

# 'Eastern Ukraine' is No More: War and Identity in Post-Euromaidan Dnipropetrovsk

Written by Taras Kuzio

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## 'Eastern Ukraine' is No More: War and Identity in Post-Euromaidan Dnipropetrovsk

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TARAS KUZIO, JAN 27 2022

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This chapter is a study of how Dnipropetrovsk halted the 'Russian Spring' and Russian President Vladimir Putin's 'New Russia' (*Novorossiya*) project in 2014–2015 and became Ukraine's outpost (*Forpost*), preventing a breakthrough of Russian hybrid warfare into Central Ukraine, and Eastern Ukraine outside the Donbas region, which could have threatened Ukraine's independence. Dnipropetrovsk's fight back was an example of civic nationalism led by two Jewish-Ukrainian citizens of Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk oblast Governor Ihor Kolomoyskyy and Deputy Governor Hennadiy Korban, and by a Russian citizen of Ukraine Borys Filatov who was Deputy Governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast and from 2015 mayor of Dnipro. The city of Dnipropetrovsk (from May 2016 renamed Dnipro) has a multi-national character which has been influenced by Ukrainian, Russian, and Jewish cultures (see the chapter by Zhuk). Since 1991, and especially since 2014, Ukrainian and Jewish identities have grown and Russian (and Soviet) have declined. Dnipropetrovsk Jewish activist Yevhen Hendin (2014) said 'Jews were always patriots of this country in which they live.'

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first analyses changes in Ukrainian identity since 2014 brought about by the Russian-Ukrainian war and makes two arguments. The first is that the balance which had characterised identity between the more 'Eastern' city of Dnipropetrovsk and more Central Ukrainian identity of small towns and villages in Dnipropetrovsk oblast has 'tipped' decidedly towards the latter. Since 2014, Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro have become more ethno-culturally Ukrainian and more Central Ukrainian in its identity, helping to disintegrate the concept of 'Eastern Ukraine.'

The second is Ukraine's 'East' no longer exists (Zhurzhenko 2014, 2015). During wars it is impossible to continue sitting on the fence, and in the case of the Donbas war to straddle Ukrainian-Russian identities. Therefore 'post-Soviet ambiguities and tolerance of blurred identities and multiple loyalties has ended' (Zhurzhenko 2014). 2014 represented a 'new rupture in contemporary history, a point of crystallization for identities, discourses, and narratives for decades to come' (Zhurzhenko 2015, 52). Ukraine's fault line was no longer East versus West but Ukraine versus the Donbas (see Demchenko 2014; Fournier 2018).

Andriy Denysenko, head of Right Sector (*Pravyi Sektor*) political party in Dnipropetrovsk oblast, believes it was wrong to include his region as part of the 'East' because it always had a more Central Ukrainian identity. The Euromaidan Revolution was the straw that broke the camel's back, and many of its participants joined volunteer battalions or volunteer groups assisting Ukrainian security forces fighting Russian proxies and Russian invading forces (Reva 2020, 131, 196; see Poznyak-Khomenko 2020). Patriotism, a sense of injustice, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and what was seen as an attempt to drag Ukraine back to the Soviet Union (as one volunteer soldier put it 'They live in the Soviet Union' in the Donetsk Peoples Republic [Reva 2020, 142]) led many in Dnipropetrovsk to view the Russian-Ukrainian war as a continuation of the Euromaidan Revolution. 'Events in Dnipropetrovsk ended the so-called South-Eastern pro-communist and pro-Russian belt. And it disappeared *de facto* here. The

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breakthrough happened in Dnipropetrovsk...,’ Denysenko said (Semyzhenko and Ostapovets 2014). Medical volunteer Natalya Zubchenko said ‘We don’t think of ourselves as East or West. We’re Central’ (Sindelar 2015). Because of its industrial power and size, Dnipropetrovsk’s example led, Denysenko (Semyzhenko and Ostapovets 2014) believes, to a ‘domino effect spreading to Zaporizhzhya, Kherson, Mykolayiv and part of Odesa oblast.’[1] At the centre of Putin’s ‘New Russia’ there is now a belt of four pro-Ukrainian oblasts lying between the Donbas in the East and Odesa to the West; Kharkiv, contrary to Putin’s amateur history, was never part of the Tsarist Empire’s ‘New Russia.’

Ukraine’s ‘East’ now consists of three groups of oblasts. The first, represented by Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Kherson and Mykolayiv, has experienced the greatest degree of Ukrainianisation since 2014. The lowest support in Southern-Eastern Ukraine for the Russian World in 2014 was to be found in these four oblasts (O’Loughlin, Toal, Kolosov 2016, 760). Kharkiv and Odesa have also undergone changes but not to the same extent. The third consisting of two Donbas oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk are all that is left of Ukraine’s ‘East.’ The 60 per cent of the Donbas region which is controlled by Kyiv has experienced a growth of Ukrainian patriotism, and since 2014 a greater number of the region’s population hold a Ukrainian over a regional identity. If Dnipropetrovsk has shifted westwards, the Western region of Donetsk controlled by Ukraine has shifted towards Dnipropetrovsk with which it has historically been connected. Ukrainian-controlled Donbas is undergoing Ukrainianisation while Russification and Sovietisation are taking place in the 40 per cent of the Donbas which is controlled by Russia in the so-called Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR). Since 2014, 37 per cent in Donetsk declared Ukrainian to be their native language, 34 per cent were bilingual and 26 per cent gave Russian. 68 per cent agreed that all Ukrainian citizens should know the Ukrainian language, history, and culture with 26 per cent disagreeing (see Haran and Yakovlyev 2018; Haran, Yakovlyev and Zolkina 2019).

The second section analyses how the Dnipropetrovsk clan led by Governor Kolomoyskyy, Korban and Filatov together with civil society volunteers defended Dnipropetrovsk from Russian military aggression and transformed Dnipropetrovsk into Eastern Ukraine’s Outpost (see Poznyak-Khomenko 2020). There are five factors why Dnipropetrovsk did not follow Donetsk (Semyzhenko and Ostapovets 2014). First, Dnipropetrovsk has no border with Russia, and Russian ‘political tourists’ were therefore fewer and any who arrived were dealt with more harshly. Second, there was no vacuum of power and more decisive leaders. Third, these leaders could rely on a large pro-Euromaidan and pro-Ukrainian constituency. Fourth, Russian media and information warfare had far less influence than in Crimea and the Donbas. Kolomoyskyy (1+1) and Viktor Pinchuk (ICTV, STB, New Channel) controlled pro-Euromaidan and pro-Ukrainian television channels. Finally, Jewish-Ukrainian patriotism and Jewish opposition to Russia and President Putin provided a further bulwark against separatism (see the chapter by Ishchenko).

## War and Identities in Dnipropetrovsk

Scholarly studies of regionalism and national identity in Ukraine have traditionally focused on Lviv versus Donetsk with Kyiv straddling the middle, which exaggerated the country’s East-West divisions (see Arel 1995a, 1995b; Arel and Khmelko 1996; Wilson 1997; Whitefield 2002). These works were heavily influenced by David D. Laitin’s (1998) prediction of the emergence of bounded Russian speaking nationalities in Ukraine and other former Soviet republics which turned out to be wrong. These studies were increasingly challenged, especially since 2014, over their claims of bounded identities and the exaggerated influence of language on Ukrainian identity (see Kuzio 2001; Kulyk 2011; Kuzyk 2019; Bureiko and Moga 2019). Russian and Ukrainian speakers were never clearly delineated groups, language use was not static, and many Ukrainians were and remain bilingual. Therefore, ‘it does not make sense to talk about bounded language groups’ (Giuliano 2015, 517). Russophones in the former USSR – unlike Serbs in the former Yugoslavia – never showed a bounded identity (Kuzio 2007).

Prior to the 2014 crisis important Ukrainian cities, such as Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Odesa, were ignored in scholarly studies of Ukrainian regionalism. Until 2014, Dnipropetrovsk was included in sociological polls as part of Ukraine’s ‘East.’ And yet, Dnipropetrovsk is more dissimilar to neighbouring Donetsk than Trans-Carpathia is to Lviv oblast. Sociological polls presented results which were biased towards the Russian-speaking city of Dnipropetrovsk, side-lining from the results the Ukrainian-speaking villages and small towns that gave Dnipropetrovsk oblast an identity that pulled it towards Central Ukraine.

