was commonplace over a dozen years ago, is now disappearing and the use of this language is ceasing to be viewed as "uncool"; young people are also becoming aware that a command of Ukrainian is a passport to a professional career. At the same time in the west of the country, even in Lviv, each year the presence of both Russian and *Surzhyk* is becoming more visible. Here it is mainly the younger generation that is undergoing

<sup>50</sup> Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy, *op. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy, *op. cit.*, also: Oksana Onishchenko, *Igry v patriotov, Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 43, 2011.

Russification, to a large extent under the influence of success stories promoted by mass culture which in Ukraine is almost exclusively Russian-language.

The Ukrainisation of education has led to a slight limitation in the use of *Surzhyk* and an increased use of correct Ukrainian. On the other hand, though, it has contributed to the degradation of the colloquial Russian language in Ukraine. Numerous authors, both Ukrainian and Russian, point to the fact that a growing number of Ukrainian Russians are using an impoverished and distorted version of Russian. Until recently language correctness was ensured by contact with great literature at school age<sup>52</sup>. Now with the reduced scope of teaching Russian literature, the lowering of the status of literature in school teaching in general, degraded forms of language, such as criminal slang, strongly present in popular songs (so called “popsa” and “shanson”), become more dominant. On the other hand more and more people share language “laziness” or negligence, being content to speak in a merely comprehensible way.

In Ukraine it is difficult to notice signs of concern for language correctness. Publications which promote language correctness (except for school manuals) are rare, style guides in the press are also rare (they are mainly seen in the nationalist press which does not promote the standard Ukrainian linguistic norm but the Galician version of the language with the clear intention of eliminating words and expressions present in both Ukrainian and Russian). The majority of politicians and other public figures (with the exception of intellectuals) use poor Ukrainian in the media, in some cases it borders on *Surzhyk*; “TV” Russian is not much better.

### 3. Schools

In 1991 the numbers of pupils in primary and secondary schools studying in Ukrainian and Russian were more or less equal, the regional differentiation was however enormous: from 97.6% children in the Ternopil district to 3.3% in the Donetsk district studied in Ukrainian<sup>53</sup>. For all children from schools where subjects were taught in Ukrainian (as well as minority schools) it was compulsory to learn Russian and Russian literature, whereas in only a few schools which taught in Russian did children study Ukrainian.

<sup>52</sup> Compare e.g. the opinion of Myroslav Popovych, the head of the Institute of Philosophy at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine ([http://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2011/05.25/79321/view\\_print](http://life.pravda.com.ua/culture/2011/05.25/79321/view_print), visited at 30.05.2011).

<sup>53</sup> Piotr Eberhardt, *op. cit.*, p. 247, complete data for each district.

In the following years there was a sharp increase in the number of schools which taught in Ukrainian (in general this was due to the transformation of the Russian-language schools into Ukrainian-language ones or the establishment of Ukrainian-language classes in Russian-language schools). In 1999 as many as 67.4% of children were taught in Ukrainian<sup>54</sup> and not all of them (although still the majority) learnt Russian as a subject. In 2010 the percentage of pupils studying in Ukrainian grew to 82.1%<sup>55</sup>. In the west and the centre of the country Russian-language schools disappeared almost entirely: in 16 districts of this part of Ukraine in 2010 merely 26 schools which taught in Russian remained and they were attended by 2.7% pupils from these districts. In Kyiv, a city of 3 million where at least half of the population is Russian-speaking, only six such schools remain. In the eastern and southern districts the number of pupils attending Russian-speaking schools dropped to 50.5%<sup>56</sup>. Except for the eastern and southern districts the number of children who are being taught in Russian is much lower than the percentage of the population which declare Russian nationality (we do not know, however, if this is also lower than the percentage of children from Russian families). Only in Donbas are the Russian-language schools clearly dominant but even there, for example in the town of Krasny Luch (the Luhansk district), at the beginning of 2011 there were 11 schools which taught in Ukrainian and four which taught in Russian<sup>57</sup>.

This situation sparked off protests from local Russian-speaking communities and caused politicians with a pro-Russian cultural orientation (which is not necessarily equivalent to the pro-Moscow political and state orientation, although this is frequently the case) to take preventative measures. After Viktor Yanukovych won the election, the ministry of education was taken over by well-known Russophile Dmytro Tabachnyk who supports an increase in the number of schools teaching in Russian in places “where parents wish so”. At the same time he leaves the majority of decisions in the hands of district governments which for economic reasons are seeking to limit the overall number of schools (for instance in Donetsk there are currently 64,500 pupils but 139,000 places in schools) but first they want to close down Ukrainian-speaking schools (in the east) or Russian-speaking schools (in the west)<sup>58</sup>. Protests against the closures of schools in general (in defence of the professional

<sup>54</sup> Volodymyr Lytvyn, *Ukraina na mezi tysiacholit*, Kyiv, 2000, p. 287.

<sup>55</sup> Roman Solchanyk, *op. cit.*

<sup>56</sup> *Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy, op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> *Donetschna mozhe zalyshytys bez ukrainskykh shkil?*, *Holos Ukrainy*, 11.02.2011.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

interests of teachers and convenience for parents, a phenomenon also known in other countries) were backed by the intellectuals and politicians who defended the “language *status quo*”. As a result, the authorities withdrew from closing down part of the schools. Nevertheless, the problem was not settled: the optimisation of the network of schools in Ukraine, where for over 15 years the population has been decreasing naturally, is inevitable and the pressure to increase the opportunities for learning in Russian seems to be mounting.

In 2007 standardised school leaving exams, carried out outside schools, were introduced in Ukraine, exclusively in Ukrainian (earlier they were organised by schools in the language in which they taught); similarly, Ukrainian became the language used for entrance exams at universities. This move was met with vehement protests from teachers – again not on “language” grounds but because school leaving exams were a source of corruption rent. Minister Tabachnyk, despite pressure, did not eliminate this form of exams; he did, however, make it possible to take them as well as entrance exams at colleges in seven minority languages<sup>59</sup>. At the same time, taking Russian at the school leaving exam became obligatory in 2012<sup>60</sup>.

A huge impact both on the education system and the development of pupils’ cultural identity comes from the way Russian literature is taught. Until 2000 in schools in Ukraine three subjects were taught: Ukrainian literature, Russian literature and foreign literature. The inclusion of Russian literature in classes on world literature lessons (taught usually in Ukrainian) diminished the extent to which it was known and did not influence the level of knowledge of Ukrainian literature. This added to the limitation of the teaching of Russian and further contributed to the above mentioned lowering of the level of everyday Russian used by young Ukrainians<sup>61</sup>. Currently, there are plans not only to

<sup>59</sup> Crimean-Tatar, Moldovan, Polish, Hungarian, Russian and Romanian (the resolution of the Education Minister no. 946 of 8.08.2011, link on the website: <http://www.mon.gov.ua/index.php/ua/pro-ministerstvo/normativno-pravova-baza/normativno-pravova-baza-diyalnos-ti-ministerstva?start=68>, visited at 8.11.2011). This solution gives preference to Russian in an evident way and when the possibilities of the Ukrainian education system are taken into consideration it grants certain privileges to Hungarians and Romanians, however only at several colleges in their original regions.

<sup>60</sup> In line with the above quoted resolution relating to the mock school leaving exam from 2012 the following subjects are obligatory: Ukrainian language and literature, Russian (without Russian literature), a foreign language (English, French, Spanish or German), mathematics, history of Ukraine, geography, biology, physics and chemistry.

<sup>61</sup> This effect was compounded by the introduction of generally poor Ukrainian translations of the leading works of Russian literature.

separate these subjects again (which can be seen as justified, at least in Russian-speaking schools) but also to enable Ukrainian literature to be included in the course on world literature, which would lead to a complete marginalisation of the national literature.

#### **4. State Institutions**

Unlike in everyday communication, when it comes to the written command of language, the language used in legal documents, the courts and public administration offices there are serious problems. The fact that one does not know an appropriate term or mistakes a Ukrainian word for a Russian one can and does cause misunderstandings which have legal implications. It seems, however, that the battle to enable Russian to be used in the official circuit is being waged not in the interest of citizens/applicants but officials, judges etc. who grew used to using Russian and who do not want to change their habits.

Since gaining independence Ukraine has tolerated the fact that the local governments and administration in the eastern and southern districts continued using Russian, although it was an explicit breach of law. Only after the Constitutional Court's verdict of 1999<sup>62</sup> did the "Ukrainisation" of the local governments and administration accelerate, even though in places where the Russian-speaking population is dominant the language of communication between these officials and citizens remains Russian and the language used during trials in court is almost always chosen by the parties involved. However, until 2004 those processes were slow, evolutive (to a certain extent linked with the rejuvenation in the ranks of officials and judges etc.) and did not cause any major objections.

The situation changed in 2005 when Viktor Yushchenko started ensuring that the real scope of the use of Ukrainian extend. He was doing it, however, in an awkward manner placing emphasis not on pragmatic aspects but symbolic ones (a campaign with slogans such as "one nation - one language - one Church" or "think in Ukrainian"), which provoked a categorical, negative reaction also from some of his followers. Nearly all Ukrainian commentators (except for extreme nationalists) agreed that Yushchenko, by overlooking the fact that the Orange Revolution was bilingual and promoted a "voluntary-compulsory Ukrainisation", acted to the detriment of the position of the Ukrainian language and culture in Ukraine.