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Of the eight oblasts traditionally viewed as 'pro-Russian' four have stood out even more since 2014 as being different. When, for example, asked if the Ukrainian authorities were pushing out the Russian language since 2014, and since the adoption of the 2019 language law, only in Donetsk did a majority (65 per cent) believe this to be the case. In Odesa opinion was evenly split between 42 per cent who agreed and 46 per cent who did not. Kharkiv, in addition to the new group of Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya, Mykolayiv and Kherson, did not agree (Assessment of vulnerabilities and resilience of residents of southern and eastern regions of Ukraine 2021). A Ukrainian-Estonian study found only Donetsk and Luhansk (which the authors classified as in their 'Red Zone') had a majority who believed the Ukrainian authorities were discriminating against the Russian language. Kharkiv and Odesa (which they defined as the 'Orange Zone') also exhibited some traces of this feeling. The study placed Dnipropetrovsk in the 'Green Zone' in its low levels of criticism of the central government's language policies and memory politics. Dnipropetrovsk undertook the most radical decommunisation of any oblast in Southern-Eastern Ukraine (Oliinyk and Kuzio 2021, 813-815). The report found the following breakdown of Ukraine's Southern-Eastern regions in terms of their vulnerability to Russian disinformation on Ukraine controlled by Western governments and IMF (Ligacheva 2021):

- Red Zone: Donetsk and Luhansk had the highest level of vulnerability to Russian disinformation.
- Orange Zone: Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhya.
- Yellow Zone: Odesa, Mykolayiv, and Dnipropetrovsk have a high proportion of their populations who disagree with the Russian disinformation narrative of external control of Ukraine.
- Green Zone: Kherson had the lowest level of vulnerability.

The disappearance of the 'East' as a unified pro-Russian concept for Eastern Ukraine after the 2014 crisis and launch of the Russian-Ukrainian war was reflected in the publication of new scholarly studies of the weakness of separatism in Kharkiv (Stebelsky 2018) and Odesa (Richardson 2019) and the reasons for the failure of Putin's 'New Russia' project in 2014 (O'Loughlin, Toal, and Kolosov 2016, 2017; Kuzio 2019). Nevertheless, studies of the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Dnipropetrovsk oblast continue to be rare (see Kulick 2019) and this chapter is a contribution to the gap in scholarly literature about an important city which in Soviet times was the home of the 'Leonid Brezhnev clan' and 'Dnipropetrovsk mafia.'

Dnipropetrovsk was both different to Donetsk on the one hand and Kharkiv and Odesa on the other. Dnipropetrovsk has no border with Russia (unlike Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv) or Russian-controlled separatist region (Transnistria) next door to Odesa. The media environment in Dnipropetrovsk was less under the influence of Russia. Silviya Nitsova (2021) believes the following five factors prevented pro-Russian separatism from being successful in Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk in comparison to its success in the Donbas:

1. A well-organised Euromaidan movement.
2. Large numbers of young patriots among Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk football fans ('ultras') who aligned with the Euromaidan Revolution and civil society and joined volunteer battalions.
3. Alternative local elites and oligarchs to the Party of Regions.
4. Higher levels of Ukrainian national identity.
5. Pluralism in the business sector and support from small and medium business.

Dnipropetrovsk oblast had high levels of attachment to the Ukrainian language, culture, and history. In 2014, Dnipropetrovsk's oligarchs showed they were Ukrainian patriots; a statement which could not be said of the Donetsk clan (Kuzio 2017, 171-201). Dnipropetrovsk elites viewed Soviet and independent Ukraine as *their* country which *they* had a right to rule – as they did in the USSR. Finally, prior to 2014 Dnipropetrovsk was less reliant upon Russia for export markets and trade (Getmanchuk and Litra 2019).

Distinguishing Dnipropetrovsk from more urbanised Donetsk was the former's Ukrainian Cossack heritage and large number of Ukrainian speaking villages. This provided it with an identity closer to Central Ukrainian regions to its West. Dnipropetrovsk was an oblast with one foot in the 'East' and one foot in the 'Centre' of Ukraine. Central Ukrainian oblasts shared the Dnipro River, which is traditionally viewed as flowing through the 'middle' of Ukraine, with Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya oblasts. The Russian-speaking city of Dnipropetrovsk co-existed with

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Ukrainian-speaking Dnipropetrovsk oblast.

Ukrainian-speaking villages in Dnipropetrovsk oblast were formed in Cossack times and the national memory of Cossacks has remained part of local legends, myths, and oral history (see the chapter by Repan). Cossack mythology experienced revivals during Soviet liberalisations in the 1960s and late 1980s and of course, in independent Ukraine. Cossack villages voted for Viktor Yushchenko in the 2004 presidential elections. There are other villages in Dnipropetrovsk oblast populated by the descendants of serfs who were brought from Central Russia during the Tsarist Empire who voted for Party of Regions leader Viktor Yanukovich.[2] Another important memory that survived was that of the 1933 Holodomor. Zubchenko's grandmother experienced the Holodomor in Zaporizhzhya and after moving to Dnipropetrovsk she was punished at school in 1963 for speaking in Ukrainian. Zubchenko's family history influenced the anti-Soviet views of her family, their support for the Euromaidan Revolution and volunteering to help Ukraine in its war with Russia (see Poznyak-Khomenko 2020).

Zaporizhzhya and Donetsk had industries with large proletariat bases. Dnipropetrovsk was more akin to Kharkiv in possessing high tech industrial plants and research establishments with technical and scientific elites servicing the economy and military industrial complex. Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv had large student bodies and a more middle class feel in contrast to more proletarian Zaporizhzhya and Donetsk.

Dnipropetrovsk was also different to Donetsk in its oligarchic pluralism. In the late 1990s, warring clans in Donetsk and Luhansk were pressured to integrate under the political *krysha* (roof [here meaning political protection]) of the Party of Regions (see Kuzio 2015). Such a unification of Dnipropetrovsk oligarchs never took place. Pavlo Lazarenko and Yulia Tymoshenko, Viktor Pinchuk, Serhiy Tihipko and Kolomoyskyy had different business interests, and often backed competing political interests and media groups.[3]

Oligarchic pluralism translated into media pluralism in Dnipropetrovsk which again made the *oblast* different to Donetsk. Russian television and information warfare in 2013-2014 had less influence on Dnipropetrovsk compared to that in the Donbas. 1+1 channel, one of Ukraine's biggest television channels owned by the Kolomoyskyy clan, broadcasts mainly in Ukrainian. Kolomoyskyy provided funding for *Ukraine Today* channel through 1+1 television channel for a counter-propaganda campaign to Russian information warfare which aired from August 2014 to April 2016 (and on-line until December 2016).

Since 1991, Dnipropetrovsk has always exhibited a high degree of attachment to the Ukrainian ethnos and the Ukrainian language. In the 2001 census, 79.30 per cent in the oblast and 56.9 per cent in the city of Dnipropetrovsk gave Ukrainian as their native language. In Dnipropetrovsk oblast, 17.6 per cent gave Russian as their native language. 67 per cent used Ukrainian as their first language in the oblast and 24.1 per cent in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, showing the difference between the former which was closer in identity to Central Ukraine and the latter which was closer to the 'East' (Piechal 2018).

Throughout Southern-Eastern Ukraine, Russian speakers were never a bounded group. As it became clear in 2014, Russian speakers who had given Ukrainian as their mother tongue in censuses might not use the Ukrainian language in their daily lives but nevertheless exhibited Ukrainian patriotism (Bureiko and Moga 2019). Denoting one's native language as Ukrainian in Soviet and Ukrainian censuses showed an emotional attachment to a language, culture and country that would come to the fore during times of crisis, as in 2014.

Speaking Ukrainian in public while using Russian at home did not reduce the level of Ukrainian patriotism (Osnovni Zasady ta Shlyakhy Formuvannya Spilnoyii Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2017, 25). Russian speaking Ukrainians and Russians volunteered to fight for Ukraine (see Poznyak-Khomenko 2020). Anatoliy Lebidyev, who was born in Russia and lived in Dnipropetrovsk, was scathing of Russia's 'open aggression' against Ukraine. Artillery fired from Russia had killed his comrade-in-arms. Lebidyev said: 'I was born in Russia; all my family are Russian; so, because I was born there, I should act wrongly and say, 'I am also Russian' and go and fight against Ukraine?' Lebidyev said 'Before [2014] I used to be proud of being Russian.' As a citizen of Ukraine, Lebidyev had no hesitations or doubts about volunteering to serve in the Ukrainian army and defending Ukraine against Russia, the country in which he was born (Reva 2020, 240-241).

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Deputy Governor of Dnipropetrovsk oblast Filatov recalled telling members of the Party of Slavic Unity that Ukrainians no longer viewed Russians as their 'brothers.' Filatov told them: 'tell me the name of the man who completely destroyed for centuries the very idea of Slavic unity and forced for the first time in the history of Russia and Ukraine, or even Russians and Ukrainians, to look at each other through the sights of a machine gun?' Filatov's pro-Russian guests were silent, and he continued telling them: 'I say this was not [US President Barack] Obama, [acting head of state Oleksandr] Turchynov, [Prime Minister Arseniy] Yatsenyuk, or not even [Right Sector nationalist leader Dmytro] Yarosh. This was your so to speak favourite [Putin]. That's right' (Semyzhenko and Ostapovets 2014, 9).

Those Ukrainians who had defined themselves prior to 2014 as 'ethnic Russian' were often from mixed marriages and in some cases held a Soviet identity. The core group which re-identified in Ukraine and especially since 2014 came from the 25.3 per cent of families with mixed (usually Russian and Ukrainian) parents. In the Ukrainian SSR, 59 per cent of Russians and 75 per cent of Jews married outside their ethnic group compared to only 18 per cent of Ukrainians. Ethnic intermarriage was especially prevalent in industrialised regions in Southern-Eastern Ukraine (Osnovni Zasady ta Shlyakhy Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2017).

In the USSR, 'Russian' and 'Soviet' were understood interchangeably, signifying identity with the Soviet state, Russian the language of Soviet power. Russian speaking and pro-Russian were not the same in Dnipropetrovsk as in Donetsk. Anna Fournier (2018, 35–36) describes how 'pro-Russianism' in different parts of Ukraine produces 'different Russian intensities' with the highest levels to be found in Crimea and Donbas. The impact of the war in 2014 was not unique and had its historical antecedents; Ivan Dzyuba (2018, 94), a native of Donetsk, points to Ukrainian nationalists in World War II who found common cause with Russian-speaking Ukrainians in Dnipropetrovsk and Donetsk.

In the 1989 Soviet census, Soviet Ukrainian citizens chose 'Russian' as their identities or were given 'Russian' by their parents. Re-identification from this arbitrary pressure of the Soviet state has been on-going since 1991 and has especially grown since 2014. Ukraine's first Defence Minister Konstantyn Morozov was from the Donbas and was registered by his parents as 'Russian;' after 1991 he found out he was Ukrainian and re-identified himself. Leonid Kuchma was from Chernihiv but had spent most of his working life in Dnipropetrovsk. When he was elected to parliament in 1990, he declared his ethnicity to be 'Russian' but three years later upon becoming prime minister he re-identified himself as 'Ukrainian.'

Analysing trends in ethnic re-identification between the 1989 Soviet and 2001 Ukrainian censuses, Ihor Stebelsky (2009, 100) believed higher numbers declaring a Ukrainian identity 'are not surprising and are expected to continue.' This would especially come to the fore during times of dramatic change (1991) or crisis (2014) when identities would undergo radical re-definition. In 1990s Ukraine the number of 'real Russians' in Ukraine was estimated by Stephen Rapaway to be as low as 11 per cent, not 22 per cent as recorded in the 1989 Soviet census, because of high rates of inter-marriage and arbitrary registration as 'Russian.' In the 2001 census the share of Russians in Ukraine was 17.3 per cent, a decline from 22.1 per cent in the 1989 Soviet census (Kuzio 2003). By 2013, 82.9 per cent of the population declared themselves to be ethnic Ukrainian and 12.8 per cent ethnic Russian, a figure like Rapaway's estimate. Since then, this has changed to 88.6 per cent ethnic Ukrainian and 6.9 per cent ethnic Russian under the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war (Bureiko and Moga 2019). These figures are like those recorded by the Razumkov Centre (Osnovni Zasady ta Shlyakhy Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2017, 5) which found the number of ethnic Ukrainians to be 92 per cent and among 18–29-year-olds as high as 96 per cent. Nadiia Bureiko and Teodor Moga (2019) and the Razumkov Centre both found only 6 per cent of Ukraine's population declaring themselves to be 'ethnic Russian,' nearly a four-fold decline from 22 per cent in the 1989 census.

In 2014, mixed Russian-Ukrainian identities in Southern-Eastern Ukraine collapsed (O'Loughlin and Toal 2020, 318). In Dnipropetrovsk, those with mixed identities halved from 8.2 to 4.5 per cent and in Zaporizhzhya and Odesa mixed identities collapsed from 8.2 and 15.1 per cent to 2 and 2.3 per cent respectively. Mixed identities were never strong in Kherson and Mykolayiv where they have *de facto* disappeared, dropping to a statistically insignificant 0.6 per cent and 1.6 per cent respectively. Kharkiv registered the lowest decline from 12.4 to 7.7 per cent. These changes are

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what Zhurzhenko (2014, 2015) called the 'end of ambiguity' in Eastern Ukraine.

In the two decades prior to 2014, attitudes in Dnipropetrovsk towards hearing and using Ukrainian had already improved<sup>[4]</sup> and increasing numbers of the Ukrainian population had re-identified themselves as 'ethnic Ukrainian.' Prior to 2014, political entrepreneurs had artificially manipulated language questions and exaggerated alleged threats to Russian speakers to mobilise Russian speakers behind the Party of Regions. This strategy became redundant during the Euromaidan Revolution, and after the disintegration of the Party of Regions and Russian military aggression. Bureiko and Moga (2019) talked of the 'de-politicisation' of language issues during and after the Euromaidan Revolution.

In 2014, Russian claims that Russian speakers were threatened in Ukraine was not reflected in opinion polls. 87.6 per cent in Mykolayiv, 86.1 per cent in Kherson and 79.7 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk did not believe the rights of Russian speakers were being infringed; even in Kharkiv a high of 71.8 per cent did not see discrimination (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014). This is one factor why high majorities in Kherson (61.1 per cent), Dnipropetrovsk (65.6 per cent), and Mykolayiv (71.5 per cent) opposed Russia's claim to possess a right to protect Russian speakers in Southern-Eastern Ukraine (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014). This was also echoed in low average support in Southern-Eastern Ukraine (11.7 per cent) for the introduction of Russian troops into Ukraine; the lowest support was to be found in Kherson (4.7 per cent), Dnipropetrovsk (5.2 per cent), and Mykolayiv (6.5 per cent).

During the 2014 crisis the Ukrainian language remained important, but it was never the primary and only marker of attitudes towards the Euromaidan, national identity and patriotism. Different studies have shown the strength of Russian speaking Ukrainian patriotism in Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro co-existing amicably with Ukrainian speaking patriotism under a common civic Ukrainian identity (Kasianov 2018, 220–221). In Southern-Eastern Ukraine, Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro had the highest number of people (70.8 per cent) who celebrated Ukrainian Independence Day followed by Zaporizhzhya (71.9 per cent) with the number in Kharkiv far lower at 47.1 per cent (Kasianov 2018, 159).

Kolomoyskyy, Korban and Filatov are all Russian speakers. Ukraine's Jewish community is largely Russian speaking. Since 2014 there has been a growth of patriotism in Dnipropetrovsk, as seen in widespread military and civilian volunteer work for the wounded and very long queues of people donating blood, an increase in the number of taught Ukrainian-language courses and greater demonstrative use of Ukrainian in public (see Poznyak-Khomenko 2020).<sup>[5]</sup> In 2013–2015, increased use of Ukrainian was recorded in sixteen Ukrainian oblasts.

Language was irrelevant during the implementation of the 2015 decommunisation laws by the Dnipropetrovsk authorities, Jewish community, and the Ukrainian institute of National Remembrance. The growth of anti-Russian attitudes, an active civil society, weak pro-Russian opposition, and disorientated public also played important roles. 330 toponyms were changed in Dnipropetrovsk oblast to new Jewish, Ukrainian and local names.<sup>[6]</sup> Dnipropetrovsk was the only region of Southern-Eastern Ukraine which renamed streets after Ukrainian nationalist figures, including nationalist ideological theorists Mykola Mikhnovskyy (born in what is now Poltava oblast but also associated with Kharkiv) and Dmytro Dontsov (born in what is now Zaporizhzhya oblast), and nationalist leaders Symon Petlura, Vasyl Kuk (who led the OUN [Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists] underground in Dnipropetrovsk during World War II), and Roman Shukhevych.

The 2014 crisis and Russian-Ukrainian war transformed on-going evolutionary into revolutionary changes in Ukrainian identity. Between 2013–2015, attitudes to the questions 'I love Ukraine' and 'I feel Ukrainian' in Dnipropetrovsk oblast grew from 88.8 to 92.8 per cent in the former and 85 to 90.1 per cent in the latter. Similar increases were found in Zaporizhzhya (81.1 to 94.4 per cent and 79.8 to 88.8 per cent), Mykolayiv (87.1 to 98.3 per cent and 90.3 to 94.6 per cent), and Kherson (90.2 to 92.2 per cent and 82.6 to 85.7 per cent) (Bureiko and Moga 2019, 151).