<sup>62</sup> See below, chapter V.2.

In response to this, in spring 2006 many district and municipal councils in the east and south of the country started introducing Russian in the official circuit in their districts as the “regional language”<sup>63</sup>. Nearly all such resolutions were repealed by means of court verdicts (at the request of the prosecutor’s office, which is subordinated to the president). These verdicts (as with earlier resolutions) did not have a significant impact on the functioning of local governments and other local authorities.

After Viktor Yanukovich came to power in February 2010 “Ukrainisation” was hampered. In the new law on the judiciary system the use of “regional languages” (which in practice means Russian) was allowed in the work of the courts, which is against the both the Constitutional Court’s verdict of 1999 and the civil and administrative procedure codes. At the same time local governments again started granting Russian the status of a regional language. That time the bulk of those resolutions was again repealed by means of court verdicts – as it can be believed, mainly because such resolutions were “breaking ranks” without waiting for regulations at the national level (the present Ukrainian government is clearly oriented towards centralism). It is most likely that their intention is that everything will be regulated by the new law on language, which will be implemented without haste, probably only after the parliamentary election of 2012<sup>64</sup>.

At the same time Ukraine’s present central government is extending the scope and increasing the quality of the use of Ukrainian, at least in its own activity<sup>65</sup>. President Yanukovich, who himself continues to improve his spoken Ukrainian, has for example forced Prime Minister Azarov, who has declared many times that he would like to but was not able to learn Ukrainian, to use it in his public speeches. In times where the message sent by TV is the main form of shaping public opinion the importance of this fact cannot be overstated.

Out of four Ukrainian presidents to date, three (Leonid Kravchuk, Leonid Kuchma and Viktor Yushchenko) grew up in the Ukrainian-speaking environment, however only Kravchuk used Ukrainian in his professional career before 1991. For Viktor Yanukovich Ukrainian is a foreign language. Kravchuk as president used good Ukrainian in the public sphere,

<sup>63</sup> In reference to the Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. See below, chapter V.3.

<sup>64</sup> See below, chapter V.5.

<sup>65</sup> Compare Raian Menon, The Two Ukraines, GMF Policy Brief, July 2011, [http://www.gmfus.org/galleries/ct\\_publication\\_attachments/Menon\\_TwoUkraines\\_Jul11.pdf](http://www.gmfus.org/galleries/ct_publication_attachments/Menon_TwoUkraines_Jul11.pdf), visited at 2.11.2011.

the Ukrainian spoken by Kuchma can be described as correct and more strongly “Russified” (as prime minister in 1992–1993 he spoke mainly Russian). Yushchenko avoided speaking Russian, his Ukrainian was however not meticulous and was full of Russicisms. Yanukovych, who started learning Ukrainian only as prime minister (approximately in 2004), now speaks it correctly and quite freely.

The present chairman of the Ukrainian parliament Volodymyr Lytvyn and his two deputies, communist Adam Martyniuk and Mykola Tomenko from the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc, have grown up in a Ukrainian-speaking environment; all three are historians, therefore they have used Ukrainian in their work. They all use good Ukrainian in public. For Prime Minister Mykola Azarov Ukrainian is a foreign language he knows poorly, which is apparent when he cannot read a prepared text.

Among leading Ukrainian politicians, members of the Party of Regions speak mainly Russian, although they use a Ukrainian version of Russian. The leaders of the Communists speak similarly, whereas the leaders of opposition parties (Our Ukraine, Batkivshchyna, the Front for Change etc.) and the People’s Party (headed by Lytvyn) use Ukrainian publicly with varying degrees of correctness (from excellent in the case of intellectuals from western Ukraine to very clumsy Ukrainian rife with Russicisms in the case of politicians from the central and eastern part of the country).

## 5. The media

Unlike other areas of language use, the language issue in the media, broadly speaking, has rather financial, not political or symbolic, importance. Regulations in this area translate into concrete profits for certain broadcasters, publishers, distributors etc. and losses for other ones.

Over the 20 years of Ukraine’s independence there has been a substantial increase in content published in Ukrainian in the press and the electronic media but in parallel, however, the availability of them has declined and therefore their importance has decreased. The number of press titles has sharply risen (only in the first decade – from 1,900 to 4,300) but their average circulation significantly fell. A considerable section of the print media is now represented by advertising and promotional press. As for the tabloid press, it is dominantly in Russian; Ukrainian is used mainly in magazines (monthlies and a part of the

weeklies), usually having a small circulation (these are of course also present in Russian) and the nationalist press. Certain titles are published in both language versions (e.g. Kyiv's daily *Den*). The majority of the formally nation-wide press (including the opinion-forming press) has a small circulation and is not available outside the capital<sup>66</sup> and in the regions the local press is predominant, in western districts and partly in central ones it is in Ukrainian and in the rest of the country in Russian<sup>67</sup>. Both daily newspapers circulated nationally, *Segodnya* and *Komsomolskaya Pravda v Ukraine*, are published in Russian and there is no equivalent daily published in Ukrainian<sup>68</sup>.

Currently 90% of the annual circulation of magazines and 70% of newspapers are published in Russian<sup>69</sup>. Since Ukraine's print media (despite advertising and partly the tabloid press) in the overwhelming majority are not financed through their sales and advertisements, it can be assumed that the fact that certain titles are sustained in this or another language version depends on the preferences and/or political goals of their owners.

The situation is different in case of the electronic media; it is irrelevant to compare it with the situation from before 1991 because of the scope of their development during the last 20 years. TV stations and FM radio stations are meant to make profits, above all from advertising and their possible number is limited by the available transmission frequencies. As is not the case with the print media, in Ukraine numerous foreign TV channels, above all Russian ones, are also available (in cable networks or through satellite). Therefore the majority of conflicts related to regulating language issues must be seen as an element of the battle the broadcasters are fighting for their place on air and on the advertising market, not over the opportunity for influencing the awareness of viewers (the latter may be the main goal of the political TV and radio stations which

<sup>66</sup> With the exception of the dailies *Holos Ukrainy* and *Uriadovy Kuryer* which are instruments of, respectively, the parliament and the government and are aimed at state and local administration officials.

<sup>67</sup> For instance in the Luhansk district only one magazine in Ukrainian is issued, the niche *Kozatska Varta*, an instrument of one of the local Cossack organisations (*Iryna Mahrytska, Kudy tiahne Ukrainy neukrainske kozatstvo?*, *Shlakh Peremohy*, no 47, 2011).

<sup>68</sup> Until 2004 this function was fulfilled by *Silski Visti*, a newspaper aimed at the rural population, it had few pages and presented a very low standard in terms of content. It later lost its mass nationwide character.

<sup>69</sup> [www.unian.net/ukr/print/428977](http://www.unian.net/ukr/print/428977), available from 4.04.2011, also Irina Kushnir, *Ukraina Moloda*, 9.11.2011, quoted after: *Nashe Slovo*, no. 47, 2011.

play a marginal role on the media market and are supported by their owners as is the case with “5 Kanal”).

According to the recent data, 47% of the overall broadcasting time of the eight main TV channels was occupied by programmes broadcast in Russian, 31% by bilingual programmes and 22% by programmes in Ukrainian<sup>70</sup> (there are no equivalent data for radio). This results mainly from the fact that TV is focused on viewers from towns and cities with an average and lower than average education, i.e. the consumers of advertising. This group, except for in the towns and cities of western Ukraine, is mainly Russian-speaking or *Surzhyk*-speaking and undisclosed marketing research apparently points to the fact that the removal of advertisements in Ukrainian does not affect the effectiveness of an advertising campaign<sup>71</sup>. Furthermore, as advertisers only exceptionally run campaigns exclusively on the Ukrainian market, the abandonment of the Ukrainian version means considerable savings (it was not by accident that one of the demands presented by the National Television and Radio Broadcasting Council of Ukraine to Russian channels was to broadcast exclusively advertisements paid for on Ukrainian territory).

Actions such as the order from 2008 to remove the main Russian channels from Ukrainian cable networks have to be seen in this context. It was mainly about the right to broadcast the Eurovision contest and the related colossal proceeds from advertisements; Ukrainian TV bought exclusive rights to broadcast this event in Ukraine, whereas the broadcast from Russian TV was also to be available in cable networks<sup>72</sup>. This issue was however granted political significance, also in Russia which perceived this ban as an act of discriminating against the Russian-speaking community and used it as another motive to attack President Yushchenko. Incidentally, it was above all distributors of satellite reception sets who profited from the temporary (and only partly enforced) ban on the broadcasting of ORT and RTR TV channels which are very popular in Ukraine.

The story is slightly different with FM radio stations. In this case the fight for local frequencies is much fiercer and large companies taking part in it are

<sup>70</sup> Irina Kushnir, *op. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> The situation is slightly different in outdoor advertising where the pressure from the government and local administration “persuaded” advertisers to Ukrainise the displayed materials.

<sup>72</sup> Such conflicts, including those regarding important sporting events, are not specific only to Ukraine.

trying to oust small, local ones (usually the “Ukrainian-music-broadcasting”<sup>73</sup> stations usually belong to this group). Attempts at introducing (compatible with EU norms) quotas on the “domestic production” in the media have not brought about any important results: broadcasters provide the explanation that “you cannot force listeners to listen to something that they do not want to” and “orchestrated” voices of the listeners who demanded Russian songs to be broadcast<sup>74</sup>.