In Dnipropetrovsk the war brought the identities of the oblast centre and oblasttowns and villages beyond the centre closer together with the former moving away from the 'East' towards Central Ukraine. If before 2014 the ratio

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between pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian identities was 50:50 this has now shifted to 70:30.[7] Dnipropetrovsk (9.4 per cent) and Zaporizhzhya (10.4 per cent) had two of the lowest levels of support in Southern-Eastern Ukraine for the attractiveness of Russian culture (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014). Higher attractiveness to Russian culture in Kharkiv (18.3 per cent) and Odesa (18.5 per cent) than Donetsk (14.6 per cent) and Luhansk (7.7 per cent) reflected the former two as middle-class cities and the latter two as proletariat where universities were less prominent and created more recently. Dnipropetrovsk had lower levels of Soviet identity (15.5 per cent) compared to Zaporizhzhya (25.6 per cent) and Kharkiv (23.3 per cent).

Surveys showed that the Donbas was different in its identity to the remainder of Southern-Eastern Ukraine while Dnipropetrovsk was the most Ukrainian in identity of what sociologists traditionally grouped together as the 'East.' In 2007 in Dnipropetrovsk, 73.1 per cent declared they were Ukrainian speakers or bilingual; the latter are important to include as they would not have had an antipathy towards the Ukrainian language. In Zaporizhzhya and Kharkiv, the figures were 68 per cent and 62.5 per cent respectively.

What also differentiated the Donbas was attitudes towards the Russian language because it was closely tied to allegiance to Soviet identity which remained high in the region. The 'Donbas cardinally differs in its attitude to the language question from the general mass opinion in east Ukrainian oblasts' (Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny: Perspektyvy i Vyklyky 2007, 18). In Dnipropetrovsk, the Russian language came third in the allegiance of its population following Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Russian bilingual. In Zaporizhzhya, Russian came second while in Kharkiv it came first. Only in the Donbas was there a majority for the radical policy of elevating Russian to a second state language; and even in this region there were differences with Donetsk far more in support of this step than Luhansk. Northern Luhansk includes a large Ukrainian-speaking rural population which has more in common in identity with Kharkiv (see Donbas. Realii 2017). In 2014, local volunteers in Northern Luhansk rebuffed pro-Russian proxy forces. In Dnipropetrovsk, Zaporizhzhya and Kharkiv there was higher support for the more moderate policy of making Russian an official language. Dnipropetrovsk gave by far the lowest support for elevating Russian to a state language of only 16 per cent (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58-65).

Since 2014, Dnipropetrovsk has recorded the highest rates of allegiance to Ukrainian as their native language (50 per cent) and the lowest for bilingual (32 per cent) and Russian (15 per cent) in Southern-Eastern Ukraine. 41 per cent of Kharkiv gave Russian as a native language compared to 24 per cent for Ukrainian. The results for Zaporizhzhya lay between Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk. Taken together, a high of 82 per cent gave Ukrainian as their native language or were bilingual (and therefore held an attachment to Ukrainian) in Dnipropetrovsk.

Asked about cultural affiliation, Dnipropetrovsk gave the highest for Ukrainian in the 'East' (54.9 per cent). In the Donbas there were differences between Donetsk where the most popular cultural affiliation was Soviet identity (37.1 per cent) and Luhansk where it came second after Ukrainian (24.5 per cent) (Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2007). A decade later allegiance to Soviet (10 per cent) and Russian (3 per cent) cultural traditions in Dnipropetrovsk were the lowest in Southern-Eastern Ukraine. At the same time, Dnipropetrovsk exhibited the highest allegiance to Ukrainian (68 per cent) and European (11 per cent) cultural traditions (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58-65). Allegiance to Soviet cultural traditions remained the highest in Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk (28 per cent); although this had declined from being the most popular form of identity because of the growth of Ukrainian cultural traditions (32 per cent).

Dnipropetrovsk as an outlier on identity issues in the 'East' was evident in responses to whether to define the Ukrainian nation as civic, ethnic-civic, or purely ethnic. The two most popular identities in Dnipropetrovsk were ethnic-civic (32.4 per cent) and a surprisingly high ethnic (25.2 per cent); one might have assumed civic would be the most popular in Southern-Eastern Ukraine. Whereas 20 per cent supported a civic nation in Dnipropetrovsk (the lowest of the three categories), 48.1 per cent and 50.1 per cent gave their support to this category in Zaporizhzhya and Donetsk respectively (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58-65).

Changes in Ukrainian identity which had taken place prior to 2014 were evident in regional attitudes to the Euromaidan Revolution which — unlike the Orange Revolution — received support in Ukraine's 'East.' In Southern-Eastern Ukraine, 51 per cent were neutral, 15 per cent were hostile and 25 per cent supportive of the Euromaidan

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Revolution. The highest level of support (27 per cent) and lowest level of opposition (11 per cent) to the Euromaidan Revolution in Southern-Eastern Ukraine was in Dnipropetrovsk (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58–65). 83.7 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk opposed the seizure of official buildings by pro-Russian rallies (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

## Dnipropetrovsk at War: Patriots, Oligarchs, and Civil Society Volunteers

### *Patriots*

In 2014–2015, Ukraine had not much of an army because it had been asset stripped during Yanukovych's kleptocratic presidency (see Kuzio 2012). Only Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv oblasti in Southern-Eastern Ukraine had military bases which became crucially important in the intense war of 2014–2015. Putin's senior adviser on the 'Russian Spring' Sergei Glazyev is caught on tape talking to Konstantin Zatulin (head of the pro-Putin Institute of the CIS) about attempts to block the 25th Separate Dnipropetrovsk Airborne Brigade from moving to Crimea (Shandra 2019). Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhya had no military bases. The 25th Separate Airborne Brigade and 93rd Independent Kholodnyi Yar Mechanised Brigade based in Hvardsiiske and Cherkaske, Dnipropetrovsk oblast and the 92<sup>nd</sup> Mechanised Brigade based in Chuhuiv, Kharkiv oblast were the closest Ukrainian forces to the frontline and took the brunt of much the initial stages of the fighting in 2014–2015.

Three factors were important in shaping developments and resistance to Russian hybrid warfare in 2014–2015. First, the disintegration of the Party of Regions, Ukraine's only political machine (see Kuzio 2015), unpopularity of the Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) and removal of traditionally pro-Russian voters (see D'Anieri 2019) because of Russia's annexation of the Crimea and military control of 40 per cent of the Donbas had reduced pro-Russian influences in Ukraine. Pro-Russian political forces lost 16 per cent of voters who had traditionally voted for them. Second, regional elites, nationalist political forces, the Jewish community, and volunteer civil society viewed the defence of Dnipropetrovsk as their defensive outpost of Ukraine from Russian military aggression. A breakthrough by pro-Russian forces into Dnipropetrovsk would have opened the door into Central Ukraine and Kyiv. Third, the Soviet concept of three 'fraternal brothers' rested on a shared past (i.e., Kyiv Rus, 1654 Treaty of Pereyaslav, Great Patriotic War) and a shared future in the Russian World (see Fournier 2018). Russia's annexation of Crimea, Putin's territorial claim to 'New Russia,' promotion of himself as the 'protector' of Russian speakers, and Russian military aggression against Ukraine (particularly after August 2014 when Russian forces openly invaded Ukraine) crossed many red lines. Russians could not be viewed as 'brothers' if they stole your land, killed Ukrainian soldiers and forced two million civilians to flee from their homes. Russia's breaking of the Soviet 'contract' of 'brotherly peoples' helped to tip the balance of identity in Dnipropetrovsk and elsewhere in Southern-Eastern Ukraine. The death of the Soviet 'brotherhood of peoples' re-aligned most of Eastern with Western Ukrainians and thereby increased civic national integration.

In Western Ukraine and Kyiv, the Soviet concept of 'brotherly (Russian-Ukrainian) peoples' had never sunk roots. The greatest impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war has been on Ukraine's South and East and therefore on Ukraine's Russian speakers. Russia's invasion of Crimea and Russian military aggression in Eastern Ukraine led to a re-thinking of Ukrainian attitudes to Russia (see Aliyev 2019, 2020). Putin's military aggression had turned a large part of Ukraine's 'East' against Russia; two thirds of Ukrainians no longer viewed Russians as 'brothers' (Kulchytskyy and Mishchenko 2018, 192). The bulk of the fighting against Russian forces and Russian proxies was being undertaken by Southern-Eastern Ukrainians which is reflected in Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro suffering the highest level of casualties of Ukrainian security forces (see figure 0.1).

Anatoliy Korniyenko, a 58-year-old resident of Dnipro, enlisted on 19 November 2014 after his 22-year-old son Yevhen had been killed in the war on 12 August 2014. The last time he had served in the military was in the Soviet army in 1976–1978. Korniyenko served five years on the Ukrainian-Russian front line. I asked him why he had enlisted, to which he replied, 'I wanted revenge.' [8] There are many Korniyenkos in Ukraine, particularly in the South and East, who have lost their loved ones to Russian military aggression or who have friends who have lost family members in the Russian-Ukrainian war.



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The highest numbers who would offer armed resistance to a Russian invasion are to be found in the four oblasts of Kherson (36.9 per cent), Mykolayiv (31 per cent), Dnipropetrovsk (26 per cent) and Zaporizhzhya (25.9 per cent). The lowest numbers greeting Russian troops in Southern-Eastern Ukraine are to be found in Kherson (1.2 per cent), Dnipropetrovsk (2.2 per cent), Zaporizhzhya (2.5 per cent) and Mykolayiv (4.7 per cent) (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

The Russian-Ukrainian war is brought home to Ukraine by the fact 15 per cent of Ukrainian voters are veterans of the Donbas war or are family members of veterans. Ukraine's only Museum dedicated to the Russian-Ukrainian war (*Muzey ATO*, see figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) is based in Dnipro which came into fruition in 2016–2017 with the support of the Fund in Defense of Ukraine.

In the centre of Dnipro, approximately 100 school children a day visit the *Muzey Alley* (Museum Alley, see figure 2.4) with graphical memorials to the war and headstones in different languages with the faces of soldiers who have been killed in action.[9]

72 per cent of Ukrainians believe there is a Russia-Ukrainian war, ranging from a high of 91 per cent in the 'West' to 62 per cent in the South and 47 per cent in the 'East.' Another poll found 71 per cent believed what was taking place in the Donbas is a Russian-Ukrainian war (Yak zminylyasya dumka ukrayintiv pro rosiysko-ukrayinsku viynu za dva roky prezydentstva Zelenskoho 2021).

In Ukrainian-controlled Donbas, views are evenly split between 39 per cent who believe a Russian-Ukrainian war is taking place and 40 per cent who do not (Poshuky Shlyakhiv Vidnovlennya Suverenitetu Ukrayiny Nad Okupovanyim Donbasom: Stan Hromadskoyii Dumky Naperedodni Prezydentskykh Vyboriv 2019). Nevertheless, 76 per cent and 47 per cent of residents of Ukrainian-controlled Donetsk and Luhansk respectively believe Russia is a party to the conflict with 12 per cent and 31 per cent respectively disagreeing (Public Opinion in Donbas a Year After Presidential Elections 2020). Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya have higher numbers of people who blame Russia (40–44 per cent) than Kharkiv (24 per cent) for the military aggression (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58–65).

44 per cent in Ukraine's 'South' and 'East' believe Russia's annexation of Crimea was illegal while a similar number (43 per cent) believe it was due to 'free will.' The oblasts with the highest views believing the annexation are illegal are the four new dissenting oblasts in the former 'East' – Mykolayiv (68.2 per cent), Dnipropetrovsk (61.1 per cent), Kherson (56.7 per cent) and Zaporizhzhya (53.6 per cent). Kharkiv (42.8 per cent) and Odesa (46.9 per cent) are close to the regional average while Donetsk (62.9 per cent) and Luhansk (58.1 per cent) gave very high support for the Russian view of 'free will' (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

### *Patriotic Oligarchs*

In 2014, the 'Dnipropetrovsk mafia' was a battered political force. Lazarenko was fighting an extradition battle to Ukraine after being released from a US jail. Victorious Euromaidan Revolutionaries released Tymoshenko from jail. Pinchuk refused the offer of governor of Zaporizhzhya, while Tihipko was discredited after aligning with Yanukovich and failing to make a political come back in the October 2014 pre-term parliamentary elections. Kolomoyskyy returned from exile and agreed to the proposal from acting head of state Turchynov[10] to become governor of Dnipropetrovsk. In Donetsk, some leaders of the former Party of Regions and extreme left-wing allies became Russian proxies, while others fled to Russia with Yanukovich. Oligarch Rinat Akhmetov waited to see which way the wind was blowing and did not begin to support Ukraine until May 2014 when he brought his workers on to the streets of Mariupol who, together with the Azov volunteer battalion, liberated the city from Russian proxies. Akhmetov's neutrality during the crucial months of February–April 2014 lost Ukraine control over a major portion of Donetsk oblast.

Volodymyr Zelenskyy missed the war as well. He became a major television celebrity six months after Kolomoyskyy was removed as governor in March 2015 with the launch of *Servant of the People* television show on 1+1 television channel where he played the small-town schoolteacher Vasyl Holoborodko. The three series of *Servant of the People*

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running from October 2015-May 2019 complexly ignored Putin, annexation of Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian war. Alexander Motyl (2019) writes, 'In its alternate universe, Crimea and Donbas are not occupied. There is no war. There are no deaths.' In the third season, bringing the show up to Zelenskyy's election as president, extremist nationalists stage a coup d'état and Ukraine disintegrates with regions breaking away.

Dnipropetrovsk oligarchs were never cut from the same cloth. Pinchuk and Tihipko were 'white collar' oligarchs who had cultivated a bourgeoisie image for themselves; albeit tarnished in the case of the latter. Pinchuk was nowhere to be seen during the 2014–2015 war. Hendin (2014) explained that Pinchuk was less 'risk prone' in business affairs and more concerned about his international image. 'Pinchuk will for a thousand times contemplate and think over how Elton John, Paul McCartney, Bill Clinton and Madeleine Albright will react to him. He will compare these [reactions] with global cosmopolitan values and then make a decision' (Hendin 2014).

Pinchuk's cultivation of a bourgeoisie image was no match for Russia's hybrid warfare and its weaponisation of organised crime. Kolomoyskyy was different with a thuggish reputation like that found among oligarchs in Donetsk (see Rojansky 2014).[11] Kolomoyskyy's thuggish character proved to be the perfect riposte to Putin's hybrid warfare (Kuzio 2019).

Political instability in Dnipropetrovsk in January-March 2014 reflected instability at the national level. During and after the Euromaidan Revolution, Korban and Filatov opposed the Party of Regions which was in retreat but at the same time ensconced in several Dnipropetrovsk cities. Their allies were patriotic Ukrainians, civil society, Euromaidan Revolutionaries, the influential Jewish community, and nationalist groups. Of Ukraine's eight Southern and Eastern oblasts, Mykolayiv (60.3 per cent) and Dnipropetrovsk (54.5 per cent) had the highest support for the view of the Euromaidan Revolution as a protest movement against a corrupt dictatorship (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

A local and national tipping point took place in Dnipropetrovsk. The local tipping point was widespread public anger at the beatings of Euromaidan Revolutionaries in Dnipropetrovsk on 26 January 2014 by vigilantes working with the police at the behest of Governor Oleksandr Vilkul, a Party of Regions hardliner. With Kolomoyskyy still in exile, Korban and Filatov mobilised pro-Ukrainian sentiments by replaying the Euromaidan Revolution live on Channel 5 broadcast on large plasma television screens in the centre of Dnipropetrovsk and flying Ukrainian and EU flags on official buildings. Of the 40 arrested during the violence outside the State Administration, Filatov recalls not a single person was a 'Banderite' (i.e., follower of nationalist leader Stepan Bandera) and all were local civic activists. Vilkul's use of vigilante violence came on top of four years of the Donetsk clan's kleptocracy during which they thought 'they had grabbed God by his beard' and would be in power forever (Semyzhenko and Ostapovets 2014). By February 2014, the population of Dnipropetrovsk had enough of Donetsk and its Kremlin supporters.