In Ukraine one can sometimes hear that the deluge of Russian “popsa” and “shanson” and the promotion of the idols of the older generation (Yosif Kobzon, Alla Pugachova) is an element of Russian “spiritual aggression” against Ukraine, that is – in more politically correct terms – an element of Russian soft power. However, even without the hypothetical inspiration from Russia, Ukrainian FM radio broadcasters would act in a similar manner, dictated by the situation on the market. They could possibly be eager to broadcast Ukrainian “popsa” but no such music is being produced.

The domination of “popsa” which promotes slang and a careless way of speaking (and also advertisements which have a similar impact) has a decidedly negative impact on the language situation in Ukraine: it contributes to the blurring of the linguistic norm, both that of Ukrainian and of Russian, and lowers the average language competence of the population in Ukraine.

## 6. Cinema

Between 2006 and 2010 the issue of dubbing cinema films was the subject of a great dispute in Ukraine. The Ukrainian government tried to force distributors to ensure that a half of the copies of foreign films were dubbed in Ukrainian or had Ukrainian voice-over and not – as had previously been the case – only Ukrainian subtitles in parallel with Russian dubbing/voice-over; and even that was not always done. The dispute concerned not Russian cinema but rather the common practice of screening the blockbusters of world cinema in Ukraine with Russian dubbing or subtitles. The order to have films

<sup>73</sup> I have introduced this neologism as this dispute is not about the language used by radio presenters but about the country from which the broadcast music production comes. Ukrainian papers in general use the term “national audiovisual production”; a rather nonsensical term, “Ukrainian-speaking music”, also appears.

<sup>74</sup> The business nature of this dispute is confirmed by, among other sources, the article of Lesya Ganzha, *Vmesto muzyki, Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 40, 2011.

dubbed in Ukrainian brought about significant losses to distributors, however, contrary to the propaganda they used, it did not affect the number of viewers in cinemas (in large cities films were usually screened in both language versions at the same time). Eventually, the regulation which imposed dubbing was removed and this move enabled copies of films made in Russia to be brought in once again (and also those which were ordered in other countries where the production costs are lower than in Ukraine). Recent data indicate that 69% of films shown in cinemas in Ukraine are dubbed in Ukrainian or have a Ukrainian voice-over and the remainder are subtitled in Ukrainian (and often there is Russian dubbing or voice-over in the background)<sup>75</sup>.

This dispute is more about business than culture. The dubbing of a cinema film costs on average US\$ 25,000<sup>76</sup> and there are several premieres a week<sup>77</sup>. It is therefore a major cost for distributors and it brings great profits to few dubbing companies (according to sources in Ukraine there is only one such company, B&H Film Distribution, the largest film distributor in the country). Dubbing is also a great school for young actors and a source of income for them, which is certainly not insignificant in a situation where Ukrainian cinema is in ruin.

## 7. Books

Ukraine's independence has brought about a decrease in the availability of books in the country, which has also triggered a fall in readership. The number of published titles has grown (in 1990–2001 from 7,000 to 10,000) but their overall circulation declined in the same period from 170 to 48 million annually, including books published in Ukrainian – from 95 to 29 million)<sup>78</sup>. Even when one bears in mind the fact that Soviet propaganda literature stopped being printed, this fall is dramatic. One must also remember that a large part of the

<sup>75</sup> Irina Kushnir, *op. cit.*

<sup>76</sup> Oksana Klymonchuk, *Khto lobiyuye interesy rosijskykh dystrybutoriv v Ukraini*, material from the UNIAN agency, 13.05.2010.

<sup>77</sup> In the first 10 months of 2011 183 foreign films were shown in Ukrainian cinemas ([www.unian.net/ukr/print/472577](http://www.unian.net/ukr/print/472577)), visited at 6.12.2011.

<sup>78</sup> *Statystychny Shchorichnyk Ukrainy 2007*, Kyiv 2008, p. 499. Later, there was an increase in the circulation of published books, up to 56 million copies (18,000 titles) in 2007. However, the overall circulation of books in Ukrainian amounted to 29 million copies in 2007, which is the same as in 2001 (*op. cit.*). Later data point to 58 million in overall circulation in 2008, 45 million (22,000 titles) in 2010 and 34 million according to initial data for 2011 (Anna Zhuravska, *Ukrainskaya kniga yest i budet!*, *Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 48, 2011).

books published in Ukrainian are school manuals, legal texts etc., therefore Ukrainian literature “for reading” has become even less available.

However, the real disproportion between the availability of books in Ukrainian and books in Russian is greater as books published in Russia are available without any constraints in Ukraine. Russian publishers who operate on the huge market of the former USSR have a competitive edge. Their books were for a long time cheaper than those printed in Ukraine; only in approximately 2006 as a result of new customs regulations did they become more expensive. This was probably the result of pressure exerted by large Ukrainian publishers who issue books in Russian because only they enter in competition with books imported from Russia. It is estimated that books in Russian (domestic and imported) currently make up as much as 87% of books sold in Ukraine<sup>79</sup>.

The disproportion of availability of books in the two languages is exacerbated by the dismal state of Ukrainian bookstores. The number of book stores has dramatically fallen, modern bookstore chains are a new phenomenon visible only in recent years, there are no nationwide distribution companies (wholesalers) and the main trade in books has moved to bazaars. In many Ukrainian towns (such as Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk) it is even difficult to find bookstores. This also works against books in Ukrainian (except for school manuals etc.): a large bookstore, especially one from a chain, can afford to run the department with books in Ukrainian or offer Ukrainian books while being aware that fewer copies of them will sell in comparison to books in Russian. A market stall holder or bookstore owner cannot afford to do this. In consequence, for example Lviv is inundated with Ukrainian books (often published due to grants, not market forces) which bookstore owners in Kyiv have never even heard of.

According to sociological research, 42% of “active readers” in Ukraine read literature in Russian only, 15% – in Ukrainian only and the rest declares that they read in both languages (which can mean that in reality they read only in Russian)<sup>80</sup>. It is not known what percentage of the Ukrainian population does in fact read literature.

<sup>79</sup> Irina Kushnir, *op. cit.*

<sup>80</sup> *Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine...*, *op. cit.*

Ukrainian writers who write in Ukrainian (as there are also Ukrainian writers who write in Russian<sup>81</sup>) frequently demand to be granted administrative preferences: not only to restrict imports of books from Russia but also to accord preferences to literature in Ukrainian. Thus they defend their position and revenues (similarly as with singers) but do not pay attention to the fact that mass readers are looking for popular literature and such literature is hardly ever written in Ukrainian. It is available exclusively in Russian, even if their authors are Ukrainian. They write in Russian not only because they have a better command of it: many of them from the very beginning count on Russian publishers who offer higher writer's fees corresponding to much higher circulations. Several attempts at publishing popular literature (mainly fantasy and action/crime literature) have failed due to the competitive advantage of publishers of books written in Russian (including domestic publishers).

The fact remains that it is not "high" literature but popular literature that is read by the wider public. The reader expects books which tell simple love, crime and fantasy stories in simple language. They shape society's language imagery (together with the electronic media). In bilingual Ukraine it has a special significance: the lack of popular literature in the state language discourages its use in contexts outside officialdom.

<sup>81</sup> For instance, novelist Andrey Kurkov, whose books are translated in countries such as Germany and Poland, playwright and novelist Anatolii Krym (also known in Poland) or the group of popular fantasy writers – Maryna and Serhiy Dyachenko, Vladimir Vasilyev and other writers. Part of the latter also write in Ukrainian.

### III. LANGUAGE AS A FIELD OF SYMBOLIC AND IDENTITY RIVALRY

Language is an important factor in determining people's national identity and an element of the "symbolic identity" of a modern state. We know many examples from the history of battles over language dominance between the state and part of its population; one of them is the Germanisation efforts of the German state, other examples are: the long-term – dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century – fight the British Crown had with Welsh, the battle pursued by Czechs over the recognition of the existence of the "Czechoslovak language" by Slovaks, and Croats striving to emancipate their language from "Serbo-Croat". In the historical East Slavic language area this dispute, fuelled on the one hand by relatively small language differences and on the other hand by political ambitions, is still ongoing. The language issue is today the main area of "symbolic and identity" rivalry between Kyiv and Moscow and it does not seem this situation is about to change.

The genesis of Ukrainian is the subject of contention. Closest to the truth is the view that until the 13<sup>th</sup> century in the East Slavic area there existed quite uniform, although dialectically differentiated, Old East Slavic (Rus Language<sup>82</sup>) which was common for the descendants of present-day Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. It had its literary (written) form, the local variety of Old Church Slavic. In the later period particular dialectic groups became more and more independent and under the influence of political factors and theological disputes in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries administrative languages – Russian, Belarusian and Ukrainian – appeared and were used both in the state and the Church circuits. The literary languages in the modern meaning emerged later: Russian in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ukrainian – towards the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both were formed on the basis of the earlier "administrative" languages. Contemporary Belarusian was established only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century on the basis of folk dialects, without any link to the extinct Belarusian "administrative" language<sup>83</sup>.