The national tipping point was the murder of protestors on the Euromaidan Revolution on 18-20 February 2014 followed by the disintegration of the Party of Regions after Yanukovich fled from Kyiv. In Dnipropetrovsk 65.1 per cent and in Mykolayiv 70 per cent disagreed with the use of deadly force by the Yanukovich regime against protestors (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

Both developments tipped the balance of power towards pro-Ukrainian forces in Dnipropetrovsk and sparked a spontaneous demolition of the main monument to Lenin in the centre of Dnipropetrovsk on 22 February 2014. Dnipropetrovsk was painted blue and yellow from 26 January and especially after 22 February 2014 when the Ukrainian national flag came to symbolise resistance against the Donetsk clan's authoritarian kleptocracy and Putin's military aggression against Ukraine. Hendin (2014, 20) explained that the flag and national hymn did not mean much to him until the Euromaidan Revolution but after became symbolic and touched his heart because of the wounding and murder of protestors. 'There has been serious suffering and deaths for this country' and 'That is why the hymn 'Plyve kache' is now mine' (Hendin 2014, 20), referring to a song in memory of the 'Heavenly Hundred' murdered during the Euromaidan Revolution.[12]

Blue and yellow became widespread colours painted on cars, balconies, bridges, and lampposts, as well as trade centres and shops owned by the Kolomoyskyy clan. The fence around the State Administration, where vigilantes had

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attacked Euromaidan Revolutionaries on 26 January, was painted blue and yellow. The Ukrainian national hymn was played over loudspeakers in the centre of Dnipropetrovsk. Even Red and Black (symbolising blood and soil) nationalist flags began to appear for the first time. Where the monument to Lenin had once stood was renamed the 'Heroes of the Euromaidan Revolution Square.' 'If a year ago you had shown someone here a blue-and-yellow flag, I don't think it would have meant anything special to them at all. But the *Maydan* roused people's sense of national identity' (Sindelar 2015).

The appointment of Kolomoyskyy after three months of instability and uncertainty 'felt good,' volunteer Natalya Khazan recalled.[13] She credited him with immediately standing up to Putin and eventually thwarting his 'New Russia' project. Jewish-Ukrainian Oleksandr Cherkasskyy, who volunteered for one of the Kolomoyskyy-funded battalions, credits the governor with playing a positive role in halting Russian aggression: 'If there had been no Kolomoyskyy there would be no Ukraine.' [14] Without the work of many people in Dnipropetrovsk, including civil society volunteers, Zubchenko believes Russian forces 'might have made it to Dnipropetrovsk, or even further into Ukraine' (Sindelar 2015).

Dnipropetrovsk welcomed 'any strong hand, Ukrainian or not' (Carroll 2015) with the arrival of Kolomoyskyy because it prevented the disintegration and chaos which they saw in the Donbas, and to a lesser extent in March-May 2014 in Kharkiv and Odesa. Importantly, Kolomoyskyy's team took control of the security forces and thus prevented defections to Russian proxy forces, as in the Donbas and Crimea (Kuzio 2012).

Kolomoyskyy played an important role beyond his home city in Kharkiv and Odesa. His influence in the leadership of the Jewish community in Ukraine persuaded Kharkiv Mayor Hennadiy Kernes, who had been a faithful Party of Regions official, to remain loyal to Ukraine. In February-March 2014, Kernes adopted a similar approach to Akhmetov of straddling pro-Ukrainian and pro-Russian fences. Kolomoyskyy's persuasion tilted him towards being pro-Ukrainian. Kolomoyskyy told Kernes 'he was risking everything by betting on the wrong horse' (Carroll 2015). Kernes visited Kolomoyskyy in Geneva in late February 2014, after which he returned to Kharkiv declaring himself a 'Ukrainian patriot.' Slowly, 'the separatist storm in Kharkiv – at one point the most violent in the land – began to dampen down' (Carroll 2015). In April 2014, pro-Russian *Oplot* (Bulwark) vigilantes probably undertook the assassination attempt on him because of his pro-Ukrainian stance.

In Odesa, Kolomoyskyy influenced the appointment of a new oblast Minister of Interior and regional governor Ihor Palytsya on 4 and 6 May 2014 respectively. Kolomoyskyy, as with Kernes, neutralised another former Party of Regions mayor, Hennadiy Trukhanov, by 'persuading' him to support Ukraine. These appointments, coming after the death of 42 pro-Russian and 6 pro-Ukrainian activists on 2 May 2014 in Odesa, 'enabled the implementation of more expansive and coordinated control over security' (Richardson 2019, 293). Palytsya organised new volunteer groups and self-defence forces who jointly patrolled Odesa with the police until 23 March 2015. As in Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv, what was crucially important was ensuring control over the security forces, so they did not defect to Russian proxies.

In the following year's local elections, Filatov defeated former Party of Regions Dnipropetrovsk governor and Opposition Bloc deputy Vilkul for the position of mayor of Dnipropetrovsk. During the elections, Filatov had 'resorted to anti-separatist and pro-Ukrainian rhetoric, fiercely attacking politicians linked to the Opposition Bloc' (Piechal 2018). Filatov's coalition included former Party of Regions politicians, the *Ukrop* (nationalist) party funded by the Kolomoyskyy clan, Self-Reliance (*Samopomych*) party, civil society volunteers and Euromaidan Revolutionaries.

### *Security Forces and Volunteer Battalions*

Control over the security forces was a crucial factor differentiating Dnipropetrovsk from the Donbas. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) were given direct orders by Governor Kolomoyskyy to deal toughly with pro-Russian protestors and groups. Criminal prosecutions were launched. Russian flags were banned. Courts blocked and seized the properties of Party of Regions defectors to Russian proxies, such as Oleg Tsaryov. A death threat was given to Tsaryov over the telephone by one of the Dnipropetrovsk clans (Kulick 2019, 383). For the Kolomoyskyy team, taking over Tsaryov's properties was an act of revenge for the theft of their own business interests in Crimea after its

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annexation by Russia.[15]

On 2 March 2014, Kolomoyskyy was appointed governor of Dnipropetrovsk. A Fund for the Defence of the Country was set up on 18 March by one of his senior advisers, Pavlo Khazan, to protect major installations and official buildings. On 17 April 2014, a bounty of \$10,000 was announced for the capture of any Russian 'saboteurs.' Between April-May 2014, four volunteer battalions were established by the Kolomoyskyy clan through the Fund for the Defence of the Country and the Ministry of Defence – Donbas, Dnipro-1 (successor to the Regiment for the Defence of the Dnipropetrovsk region formed by Yuriy Bereza, a Ukrainian speaker from Luhansk) (Bukkvoll 2019, 301), Dnipro-2 and *Pravyi Sektor*. Most of the volunteers, such as *Pravyi Sektor* leader Yarosh and oblast leader Denysenko, were local activists.[16] The Kolomoyskyy clan financed and equipped the volunteer battalions with everything except weapons which were supplied by the military and Ministry of Internal Affairs (Korban 2014).

Filatov, an ethnic Russian citizen of Ukraine, coordinated Dnipropetrovsk-based volunteer battalions. At 58 *Komsomol* Street in the city of Dnipropetrovsk, the *Pravyi Sektor* nationalist volunteer battalion was based on the second floor, Sicheslav (old name for Dnipropetrovsk) volunteer battalion on the third, and Dnipropetrovsk Territorial Defence units on the fourth (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 181). With memory politics popularising them since the late 1980s, Cossacks (including some former *Berkut* riot police officers) from Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya formed the Novokodatskyy, Verkhnodniprovsk and Staro-Samarska platoons (*soznyas*). A study of Dnipropetrovsk in the Russian-Ukrainian war analysed *Berkut* officers from Western Ukraine and Zaporizhzhya who fought for Ukraine (Reva 2020, 217, 225).

### *Countering the 'Russian Spring'*

During the 2014 'Russian Spring' the three jewels in the crown of Putin's 'New Russia' project were Kharkiv, Dnipropetrovsk and Odesa. Thuggish 'political tourists' from Russia were the main initiators of violence against Euromaidan Revolutionaries and pro-Ukrainian forces on the streets of cities such as Donetsk and elsewhere. In Kharkiv and Odesa, Russian 'political tourists' travelled from Belgorod in Russia and Moldova's Transnistria region respectively.

The atmosphere in Southern-Eastern Ukraine was a mixture of disquiet at the unstable political situation and weak understanding of what would come next at a time when Putin's objectives were still unclear. In 2007, 61.8 per cent of Dnipropetrovsk disagreed with the view that regional differences were so acute in Ukraine that one could speak of two peoples, with Donetsk giving the lowest (48.4 per cent) support for this view (Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2007). Sixty-nine per cent in Dnipropetrovsk (the highest in the 'East') disagreed with the statement that regional differences in Ukraine were so great one could call 'East' and 'West' two different peoples, a harbinger of a future base for national integration. In Kharkiv 49 per cent disagreed with this view (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58–65). With a regional average of 19.1 per cent, the lowest belief there would be 'civil war' was to be found in Dnipropetrovsk (10.6 per cent).

Dnipropetrovsk (17.1 per cent) was close to the regional average (16.9) of the fear of Russian invasion. Such sentiments produced a rallying around the flag and governor in Dnipropetrovsk. Not surprisingly, the highest fear was to be found in Kherson (45.3 per cent) and Mykolayiv (36.2 per cent) because they bordered or were close to Crimea (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

In Ukraine's 'East,' Zaporizhzhya (93 per cent) and Dnipropetrovsk (86.2 per cent) were the most opposed to separatism. In 2007, only in the Donbas did regional autonomy receive relatively high support of 39.7 per cent (Donetsk) and 33.6 per cent (Luhansk) (Formuvannya Spilnoyi Identychnosti Hromadyan Ukrayiny 2007). A decade later support for regional autonomy in the 'East' dropped to only 7 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk with a very high 79 per cent opposed (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58–65). These figures ensured a high level of Ukrainian patriotism and opposition to Putin's 'New Russia' project.

Federalism had always been a political football in Ukraine, raised at different times by Eastern Ukrainian political entrepreneurs and then quietly dropped. Russia's long-term policy has been to weaken the Ukrainian state by

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transforming it into a loose federation or even confederation of 'New Russia,' Ukraine ('Little Russia') and 'Galicia.' Support for federalism in Ukraine ranged between a high of 38.4 per cent in Donetsk and 41.9 per cent in Luhansk, where the Party of Regions had played with the idea, to a low of 6.9 per cent in Kherson, 10.7 per cent in Mykolayiv, 11.4 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk and 15.3 per cent in Zaporizhzhya. Kharkiv (32.2 per cent) was closer to the views of the Donbas on federalism (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

There was little belief in Russian political rhetoric and Russian information warfare and disinformation claiming Russian speakers were threatened by the rise of extremist nationalists. Mykolayiv (60.3 per cent and 78.2 per cent) and Kherson (60.4 per cent and 69.8 per cent) had similar results to Dnipropetrovsk in their opposition to the seizure of official buildings (55.7 per cent) and Russia's illegal interference in Ukrainian affairs and Russian support for separatist rallies (72 per cent) (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

Political forces formerly linked to Dnipropetrovsk oligarchs had never supported separatism or exhibited pro-Russian Soviet nostalgia. Pro-Russian crowds were never large and were countered by different actors. Communist Party of Ukraine members were mainly pensioners and were not adept at seizing official buildings or in street fights with young vigilantes. Communist Party members dominated the Union of Soviet Officers which was the main pro-Russian force in Dnipropetrovsk. In view of the influence of the Jewish community in Dnipropetrovsk it did not help the pro-Russian cause that the Union of Soviet Officers was anti-Semitic, with its leaders warning of the alleged threat of a 'World Zionist government' taking over the world (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 180). Hendin (2014) described how he had attended both the Euromaidan Revolution and anti-*Maydan* meetings and had only ever heard anti-Semitic rants about 'Jewish conspiracies led by Kolomoyskyy' at the latter (see Kuzio 2017, 118–140). Jews in Dnipropetrovsk associated anti-Semitism with pro-Russian forces in Crimea and the DNR and LNR and not with Ukrainian nationalists. They were happy to work with and finance *Pravyi Sektor*. Only 10.6 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk were concerned at the growth of Ukrainian extremist nationalism.

Opposed to pro-Russian forces in Eastern-Southern Ukraine were Ukrainian patriots who prevented local councils from adopting pro-Russian resolutions denouncing the 'fascist coup' in Kyiv, security forces which remained loyal and prevented their arms falling into the hands of pro-Russian forces, football *ultras* (extremist members of support clubs) and Kolomoyskyy's 'patriotic vigilantes' who confronted pro-Russian supporters on the streets. In Dnipropetrovsk the largest protest took place in May 2014 and attracted 200 people with only 32 attending the last rally on 22 June 2014. Asked if they would participate in pro-Russian rallies, 25 per cent said they would in the Donbas and 15 per cent in Kharkiv. In the remainder of Eastern-Southern Ukraine this dropped to between 3 and 7 per cent (Stebelsky 2018, 42–43). Pro-Russian Soviet nostalgia was again shown to be higher in Kharkiv and especially the Donbas than in Dnipropetrovsk or Odesa.

Pro-Russian rallies in Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhya were minimal compared to those in the Donbas, Kharkiv and Odesa. Only 5.9 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk (with similar figures in Mykolayiv [7.2 per cent] and Kherson [2.7 per cent]) supported rallies calling for their regions to join Russia. Low numbers backed the right of secessionist regions to join Russia ranging from 3.5 per cent in Kherson, 6.2 per cent in Zaporizhzhya, 6.9 per cent in Dnipropetrovsk to 7.2 per cent in Mykolayiv and Odesa (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014). In Dnipropetrovsk (4 per cent), Mykolayov (4.2 per cent) and Kherson (0.7 per cent) a miniscule number supported unification of Ukraine and Russia into one state (Dumky ta Pohlyady Zhyteliv Pivdenno-Skhidnykh Oblastey Ukrayiny: kviten 2014).

Union of Soviet Officers and Union of Afghan Veterans organised meetings wearing St. George ribbons and carrying Russian flags which made them unpopular in Dnipropetrovsk. The Russian flag had supporters in Donetsk and Luhansk but not in Dnipropetrovsk. On 1 March 2014, in coordination with other cities in Southern-Eastern Ukraine these pro-Russian forces planted Russian flags on the Dnipropetrovsk State Administration building. In Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk, Ministry of Interior special forces removed the flags.

Rumours of summary justice of pro-Russian activists have been hinted at by members of the Kolomoyskyy clan. Kolomoyskyy said 'We had a problem, we dealt with it, and thank God we did' (Carroll 2015). As a corporate raider,

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Kolomoyskyy had tough young 'sportsmen' at his disposal who could be quickly mobilised as vigilantes against a Russian threat to Dnipropetrovsk.

'Patriotic' vigilantes came to the small number of poorly attended pro-Russian meetings and broke them up. 'It just so happened that very active comrades when leaving pro-Russian meetings ended up in reanimation (hospital)' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 210). In other cases, 'Some of them had their heads cracked at bus stops, some did not make it to the underpass, and the result was that they concluded it was better to not become involved in these activities' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 210). Kolomoyskyy's clan never shied from using 'marches to the woods,' summary shootings, gang warfare' (Carroll 2015). Such claims, part of the urban legend of the outpost of Dnipropetrovsk in 2014, are widely believed but of course cannot be verified.

Korban does not shirk responsibility for his tough response to Russian proxies. The Kolomoyskyy clan took control of organised crime in the oblast and ensured they worked for Ukrainian interests – and not Russian hybrid warfare (Kulick 2019, 252). The Kolomoyskyy clan believed Ukraine was at war and therefore their rules of war applied to all types of combat. If they had not been tough with pro-Russian activists from the beginning Korban (2014) was 'sure we would have had Chechen mercenaries here long ago.' After pro-Russian activists were removed from official buildings they were taken to the woods where they received 'a stern lesson' in 'how to love Ukraine' (Kulick 2019, 377). Filatov (2014) also talked of 'separating the separatists' which he meant as sowing divisions within their ranks.

## *Civil Society Volunteer Movement*

The city of Dnipropetrovsk and oblast played a crucial role in 2014–2015 in halting and reversing Russian military aggression and it could not have accomplished this without a large civil society volunteer movement. One volunteer recalled 'This is a part of the history of Ukraine' and 'Dnipro was the outpost' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 230). 'If people did not support the war through volunteers, then the enemy who invaded our land would have not been halted' (Hrushko-Kolinko 2017, 7).

In 2014, pressure was intense on Ukrainian patriots in Dnipropetrovsk to become involved in fighting a war they did not at that stage fully comprehend. A volunteer recalled 'Every day, the intelligence services came to us and informed us that there was the possibility of the (separatist) fighters breaking through' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 222). Svyatoslav Oliynyk recalls that the first goal of volunteers and volunteer battalions was to push Russian and separatist forces as far east as possible from the Dnipropetrovsk-Donetsk 'border', 'so that this epidemic did not spread' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 183). The second goal was to ensure strategic buildings, such as the State Administration and Ministry of Internal Affairs were protected (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 227).

Dnipropetrovsk already had an active civil society movement that was galvanised by Yanukovych's kleptocratic authoritarian regime and the Euromaidan Revolution when human rights organisations had assisted prisoners with free legal advice and appeals to the ECHR. In Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv and Zaporizhzhya, 27–30 per cent were willing to participate in the volunteer movement, a high figure in a region where civil society had traditionally been less active than in Western Ukraine and the capital city of Kyiv (Identychnist Hromadyan Ukrayiny v Novykh Umovakh 2016, 58–65).

In 2014 *Forepost* (Outpost) and *Sich* NGOs emerged from these existing human rights groups with the purpose of legally defending prisoners-of-war and providing aid to soldiers. They produced *Unbroken* (*Nezlamnyy*), a documentary film about Ukrainian women illegally imprisoned in the DNR and LNR, Crimea and the Russian Federation.[17]

Volunteers 'defended' their land not with weapons but with 'mercy (*myloserdya*)'; they were 'crucial rear volunteers' (Hrushko-Kolinko 2017, 4). The Dnipro Volunteer Centre collected money, food, clothing, footwear, tea, coffee, soap, sleeping bags and blankets and bought bullet proof vests, night vision glasses, binoculars, uniforms, and other items.