<sup>82</sup> The term "Rus Language" is not widely adopted, its introduction is however needed since the lexical similarity between "ruskiy yazyk" (Old East Slavic) and "russkiy yazyk" (contemporary Russian) is the subject to manipulation in ongoing linguistic and political disputes. The terms "Ruthenian Language" and "Rusyn Language" refer to other stages of the development of East Slavic languages.

<sup>83</sup> After: Franciszek Sławski, *Języki słowiańskie*, [in] *Języki indoeuropejskie*, ed. Leszek Bednarczuk, PWN Warsaw 1988, p. 948–964.

This view is however not commonly accepted, national interpretations of the genesis of the languages differ considerably and these differences are politically significant. The majority of Russian researchers consider the Rus language to be Old Russian and think that modern Russian comes in the simple and uninterrupted line from the Rus language (while minimising or ignoring the influence of the Finnish, Turk-Tatar and German languages on its development) and it is the only language that is its “legitimate heir”. At the same time they move the emergence of Ukrainian to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries and ascribe it to the influence of Polish and Polish political power. Several authors go as far as to claim that Ukrainian developed only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in East Galicia. As for Ukrainian researchers, they argue that the emergence of Ukrainian from the East Slavic language area occurred as early as between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>84</sup> and in the 14<sup>th</sup> century there already existed distinct Ukrainian, Belarusian and Russian languages.

There are also extreme, anti-scientific and even absurd interpretations such as the one claiming that “Russian and Ukrainian developed practically at the same time in the territory of Ukraine in the period beginning in the 10<sup>th</sup> century. Both languages are autochthonous to Ukrainian lands and are not the languages of migrants or conquerors; they have peacefully co-existed for over 500 years”<sup>85</sup>. On the other hand, there are views that Ukrainians come from the people of Neolithic Trypillian culture identified (without any justification) with Pre-Indo-Europeans, therefore (*sic!*) Ukrainian is one of the most “aboriginal” and the oldest Indo-European language (the Ukrainian pavilion at the 2010 Shanghai World Expo was subjected to this concept).

This dispute has political significance due to the identification of language with nation: a nation which does not have its own language cannot exist, a language not anchored in a nation cannot exist either. The second premise, which is widely recognised in discussions on this topic both in Ukraine and in Russia, is that there is a continuity of the existence of contemporary nations from their oldest forms of their development, which are possible to accept. In the light of this concept if the Ukrainian nation (the Russian nation, any other nation) exists, it must have existed in its present from since the very beginning of history. If there existed the Rus Language = Old Russian, there was also such

<sup>84</sup> Compare e.g. Oleksandr Paliy, *Ukrainska mova: krapochka nad nashym ‘i’*, [www.unian.net/ukr/print467427](http://www.unian.net/ukr/print467427), visited at 10.11.2011.

<sup>85</sup> [www.r-u.org.ua/analit/-/4220-news?tmpl+component&preview](http://www.r-u.org.ua/analit/-/4220-news?tmpl+component&preview), available from 23.03.2011.

a nationality which has developed into the modern Russian nation. Ukrainian and Belarusian (both the languages and nations) did not 'emerge' but have rather been severed from the "Rus/Russian trunk" and whose distinctiveness is an unnatural state and could/must be reversed.

If, on the other hand, the Rus Language is in fact Old Ukrainian<sup>86</sup>, the Ukrainian nation is not only distinct from Russian from the very beginning but it appears to be the first of the East Slavic nations which Russians have "split off from" and therefore the Russians are the "younger brothers" (both in terms of chronology and "honour"). It is the reversed image of the above mentioned Russian view, although its implications are merely nationalist and not imperial (they do not feature the demand of the "re-Ukrainisation" of Russians). The contention outlined above, still alive in historical and political discussions, is an important element of Ukraine's ongoing dispute over the ideological (symbolic) dominion which substantially impacts the way the language issue is thought about in Ukraine and possible solutions to it.

Ukrainian intellectuals and nationalistically-oriented politicians for a long time did not have any influence on Kyiv's politics since the government focused on pragmatic matters and did not understand the need to pursue an identity policy. The situation changed in 2005 when many nationalists appeared in the entourage of President Yushchenko; they overestimated the significance of the language issue and called for the Ukrainisation of the language sphere of the country. Yushchenko himself, being fascinated with history in quite an uncritical manner (e.g. he shares the vision of the Ancient Ukrainian Trypillian culture), supported these activities and became involved in them.

The western Ukrainian way of thinking about the role of language in the state, shared by Yushchenko, is well exemplified by his *sui generis* political legacy – the decree of 15 February 2010. The decree introduced the Concept of the State Language Policy<sup>87</sup>, according to which "Ukrainian as a means of communication and an intellectual expression of one's personality reflects the autonomy of the Ukrainian nation and provides the foundation for its spirituality and historical memory" and the "full functioning of the Ukrainian language in all aspects of the social sphere in the entire territory of the country is a guarantee

<sup>86</sup> In line with the view of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, first formulated in the classic article of 1903 "Zvychnaya skhema russkoyi istorii y sprava racionalnoho ukladu istorii skhidniogo Slovyanstva".

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.president.gov.ua/documents/10486.html>, visited at 2.11.2011.

of the Ukrainian nation's identity and Ukraine's unity". The present language situation is referred to as "deformed" and resulting from the "wide use of direct and implicit coercion" aimed at accelerating the denationalisation of Ukrainians, and the "normalisation of the language situation" will be achieved by helping Ukrainian to become clearly dominant. Further on the document states: "The priority of the state language policy will be to strengthen and develop Ukrainian – the decisive factor and the main token of the identity of the Ukrainian nation [natsya] whose historical home is the territory of Ukraine, which constitutes an absolute majority of Ukraine's population, which has given the official name to the state and is the fundamental system-forming constituent of Ukrainian statehood and the Ukrainian Nation [Narod] – citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities<sup>88</sup>. (...) Citizens of Ukraine, regardless of their ethnic origins, convictions or the positions they hold, should know Ukrainian as the language of their citizenship". After leaving office Yushchenko expressed it in a more brutal way: "Only occupants, slaves and fools do not speak the national language"<sup>89</sup>.

This approach, coupled with attempts to enforce the observation of the law relating to language among civil servants, and unreasonable measures such as attempts at imposing the use of Ukrainian on teachers in their private conversations at work have provoked a response from Russian-speaking circles who had been earlier satisfied with the *status quo*. This reaction was exacerbated by the fact that in each electoral campaign the parties canvassing constituents from eastern and southern Ukraine have been promising to grant Russian the status of equal state language (not only the status of official language) and therefore to raise its symbolic rank. After the election, however, they do not take any steps in this direction. When Viktor Yanukovich and his government followed suit, they came under stark criticism from Russian-speaking circles.

At present the main lobby for this orientation is the Pan-Ukrainian Social Organisation "Russian-speaking Ukraine", headed by an influential Member of Parliament from the Party of Regions, Vadym Kolesnichenko. The Organisation's goals include not only the "development of the Russian language and culture as the language and culture of the native population of Ukraine" but also the "popularisation of a shared history as the integrating factor for all East Slavic nations", the defence of the canonical Orthodox Church<sup>90</sup>, the bat-

<sup>88</sup> In Ukrainian (and Russian) political context "nationality" means ethnicity, not citizenship.

<sup>89</sup> [www.pravda.com.ua/news/2011/05/15/6199988/view\\_print](http://www.pravda.com.ua/news/2011/05/15/6199988/view_print), visited at 16.05.2011.

<sup>90</sup> That is the fight with the Ukrainian autocephaly, supported by nation-oriented politicians, including Yushchenko.

tle for the federalisation of the country's political system and finally the "fight with manifestations of racism, xenophobia and discrimination on language grounds"<sup>91</sup>. The way these goals are formulated and the argumentation used prove that they do not refer to combating the discrimination of the Russian language but rather the Ukrainian national identity itself.

For Kolesnichenko and his followers there is a close, unambiguous connection between Ukrainian and Greek Catholicism (seen as a result of "Western aggression" against Russia) and the anti-Soviet independence movement from the of World War II period which is in turn identified with Nazism etc. The Rusophile organisations and circles are opposed to Ukraine's rapprochement to Western structures and strongly support the integration of post-Soviet states. The logical consequence of their views is challenging the distinctiveness of the Ukrainian language and Ukrainian culture and therefore also the existence of the nation and the state. The holders of these views do not go that far, possibly because of tactical reasons.

It is worth pointing out that such organisations may easily gain support in certain European circles by portraying themselves as the defenders of all Ukraine's national minorities against Ukrainisation and as "the just few" who resist the development of the tradition of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and antisemitism in Ukraine etc.

Both briefly outlined "identity projects" draw the attention of relatively few circles, these are however the elites who make decisions regarding culture. They are also an excellent instrument to mobilise voters and neither side will thus abandon them. It should not therefore be expected that the heated debate over the language and identity issues will cool down or that a moderate, centre-oriented option will be developed.

<sup>91</sup> Kratkiy otchot after 2009-11; link on the website <http://www.r-u.org.ua/recomend/4536-news.html>, visited at 2.11.2011.

#### IV. RUSSIA AND THE UKRAINIAN LANGUAGE DISPUTE

The policy of the Russian Federation is not the subject of this paper. It cannot be entirely overlooked, however, because of the constant presence of the Russian media in Ukrainian public discussions and actions undertaken by the government and other bodies of the Russian Federation in order to influence the situation in Ukraine, also in the language sphere.

Russia, while formally accepting the dissolution of the USSR, almost from the beginning has tried to hamper the process of a real distancing of post-Soviet countries, particularly Belarus and Ukraine, treating them as part of the common geopolitical and civilisational area. As part of these actions Russia has been supporting the direct or indirect presence of the Russian media in Ukraine, aiming at maintaining Russian as the main or the only medium of economic, scientific and legal co-operation (which means giving the impression that the development of the written standard of Ukrainian in these spheres is not necessary) and promoting the vision described above of the exclusive legitimacy of the succession of the Russian language/culture/nation to the Rus Language.

Initially, the media (also Ukrainian versions of Russian newspapers and magazines, of course in Russian) and the natural dominance on the books market, particularly in the case of translations (which contributed to the maintenance of the role of Russian as the medium of contact with world culture and science), were the main channel of Russia's influence. After 2004 Moscow came to appreciate the importance of non-governmental organisations and started supporting and/or establishing non-governmental organisations which displayed a civilisational pro-Russian orientation. At the same time the rapid development of the Internet media has given Russia new instruments to exert influence which are being actively and skilfully used.

The Russian state has criticised the constraints on teaching Russian and especially Russian literature in Ukraine many times and has also raised the issue of the rights of the Russian-speaking community in official relations. Russia decidedly criticised the identity policy (including the language policy) pursued by Viktor Yushchenko, later it endorsed propaganda actions taken by Deputy Prime Minister Tabachnyk and aimed at a reversal of the changes in the education system introduced under Yushchenko. The Russian government has also backed the Moscow Patriarchy in its measures taken to counteract centrifugal

tendencies in the Ukrainian Orthodox Church<sup>92</sup>. Crimea has been a subject particular interest for Moscow as its population almost exclusively uses Russian and the Ukrainian-speaking community is composed exclusively of the immigrants who arrived there in the last half a century.

Approximately in 2007 the concept of “*ruskiy mir*” was invented, according to which the “area” of the Russian world/peace<sup>93</sup> extends also to citizens of other countries who speak Russian, learn or teach Russian, “those who have a sincere interest in Russia”. This idea is to be implemented by both the state and the Orthodox Church and its activities are set to be coordinated by the Russkiy Mir Foundation, established in 2007 and funded from the state budget.

The scope of this project and the foundation’s statutory activities go far beyond the language issues; nevertheless, hampering the Ukrainisation of Ukraine’s language sphere is one of its crucial goals. It can therefore be assumed (although we do not have any evidence for this) that the foundation organisationally and financially supports such organisations as “Russian-speaking Ukraine”.

Russia equally actively supports organisations of the Russian community in Crimea, where Russians make up the vast majority<sup>94</sup> and where they in large part do not feel a “symbolic” connection with Kyiv. Furthermore, most Crimean Tatars and a substantial part of Ukrainians living in Crimea are Russian-speaking. The existence of the Crimean autonomy makes it more difficult for Kyiv to pursue the language policy in this region. It does not, however, constitute a barrier to informal Russian influences.

<sup>92</sup> This issue is beyond the scope of this paper. In this analysis it is important to note that although Ukraine’s “dissident” Orthodox Churches see the use of Ukrainian in church life as a fundamental matter, the structures subordinated to the Moscow Patriarchy use it reluctantly, mainly at the request of local congregations.

<sup>93</sup> This duality of meaning is clearly explained in the official ideology of the Russkiy Mir Foundation. Compare [www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/ru/fund/about](http://www.ruskiymir.ru/ruskiymir/ru/fund/about), visited at 2.12.2011.

<sup>94</sup> As the data gathered in the census of 2001 indicates, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea’s population stood at 2.03 million, of whom 58.3% were Russians, 24.3% were Ukrainians and 12% were Crimean Tatars, the town of Sevastopol had a population of 400,000 people, of whom 71.6% were Russians and 22.4% were Ukrainians.

## V. LEGAL REGULATIONS OF LANGUAGE ISSUES

### 1. The Constitution

The Constitution of Ukraine, adopted on 28 June 1996, stated in the preamble that the Ukrainian Nation (*Ukrainsky narod*) is composed of the citizens of Ukraine of all nationalities. It therefore implicitly recognises the multilingualism of this political nation. However, article 10 states that, “The state language in Ukraine is the Ukrainian language” and further continues that, “The State ensures the comprehensive development and functioning of the Ukrainian language in all spheres of social life throughout the entire territory of Ukraine” and that, “In Ukraine, the free development, use and protection of Russian, and other languages of national minorities of Ukraine, is guaranteed”. Details are to be defined by a law which has not been made yet.

Therefore, the constitution of Ukraine states that Ukrainian is the only state language, Russian is only the language of a national minority (the fact that it is mentioned separately reflects not the size of this minority but its “honorary primacy”) and it is not, as in Soviet law, the language of “inter-ethnic communication”. At the same time the transitional provisions stated that laws adopted prior to this constitution entering into force (also in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic) “are in force where they do not contradict the Constitution of Ukraine” (Chapter XV, article 1) but no deadline was given for harmonising the legislation with the constitution. Therefore the language regulations to date remained in effect (including the law of 1989, commented on below) and it was not clear which of its provisions are contradictory to the constitution.

### 2. The law on language

The “Law of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic on languages in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic” adopted on 28 October 1989 states that the state language in the Ukrainian SSR is Ukrainian and that Russian (along with Ukrainian and other languages) has the status of “the language of inter-ethnic communication” and that the “Ukrainian SSR ensures the free use of Russian as the language of inter-ethnic communication of the nations of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics”. This law does not accord Russian special status among the “languages of other nationalities” and it places officials of the state administration, the party and other public organisations under the obligation to know Ukrainian and Russian and “when necessity arises – also another national language” (Art. 6). The possibility of using the language of

a minority where the majority of the population belongs to this minority was restricted to the level of the basic administrative division (towns and villages). At the same time the scope in which the use of Russian (along with and not instead of Ukrainian) was admitted in the activity of public institutions was defined so broadly that it can be said that it was admitted to be used as the official language, although this term is not employed in the law.

The incompatibility of this law with the Constitution of Ukraine was the reason for the verdict of the Constitutional Court of Ukraine of 14 December 1999 which stipulated that “Ukrainian as the state language is the obligatory medium of communication throughout the entire territory of Ukraine by the state authority and local authority bodies when exercising their competences (...), and also in other public spheres of social life which are regulated by law. (...) The teaching language in nurseries, primary, general secondary, vocational and technical and higher education establishments, state-owned and communal, is the Ukrainian language. In state-owned and communal educational establishments along with the state language (...) languages of national minorities may be used and taught”<sup>95</sup>. On the basis of this verdict the provisions about the exclusive use of Ukrainian in the official circuit were introduced to Ukraine’s many legal acts; the work on the new law relating to language, undertaken several times, have not however led to it being adopted, and the old law, even though it is widely ignored, remains in force.

### **3. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**

When Ukraine joined the Council of Europe, it was obliged to adopt the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (henceforth referred to as the Charter<sup>96</sup>), adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992. Ukraine signed it on 2 May 1999 and ratified on 15 May 2003 by means of law no. 802-IV<sup>97</sup>. The fact that the Council of Europe insisted Ukraine adopt the Charter can be assessed as a political error made by the Council of Europe since Ireland, Portugal, Belgium, Albania, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey, Georgia, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia all

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.ccu.gov.ua/uk/doccatalog/list?currDir=9343>, visited at 2.11.2011.

<sup>96</sup> <http://conventions.coe.int/treaty/en/Treaties/Html/148.htm>. Further quoted from this version.

<sup>97</sup> The earlier ratification law of 24 December 1999 was invalidated by the Constitutional Court on formal grounds.

refused to sign it<sup>98</sup>. These countries (excepting Portugal) have serious language problems and for various reasons did not agree to grant the rights defined by the Charter to particular minority languages. For the purpose of this paper the position of Ireland is of great importance as this country is struggling with an identical problem as Ukraine, which cannot be resolved by the Charter: its state language is at the same time the minority language.

The main objective of the Charter is to protect regional and minority languages which are defined by the Charter as “languages that are: (i) traditionally used within a given territory of a State by nationals of that State who form a group numerically smaller than the rest of the State’s population; and (ii) different from the official language(s) of that State; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the State or the languages of migrants. Further on, the Charter introduces the criterion of the numerical size of the group which uses a given language, and the “adoption of the various protective and promotional measures provided for in this Charter” must be “justified” by the size of this group and the term “non-territorial languages”, mainly to make it possible for the Charter to extend to the languages of the Romani people, Yiddish and Hebrew. Each signatory country of the Charter independently decides to which languages and to what extent it grants the protection provided for by the Charter.

The Charter does not state how large the group has to be in order for it to come under the protection of the Charter (several countries applied this protection to the languages used by groups of over a hundred people or to languages which are no longer used at all<sup>99</sup>). The Charter tacitly leaves it to its signatories to define what a language is and what a dialect is as well as to establish which groups are migration-based groups and which are not. The assessment of these may easily become the matter of political controversies, the more so that linguistics and sociology are not in full agreement on these issues.

The Charter cannot therefore be applied in a situation where a group which uses the state language of the country is a minority within its population (since the Charter cannot be the basis for the protection of the state language), nor can the protection provided for by the Charter extend to the language traditionally used by the majority of the country’s population.

<sup>98</sup> Among the Charter’s signatories the following countries have not so far ratified it: Iceland, France, Italy, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Moldova, Russia, and Azerbaijan.

<sup>99</sup> e.g. in Poland – the Karaim and Tatar languages.

The authors of the Charter were guided by the analysis of the situation in Western Europe where (except for Belgium and Ireland) in particular countries the state/official language is dominant (the language of the main national/ethnic community) and where next to the languages of national minorities there are also local languages whose speakers do not consider themselves as nationalities (e.g. Lower-German dialects recognised by Germany as regional languages or countless Italian dialects). The situation of the post-Soviet states and Yugoslavia's succession states has not apparently been taken into consideration, although the case of Ireland should have provided the opportunity for reflection. As a result, the Charter has been ratified by only two post-Soviet countries: Armenia and Ukraine.

The Charter entered into force in Ukraine in 2006. However, in Kyiv one of its key categories had been wrongly translated: instead of “minority languages” the Ukrainian text refers to the “languages of the minorities” (*movy menshyn*). In this regard Ukraine has declared it will protect the “languages of the following national minorities of Ukraine: Belarusians, Gagauz, Greeks, Jews, Crimean-Tatars, Moldovans, German, Poles, Russians, Romanians, Slovaks and Hungarians” and thus it has declared it will protect all these languages throughout the whole Ukrainian territory (the majority of the countries which are signatories of the Charter confine the protection of regional languages to their home regions). What draws attention is the fact that the Romani people have been overlooked (which is the result of Ukraine's not having adopted the provisions relating to non-territorial languages) as well as the lack of clarity of the terms “the language of the Greek and Jewish minority”<sup>100</sup>.

Ukraine, having made use of the opportunities provided for by the Charter, has not adopted certain language rights, including the possibility to conduct trials in languages of the minorities in courts or using these languages by the state administration bodies (they are replaced by the guaranteed right to have an interpreter). This move was intended to preserve – in line with the verdict of the Constitutional Court discussed above – the monopoly of Ukrainian in the administration of state bodies.

<sup>100</sup> We give more information on Ukraine's national and ethnic minorities in the Appendix.

#### 4. The new draft law on language

Drafts laws relating to language questions have been submitted to the Supreme Council of Ukraine (the Parliament) many times; a section of them were focused on ensuring the primacy of Ukrainian while others focused on guaranteeing the primacy of Russian. The most serious draft to date has been the document submitted by the Party of Regions in September 2010<sup>101</sup>, then corrected in part under the influence of the critical comments made by the Venice Commission<sup>102</sup>. The main points of this criticism were: the granting of excessive protection to Russian, the lack of a guarantee of due protection to Ukrainian as the state language and the lack of clarity of the term “*native language / *ridna mova*”*. The Venice Commission equally emphasised the necessity of improving the criteria of ethnic and language identification in the forthcoming census and asked for protection to be extended to an additional three languages: Karaim, Krymchak and Rusyn. The final draft of the law “On the rules of the state language policy”<sup>103</sup> was submitted in August 2011 and it can be expected that it will be brought under discussion at the Supreme Council in spring 2012.

The draft guarantees Ukrainian the role of the only state language, treats Russian as one of the “regional languages or languages of minorities” without according it a special position as had been the case in the draft of 2010. The latter stated that “Russian is the native language or the language used daily by most citizens” and referred to the “historically determined Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism” as an important element of Ukraine’s national heritage. It was apparently assumed that there is no need to accentuate the special role of Russian since all the rights granted to speakers of regional and minority languages will apply above all to Russian-speakers. It cannot be ruled out that the fact that Russian has not been given the status of the “second state language” stems from the reflection that in such a case it would no longer be protected under the Charter. Nevertheless, the Party of Regions still has the slogan “one nation – two languages” in its electoral agenda and demands the introduction of the second state language; it seems that its leadership is not unanimous in this matter.

<sup>101</sup> No.1015-3; [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb\\_n/webproc4\\_1?id=&pf3511=38474](http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb_n/webproc4_1?id=&pf3511=38474), visited at 2.11.2011.

<sup>102</sup> Opinion no. 605/2010 of 7.01.2011, [http://www.venice.coe.int/site/dynamics/N\\_Opinion\\_ef.asp?L=E&OID=605](http://www.venice.coe.int/site/dynamics/N_Opinion_ef.asp?L=E&OID=605), visited of 15.09.2011.

<sup>103</sup> No. 9073, [http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb\\_n/webproc4\\_1?id=&pf3511=41018](http://w1.c1.rada.gov.ua/pls/zweb_n/webproc4_1?id=&pf3511=41018), visited at 2.11.2011.

The draft for the first time clearly defines the state language, the language group etc. The native language is the “first language which a person has learnt in early childhood”. This definition in fact removes the rights relating to language of most small minority groups which are entirely or almost entirely Russified. The norm which states that “everyone has the right to freely choose the language which they consider to be their native language” is in stark contrast to this definition.

The draft enables regional languages and the languages of minorities to be used as administrative languages by local authorities and public administration, including the use of them in correspondence between government bodies and also for legal acts to be issued in them. The draft guarantees the right to freely choose the language of instruction but with the reservation that teaching Ukrainian is compulsory “to the extent which is sufficient to ensure integration in Ukrainian society” and it is clearly stated that the Ukrainian language and its literature can be taught only in Ukrainian. The issues of language proportions in the media and the question of whether or not to introduce dubbing, voice-over or subtitles in screened films are left to be decided by their owners and language regulations regarding advertising were removed. The exclusiveness of Ukrainian has been maintained only in the army.

The draft law extends to the following languages: Russian, Belarusian, Gagauz, Yiddish, Crimean-Tatar, Moldovan, German, Modern Greek, Armenian, Polish, Romani, Slovak, Hungarian, Rusyn, Karaim and Krymchak<sup>104</sup>. The prerequisite for the introduction one of these languages to be used in parallel with the state language is the will of the population of a given administrative unit, expressed by the signatures of at least 10% of the population (without the reservation that it applies only to adults). The will of the population expressed in this way is binding for the local administration and the local government. The draft treats all the levels of the administrative division of the country as equal, it does not provide for safeguards against the introduction of several non-state administrative languages in the same administrative unit. Thus after the law has been voted on, the following situation will be possible: for example in one of the counties<sup>105</sup> of the Zakarpattia district several languages will be in force

<sup>104</sup> In this way, with Russian being excepted from Ukrainian alphabetical order and the mechanical addition of the three last languages which were put forward by the Venice Commission. A brief outline of the nationalities in Ukraine is presented in the Appendix.

<sup>105</sup> In Ukrainian and Russian “raion”.

at the same time: Ukrainian as the state language, Hungarian as the district language, and Slovak and Romani as county languages.

In the draft the earlier intention of introducing the languages of minorities as administrative languages directly on the basis of census results was abandoned (this would mean the compulsory, immediate introduction of Russian as an administrative language to 13 of the 27 districts of Ukraine and the introduction of Crimean-Tatar in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, or Hungarian in the Zakarpattia district and Romanian in the Chernivtsi district. The objective of introducing this change may have been to limit the political significance of the census which is supposed to be held in 2012, which means it would coincide with the electoral campaign. The provision which states that the size of “regional language groups” is established on the basis of the census has been maintained in the draft; quite likely it is intended to provide a way to refuse to recognise the will of 10% of the population living in the region where for certain reasons it will be inconvenient for the local government.

An important element of the draft, which takes into consideration the expectations of the Ukrainian-speaking community and implements some of the demands of the Concept of the State Language Policy of President Viktor Yushchenko discussed above, is the commitment made by the government to support the development of the lexicographic base of Ukrainian<sup>106</sup> and validating such dictionaries (including spelling dictionaries) used in administrative practice.

One strong point of the draft is its complexity which includes the introduction of appropriate amendments in other legal acts featuring the norms of the administrative language (procedure codes, the education law, the civil status law, the cinematography law etc.). Nevertheless, the reference made to the constitution was removed from the amended provisions of these laws, since the law relating to language was recognised as the only legal act which regulates these issues. The law relating to language is therefore intended to have an overriding, quasi-constitutional character<sup>107</sup>. This intention is confirmed by the words

<sup>106</sup> Due to the insufficient number of specialist dictionaries, Russian is still the predominant language in the works of life science and physical science at the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. Compare: Nikolai Danshyn, *Yazykovy katamaran Ukrainy, Zerkalo Nedeli*, no 10, 2010.

<sup>107</sup> In Ukrainian publications the term “*bazovy zakon*” (basic law) is often used, which may be interpreted as referring to a special status of a law that regulates a given sphere of social life in a comprehensive way. However, this is not a legal term as the constitution of Ukraine has not introduced the hierarchisation or “categorisation” of laws.

of one of the draft's authors, Vadym Kolesnichenko, that the law relating to language is set to become a "new social contract"<sup>108</sup>.

There are no doubts that the discussed draft is focused not on the protection of regional languages but on the preservation if not the extension of the presence of Russian in the public sphere and in the work of the state administration. The draft is very liberal and (post)modern, which is manifested for example in the "principle of plurilingualism"<sup>109</sup> which states that "each member of society freely speaks several languages, in contrast to the situation where particular language groups use only their own language" (this principle equates to the demand that all citizens of Ukraine fluently speak Russian). However, the liberalisation of language in Ukraine will contribute to the presence of Russian increasing in the sphere of social life; the development of Ukrainian requires the use of some kind of affirmative action.

<sup>108</sup> Rada Evropy vymahaye priyniattia zakonu "Pro movy v Ukraini", *Holos Ukrainy*, 5.10.2010.

<sup>109</sup> An exact translation of the original neologism.

## CONCLUSIONS

1. The phenomenon of bilingualism in Ukraine is a fact, as is the strong regional differentiation of the language situation. 20 years of independence for Ukraine shows that there is no doubt that it is a durable phenomenon, resistant to the twists and turns of state politics, one which cannot be eliminated by means of political instruments or easily changed through the Ukrainisation of education (assuming that it will be fully implemented). Therefore, allowing Russian to be used in public life, also in the official sphere, is justified both on the grounds of the pragmatic functioning of the state and of human rights.

2. The opposition to the establishment of Russian as the second official language and the demand of the “positive discrimination” of Ukrainian in the media are commonly justified by the argument that the former will lead to the marginalisation of Ukrainian also in other spheres of public life. This argument seems relevant: indeed Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism may easily lead to the establishment of Russian-speaking monolingualism. And it appears that for at least a section of the champions of bilingualism this is exactly what they are seeking.

“Granting full rights” to Russian or even only a further growth of its role in public life in Ukraine may contribute to the undermining of one of the crucial symbolic attributes of the state and to threatening the human rights of the Ukrainian-speaking community. It could even lead to relegating Ukrainian in Ukraine to the role of a regional language, deprived of state support (in line with the Charter’s provisions). Therefore the efforts undertaken by the state in order to protect Ukrainian and to extend its use are justified as a principle (although the Charter cannot be the basis for the protection of it). Nevertheless, these measures have not so far been established in Kyiv in a form that would be both effective and compatible with the standards of a democratic state.

3. The role of language in the self-identification of Ukrainians is overstated and the language issue itself is strongly ideologised and politicised. The vast majority of the society does not see it as important and does not think they are being discriminated against on language grounds (as much as 84.5% of the respondents claim that they have not been subject to any violation of their language rights<sup>110</sup>), although when applying European standards one can point to

<sup>110</sup> Russkiy yazyk v Ukraine bez emotsiy, *op. cit.*

the discrimination (after 2004) of Russian-speaking citizens, particularly in the area of education. The language issue is, however, exceptionally important for the intellectual elite and nationalist circles (to a greater extent for Ukrainian ones than Russian) for whom the language is both the instrument of expression and the tool of ideological dominion. The “two Ukraines” which are in conflict, if not hostile to each other – the Ukrainian-speaking Ukraine and Russian-speaking Ukraine – exist mainly, if not only, among the elite and put together they represent a minority in society.

4. The fact that the majority of society does not consider the language issue as significant does however not mean that it is not important. Kyiv could afford to overlook this subject, even the fact that the current formula of bilingualism hinders the functioning of the state, leads to the blurring of the linguistic norm (both the Ukrainian and the Russian one) and limits the capacity to appreciate high culture, if it were not for Moscow’s policy. The constant pressure from Russia, which considers language to be an instrument of symbolic and political reintegration of the former Empire, forces Kyiv to pursue an active language policy, even more so that this pressure finds a following in Ukraine itself where the Russian chauvinist movement has been gathering momentum in recent years.

5. When one considers the solutions to the language issue outlined in the introduction which are theoretically possible, a consistent Ukrainisation is unrealistic: it could only be undertaken by a totalitarian regime and even so success would not be guaranteed since the societal forces which could endorse such a process are too faint and the economic interests linked with it are too weak. Furthermore, Kyiv would not find the international support for such an action, which would be needed to counterbalance Moscow’s opposition to it.

The introduction of bilingualism throughout the entire Ukrainian territory seems equally unrealistic. The establishment of Russian as the second state language appears to be even more unrealistic since one may anticipate violent opposition in the western part of Ukraine (going as far as to use separatist slogans) and because it would be a far-reaching concession in the sphere of the state’s symbolic identity, even for the forces currently in power in Ukraine. What is however real is the legalisation of Russian as a tool used in the public administration in part of the country. Furthermore, since the removal of Russian from public life in Ukraine is unrealistic, this solution is becoming inevitable and sooner or later it will have to be implemented. If it involved a real

decentralisation of the state and the establishment of the local government of local communities, it would definitely be of advantage to Ukraine.

6. The growing importance of the economic and symbolic factors in the language issue makes it more difficult to introduce any uniform solution as on the one hand it causes the temperature of the dispute to rise and prevents a rational discussion and on the other hand it reinforces the pressure of market players which push forward their own interests. Due to these factors and the reluctance of the Kyiv elite, which has been apparent for many years, to take a clear-cut position on this issue the most likely scenario for the coming years will be the tolerance of the current “unofficial bilingualism”.

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## APPENDIX

### The nationalities in Ukraine

Besides Ukrainians and Russians there are members of 16 larger and a few dozen smaller national minorities living in Ukraine; they make up both national minorities and communities of immigrants. As they are treated on an equal footing with Russians legally and often in terms of propaganda, it is justified to present a brief outline of them. These nationalities are presented in the order of their numerical size determined by the census of 2001<sup>111</sup>.

**Belarusians** (276,000; in 1989, 440,000). They live across the country (they are concentrated in the largest numbers in the Donetsk, Dnipropetrovsk districts and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea). In the vast majority they are a group of immigrants and not a national minority (in districts bordering Belarus there are only 28,000 of Belarusians). The decline in the number of people declaring that they are Belarusians in the period between the censuses is explained by their assimilation which is characteristic of immigrants easily integrating themselves with the population where they live. 19.8% of Ukrainian Belarusians recognised Belarusian as their native language, 65.2% said it was Russian and 17.5% declared that Ukrainian was their native language<sup>112</sup>.

**Moldovans** (259,000; in 1989, 324,000). They live above all in the Odessa district, where in one of the counties they constitute a relative majority, and also in the Chernivtsi district (its eastern part, historically belonging to Bessarabia, not Bukovina), in the lands which constitute the historical Moldovan settlement. The distinction between Moldovans and Romanians is of a historical nature: those living in Bukovina, which once belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, declare themselves to be Romanians, whereas those in the community which lived in the lands of the Russian Empire at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century think of themselves as Moldovans. Moldovan was recognised as the native language by 70% of Ukrainian Moldovans, Russian by 17.6% and Ukrainian by 10.7%.

<sup>111</sup> The census data after: Natsyonalny sostav naseleniya SSSR po dannym vsesoyuznoy perepisi naseleniya, Moskva 1991 and [www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results](http://www.ukrcensus.gov.ua/results), visited at 4.08.2004.

<sup>112</sup> Here and below the data does not represent 100% since part of the people subject to the census, particularly members of mixed families, declared a different native language.

**Crimean Tatars** (248,000; in 1989, 47,000). They live almost exclusively in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and in Sevastopol, a small group of them lives in the Kherson district. They are the traditional population of Crimea, in large part the descendants of the nationalities which inhabited the southern part of the peninsula before the Mongolian conquest. In 1944 they were expelled to Central Asia and started returning to Crimea at the end of 1980s (which explains the huge increase in the number of Crimean Tatars in the period between the censuses); a certain number of them still live in Uzbekistan and quite a large group lives in Moscow. 92% of Ukrainian Crimean Tatars recognised Crimean-Tatar as their native language, 6.1% said it was Russian and 0.1% indicated Ukrainian.

**Bulgarians** (205,000; in 1989, 234,000). They live mainly in the eastern part of the Odessa district, where in one of the counties they represent an absolute majority and in two other counties a relative majority. They are the descendants of the refugees from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, nowadays they are a national minority. Bulgarian was indicated as the native language by 64.2% of Ukrainian Bulgarians, Russian was chosen by 30.3% and Ukrainian by 5%.

**Hungarians** (157,000; in 1989, 163,000). They live almost exclusively in the southern belt of the Zakarpattia district, on the lands of the historical Hungarian settlement. In one county they constitute an absolute majority and in two further ones they make up a relative majority of the population. 95.4% of Ukrainian Hungarians declared Hungarian to be their native language, 1% declared it to be Russian and 3.4% indicated Ukrainian.

**Romanians** (151,000; in 1989, 134,000). They live mainly in the Chernivtsi district, where in two counties they represent an absolute majority, and in the Zakarpattia district, on the lands of the historical Romanian settlement. The increase in the number of their population may possibly be the consequence of the change in the declarations of certain people who earlier indicated the Moldovan nationality. Romanian was declared as the native language by 91.7% of Ukrainian Romanians, 1.5% indicated Russian and 6.2% Ukrainian.

**Poles** (144,000; in 1989, 219,000). They live mainly in the Zhytomyr, Khmelnytsky and Lviv districts, and in all these districts they are greatly dispersed. They are the descendants of the former Polish population (lower nobility or peasants) and were linked with Polishness (with the exception of western Ukraine) rather by the religion than the language. A substantial decrease in declarations of Polishness results from the assimilation (reinforced by the

Ukrainisation of the Roman Catholic Church still underway in Ukraine) and partly from immigration to Poland. As the only (along with Slovaks) national minority in Ukraine Poles tend to adopt rather Ukrainian than Russian. 12.9% of Ukrainian Poles declared their native language to be Polish by, 15.6% indicated Russian, and 71% Ukrainian.

**Jews** (103,000; in 1989, 486,000). They live in Kyiv (18,000) and in the towns of eastern and southern Ukraine. Their traditional language was Yiddish, while Hebrew became increasingly learned towards the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. A dramatic fall in the number of Jews can be explained by their mass immigration (its scope was larger than the comparison of the data reveals as simultaneously there was an ongoing process of many people who had earlier concealed their Jewish identity “coming out” as Jews). 3.1% of Ukrainian Jews declared their “own” language (we do not have any data as to what language that was) as native, 83% declared Russian to be their native language and 13.4% indicated Ukrainian.

**Armenians** (100,000; in 1989, 54,000). In Ukraine Armenians are a community of immigrants and they are to a minimal extent the descendants of former Armenians from the region of Podillia. They live dispersed, in towns. An increase in their number in the period between the censuses can be accounted for by their immigration. Armenian was declared to be the native language by 50.4% of Ukrainian Armenians, Russian was indicated by 43.2% and Ukrainian by 5.8%.

**Greeks** (91,000; in 1989, 98,000). They live mainly in the southern part of the Donetsk district. They are the descendants of Crimean Greeks, displaced here by Russia at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Their traditional languages are Rumaiica Greek which stems from Byzantine Greek, and Urum or Urumian, which belong to the Turkic language group; the promotion of Modern Greek in their community started only at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rumaiica and Urumian are nowadays used only by the oldest generation and it may be expected that they will be extinct quite soon. 6.4% of Ukrainian Greeks recognised as their native language their “own” language (we have no data as to which language of the three enumerated this was), 88.5% indicated Russian as their native language and 4.5% stated it was Ukrainian.

**Tatars** (73,000; in 1989, 87,000). They live mainly in industrial centres, one of the regions where they are concentrated is the Donetsk district, there are also many Tatars in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and Sevastopol. They are a group of immigrants, the descendants of migrants from the Tatar Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (the present Tatarstan). They are not however so well established as to be considered a national minority. Tatar was declared to be the native language by 35.2% of Ukrainian Tatars, Russian was indicated by 58.7% and Ukrainian by 4.5%.

**Romanis** (45,000; in 1989, 48,000). They live mainly in the Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi districts, also in the Odessa and Dnipropetrovsk districts; in large part they often change the place where they live. The lack of growth of their community, known for its high birth rate, is explained by emigration (mainly from the Zakarpattia district) and declaring other nationalities (particularly Hungarian) and, possibly, by not reaching some Romanis during the census. 44.7% of Ukrainian Romanis reported their “own” language (it was not stated which one, there is not one single Romani language), Russian was declared by 13.4%, Ukrainian was indicated by 21.1% and ‘other’ (mainly Hungarian) by 20.8%.

**Azeris** (45,000; in 1989, 37,000). They live in towns, dispersed; there are quite many of them in Crimea and in the Odessa district. They are an immigrant group, not deeply rooted and very mobile. Azerbaijani was reported to be the native language by 53% of Ukrainian Azerbaijanis, 37.6% of them said it was Russian and 7.1% indicated Ukrainian.

**Georgians** (34,000; in 1989, 23,000.<sup>113</sup>). They live in towns, dispersed. They are an immigrant group, not deeply rooted 36.7% of Ukrainian Georgians reported that Georgian was their native language, 54.5% indicated it was Russian and 8.2% declared it to be Ukrainian.

**Germans** (33,000; in 1989, 38,000). They live mainly in the towns of eastern Ukraine; there is a small group in the Zakarpattia district which is a rural population. They are the descendants of consecutive waves of German immigration to the Russian Empire (except for Zakarpattia). 12.2% of Ukrainian

<sup>113</sup> Here and below the census data on nationalities with a population below 30,000 after: W. Baluk, *Koncepcje polityki narodowościowej Ukrainy. Tradycje i współczesność*, Wrocław 2002, p. 19 and other sources. Official census publications do not provide these data.

Germans indicated German as their native language, 66.7% of them reported that it was Russian and 22.1% said it was Ukrainian.

**Gagauz** (32,000; in 1989, 32,000). They live mainly in the eastern part of the Odessa district. It is a Turkic-speaking nationality whose religion is traditionally Orthodox. They are the descendants of the refugees from the end of 18<sup>th</sup> century from the lands of present-day Bulgaria; currently they constitute a national minority. Most Gagauz live in Moldova where they enjoy autonomy. The Gagauz language was declared to be the native language by 71.5% of the Ukrainian Gagauz, Russian was indicated by 22.7% of them and Ukrainian by 3.5%.

Members of **other nationalities** (over a hundred, the exact figure was not given) totalled 177,000 (in 1989, 431,000). Most of them represent other nationalities of the former USSR, they are immigrants in Ukraine. The most represented were: **the Chuvash** (in 1989, 20,000; in 2001, below 5,000), **Uzbeks** (respectively 20,000 and 12,000), **Mordvins** (19,000 and below 5,000), **Lithuanians** (11,000 and 7,000), **Kazakhs** (10,000 and 5,000), **Czechs** (9,000 and 6,000), **Koreans** (9,000 and 13,000), **Udmurts** (8,000 and below 5,000), **Slovaks** (8,000 and 6,000), **Bashkirs** (8,000 and below 5,000) and **Latvians** (7,000 and 5,000). Below I present information about four groups which are national minorities in Ukraine; two of them sparked the interest of the Venice Commission during the process of consultation of the draft of the Ukrainian law relating to language.

**Slovaks** (6,400; in 1989, 7,900). They live almost exclusively in the western part of the Zakarpattia district, in the historical area where the Slovak and Ukrainian settlements came into contact. 41.2% of Ukrainian Slovaks declared Slovak to be their native language, 5.2% said it was Russian and 41.2% indicated Ukrainian.

**Czechs** (5,800; in 1989, 6,100). They live mainly in the Volyn district and constitute a relic of the Czech colonisation of Volyn in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (most Czechs who survived the Second World War there left for Czechoslovakia). The information about their linguistic identification is missing; they are most likely thoroughly Ukrainised.

**Karaims** or **Crimean Karaites** (there is no census data for 2011— estimates establish their number at approximately 1,200 people, including 650 in Crimea; in 1989, 882). They live in Crimea (and also in Lithuania, Poland and Israel).

They are an ethno-religious group, their religion is pre-rabbinic Judaism, formerly they used their own language from the Kipchak group of Turkic languages; Crimean Karaims already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century spoke mainly Crimean-Tatar. In 1989, 96 Crimean Karaims declared Karaim to be their native language, 18 other Karaims said they could speak it. There are serious doubts whether currently in Crimea anybody still speaks this language.

**Krymchaks** (there is no census data for 2011—estimates establish their number at from 200 to 500 people; in 1989, 604)<sup>114</sup>. They live in Crimea (and also in Israel). They make up an ethno-religious group, their religion is Rabbinic Judaism. They formerly used their own language which was close to Crimean-Tatar. In 1989 125 people said Krymchak was their native language and further 25 people declared they could speak it. There are serious doubts whether currently in Crimea anybody still speaks this language.

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The status of **Rusyns** as a contemporary ethnic or national group is debatable. The term Rusyns is the traditional, pre-national way in which Ukrainians and Belarusians defined themselves, it was preserved in the western borders of the Ukrainian ethnic area until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century and survives in some parts of this area still today. Towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a small part of the Ukrainian population from Yugoslavia, Zakarpattia, Slovakia and Poland declared themselves to be Rusyns (or Carpatho-Rusyns<sup>115</sup>) as a distinct, fourth East Slavic nation. There is no unanimity as to whether the Rusyn language is an autonomous language or whether it is just a quite well-developed dialect of Ukrainian (and thus not protected by the Charter). From the linguistic point of view the latter premise is justified, however such dialects have frequently been developed to reach the status of standard languages.

In the Zakarpattia district there are Rusyn national organisations, Sunday schools etc. In 2007 the Zakarpattian district council recognised Rusyns – in the face of protests from Kyiv – as a national minority (which should lead to the recognition of the Rusyn language as a regional language). In the census of

<sup>114</sup> In older papers Krymchaks were called “Crimean Jews” to make a distinction between them and Eastern European Jews who also lived in Crimea. The term Krymchaks was probably introduced in order to avoid misunderstandings in regard to the former name.

<sup>115</sup> The Carpatho-Rusyn “national project” was established in the US at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

2001 10,000 of the district's population (0.8%) declared Rusyn nationality. Nevertheless it leaves no doubt that the number of people who consider themselves to be Rusyns and thus not Ukrainians (not "simply Rusyns") is several times higher (even though it is still not considerable). A possible extension of the protection under the Charter to the Rusyn language may accelerate the development of this language and nation, which would weaken Zakarpattia's ties with Ukraine, the region already not strongly linked with the rest of the country.

compiled by Tadeusz A. Olszański





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