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Women baked and cooked food which was freeze dried for transportation to the war zone. Children and school pupils wrote letters and painted pictures (Hrushko-Kolinko 2017, 21–22). They transported these products to Ukrainian military bases at Piske and Butivka near Donetsk airport on the front line. When they arrived 'our lads were already waiting for us' (Hrushko-Kolinko 2017, 9).

Women have played a disproportionate role in Ukraine's volunteer movement since 2014, providing expertise in the medical, psychological, catering, and educational fields. Hairdressers and dentists volunteered their services. A *Sestrynska sotnya* (Sister's platoon) of 100 women was created in the National Defence HQ in the State Administration (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 184). A 'culinary *sotnya*' prepared food packages which included freeze dried 'Dnipro borsch.' An 84-year-old grandmother brought food to the train station for soldiers. A 60-year-old pensioner came to the military hospital to wash the floors. People – especially women – volunteered with whatever help they could provide. Monks came to help Church chaplains in the military. Father Dmytro Povorotnyy of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church-Kyiv Patriarch became a local hero as a volunteer army chaplain. Most of these volunteers, especially from the older generation, had never before been involved in civil society work.

Volunteers dealt with the sudden and horrific flow of casualties from the war zone. 'This was a major trauma. All of the city remembers the sirens of ambulances and within each ambulance there was a human fate' (Hladka, Hromakov, Myronova, Pluzhnyk, Pokalchuk, Rudych, Vasilisa, Shevchenko 2016, 201). Tents had to be quickly put up at Dnipropetrovsk airport for the wounded. The main military hospital had to be prepared and equipped largely with donations and staffed by volunteers. Far greater numbers of Ukrainian wounded were brought to Dnipropetrovsk from the Donetsk war zone than to Kharkiv which took casualties from the Luhansk war zone.

Dnipropetrovsk Airport was a 'surreal' place converted from civilian to civilian-military purposes over-night. Wounded on the front line were first taken to stabilisation points at front-line hospitals where they were provided with emergency treatment. From there, helicopters (or if there was bad weather, trains) evacuated the wounded from the Donetsk war zone to Dnipropetrovsk Airport and from there they were taken by ambulance to be treated in hospitals in the city.[18]

'Most of us did not have any experience with field medicine or treating combat injuries. We weren't treating combat injuries. We weren't expecting a war. It took us about two months to get up to stuff,' recalled Zubchenko who together with her husband worked as anaesthesiologists in the front-line evacuation hospital in Dnipropetrovsk (Sindelar 2015). Hanna Teryanik, a resident of Dnipropetrovsk with her husband from Luhansk, recalled seeing numerous vehicles driving past her apartment window with wounded Ukrainian soldiers.

The volunteer movement expanded in number after the August 2014 Ilovaysk massacre of Ukrainian soldiers who had been given 'safe passage' by Putin but were attacked and shelled, killing over 300 and wounding many more. Teryanik recalled cancelling her June 2014 vacation because 'She had to do something.' She and others used any vehicles they could commandeer to drive to the Donetsk war zone and bring dead and wounded back to Dnipropetrovsk.[19] The Ilovaysk massacre and Russia's invasion of Ukraine was one of the many factors that buried the Soviet concept of Russian-Ukrainian 'brotherly peoples' (see Aliyev 2019, 2020).

### Conclusion

This chapter has challenged the traditional concept of a unified Ukrainian 'East' by showing it had been mistaken to view eight Southern-Eastern Ukrainian oblasts in such a manner prior to the 2014 crisis, and with the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian war on Ukrainian national identity this is even more the case since the 2014 crisis. A bounded Russian speaking nationality had never emerged in Ukraine prior to 2014 (Arel 1995a, 1995b; Arel and Khmelko 1996; Laitin 1998; Whitefield 2002). The Russian-Ukrainian war has tipped the balance between the more 'Eastern' identity of the city of Dnipropetrovsk and more Central Ukrainian identity of Dnipropetrovsk towns and villages towards the latter. Zaporizhzhya, Mykolayiv, and Kherson are similar to Dnipropetrovsk in moving since 2014 away from the 'East' towards a more Central Ukrainian identity.

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Two major crises in 1991 and 2014 dramatically reduced the size of Ukraine's ethnic Russian population by three quarters from 22 per cent to 6 per cent. In Dnipropetrovsk, a large proportion of those who had defined themselves as 'Russians' or biethnic Ukrainian-Russian have re-identified as Ukrainian. In wars, such as that taking place since 2014 in Eastern Ukraine, sitting on the fence is no longer an option. Answers to survey questions about Dnipropetrovsk show how identities were changing in an evolutionary fashion prior to 2014 and since then have changed in a more revolutionary manner.

Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro is historically analogous to Lviv in Western Ukraine which was a Ukrainian outpost in the fight with Poland over their border. Since 2014, Dnipropetrovsk and Dnipro are playing an analogous role as the outpost in the war with Russia over their border, as seen in the region having the highest rate of security force casualties of any Ukrainian region.

Kolomoyskyy is undoubtedly a controversial figure in Ukraine. Nevertheless, in 2014-2015 his clan played a positive role in leading, mobilising, organising, and financing volunteer battalions which successfully halted the 'Russian Spring' and Putin's 'New Russia' project. The Kolomoyskyy clan accomplished this together with Euromaidan Revolution activists, Ukrainian patriots, civil society volunteers and the Jewish community. Language played no role in Dnipropetrovsk in Ukrainian patriotism and was overshadowed by the civic Ukrainian patriotism of Jewish-Ukrainian and Russian governors and deputy governors (Bureiko and Moga 2019).

The defeat of Dnipropetrovsk would have opened a gateway for the spread of Russian hybrid warfare into Central Ukraine and ultimately becoming a threat to the capital city of Kyiv. This never came to pass as Putin's 'New Russia' project was halted in the outpost of Dnipropetrovsk. The Kremlin never expected pushback from Southern-Eastern Ukraine's Russian speakers and Jewish community because it never understood – and continues to not understand – the internal dynamics of identity and nation-building of a country, Ukraine, and people, Ukrainians, it denies exist.

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## Notes

[1] <https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/photo-megamarsh-vyshyvanok/31327623.html>

[2] Interview with Ihor Kocherin, Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance (UINP), Dnipro, 9 February 2020.

[3] Interview with Kocherin.

[4] This author's personal experience in speaking Ukrainian in Dnipropetrovsk in 1996 and 2019–2020 were radically different. In the 1990s one still received funny looks when asking questions in Ukrainian; this is no longer the case.

[5] Interview with volunteer Olha Volynska, Dnipro, 8 February 2020.

[6] Interview with Oleh Rostovtsev and I. Kocherin, Dnipro, 9 February 2020.

[7] Interview with Anatolii Korniyenko, Dnipro, 8 February 2020

[8] Interview with Korniyenko.

[9] Interview with volunteer Natalya Khazan, Dnipro, 8 February 2020.

[10] The offer was made in March 2014 when Ukraine had no president. Elections were held in May which Petro Poroshenko won.

[11] Interview with political technologist Denis N. Semenov, Dnipropetrovsk, 26 May 2014.

[12] 'Plyve kacha. Pamyati Nebesnoyii sotni,' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3afvyGNbGoE>

[13] Interview with Khazan.

[14] Interview with Oleksandr Cherkassky, Dnipro, 9 February 2020.

[15] Interview with Volynska.

[16] Interview with D.N. Semenov.

[17] Interview with Volynska.

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[18] Interview with Khazan.

[19] Interview with Hanna Teryanik, ATO Museum, Dnipro, 3 November 2019.

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## About the author:

Taras Kuzio received a PhD from the University of Birmingham, England; MA from the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London; and BA from the University of Sussex. He is the author and editor of 23 books, including *Fascism and Genocide. Russia's War Against Ukrainians* (2023); *Russian Nationalism and the Russian-Ukrainian War. Autocracy-Orthodoxy-Nationality* (2022); *Crisis in Russian Studies. Nationalism (Imperialism), Racism and War* (2020); *Putin's War Against Ukraine. Revolution, Nationalism, and Crime* (2017, 2019); and *Ukraine: Democratization, Corruption, and the New Russian Imperialism* (2015). He has also published six think tank monographs, and 165 book chapters and scholarly articles. Taras is currently teaching in the Department of Political Science at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy.