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Ukraine's Westward Bent

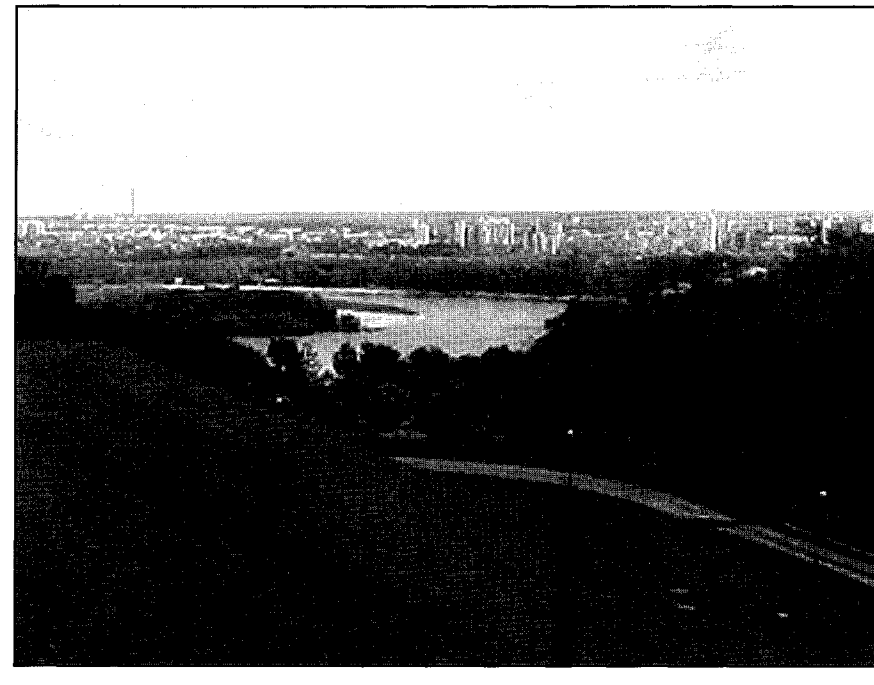
By Gregory Feifer

JUNE 2001

KIEV—Ukraine is poor. The extent of the country's unenviable state of affairs is perhaps best illustrated by its massive energy bill to Russia, a country on which Ukraine depends for economic survival. (Basketcase Russia, of all places!) So it may come as a bit of a surprise to learn that in comparison to any Russian city, the Ukrainian capital looks clean, orderly, in parts even stunning. In preparation for its celebrations marking a decade of Ukrainian independence in August, Kiev is undergoing a massive regime of rebuilding. Pedestrian underpasses are being reconstructed; the train station is being completely renovated. Almost every church in the city center looks as if the paint on its walls is still drying.

That's just the literal surface of things. Other comparisons also put Russia to shame. Ukrainians in general are a relatively friendly, civilized lot. They're also industrious. Ukraine's corruption-riddled economy and crony politics still need far to go to recover from many decades of Moscow-imposed communism, but society itself is westernizing quickly.

That's not the picture one gets reading news about this country outside its borders. Western media tend only to report economic and political crises—and Ukraine has had more than its fair share in the past months. There's also the reputation-blackening Chernobyl nuclear plant, which was finally shut down last December, some 15 years after the world's worst nuclear disaster claimed



A view of the Dniepr River and the east bank of the city. The river was key for giving the Scandinavians—who founded the civilization of Kievan Rus in the ninth century—control over trade from the Baltic to the Black seas.

up to 30,000 lives and contaminated most of Europe. The Russian press, for its part, is only too glad to describe Ukraine's problems, as if to gloat over the fact that the country has failed to find its footing since parting ways with Russia.

Indeed, there is no shortage of scandal in Ukraine. The president, a crook and a liar, is accused of authoritarian tactics in general and specifically with ordering the murder of a crusading investigative journalist, whose headless corpse was found in a shallow grave in the woods outside Kiev. A group of big-business boosters and communists allied in parliament to sack a reforming prime minister who did more than perhaps any other Ukrainian politician to restructure the economy and provide for growth since the Soviet collapse. Average Ukrainians, meanwhile, grumble that organized criminal groups run their country.

Despite these crushing problems, Ukraine appears to have come a long way since independence in 1991. The country seems closer in spirit to the West than to Russia, despite the historic ties of politics, culture, language, religion and geography. Perhaps that's because closeness to Russia has always been exaggerated. Russia's connection to Kievan Rus,[1] the civilization preceding modern Russia's, was not that of a continuous whole. In fact, the principality of Muscovy (which later grew into Russia) was a separate political entity. Similarly, when Muscovy later swallowed Ukrainian lands—taking them out of the orbit of the Polish-Lithuanian Empire that had held sway over the region for centuries—it acquired not "Little Russia," the term Russians condescendingly used for Ukraine, but a distinctly separate state.

It was Russian hagiography and other mythmaking that left to posterity the idea that Ukraine—the name derives from "borderland"—had always been an inseparable part of Russia. That myth still exists, even though a quick glance at Kiev—a city admittedly far richer than the poverty-stricken countryside—is enough to show that Ukraine

[1] Usually spelled "Rus'" (to indicate the soft "s" sound). I omit the apostrophe for the sake of clarity.

is indeed a different place with different sensibilities and different behavior. Russia is now trying once again to turn the screws and bring Ukraine under its orbit. Thankfully for Ukraine, Kiev seems to have enough homespun problems of its own to pay the Russians a great deal of attention.

Kiev

I'd been taken in by the usual reports about Ukraine myself, and was expecting to travel to a metropolis more downtrodden than Moscow. I'd spent time in Yalta before, but that city, as does much of the Crimean peninsula, benefits from tourists' cash and its long role as holiday destination, and is therefore an exception. Kiev, I assumed, would be far different. For months, Russian television had aired grim images of angry Ukrainians protesting in front of the state parliament building and clashing with police. It didn't seem a healthy situation.

The first surprise came in Russia. Boarding an overnight train to the Ukrainian capital in Moscow's central Kiev station, I found my car to be brand-new and fairly modern-looking. Unlike their Russian counterparts, the conductresses made efforts to appear polite. My compartment even had a television set—it even worked. Perhaps the Ukrainian railway service had invested in the new technology to show up Russians traveling to their former subject state. If so, the ploy seemed fairly successful.

I awoke the next morning to a countryside visibly poorer than Russia's. The farms and train stations I passed seemed to have undergone no visible renovation since the Soviet collapse. (Perhaps I especially noticed the contrast because the landscape outside Moscow—still visible before dusk had set in—showed many signs of modernization: new warehouses and the construction of better-than-average apartment houses chief among them.) But there was another difference in Ukraine. Even though the scenery might have changed little in the past 15 years, the buildings were clean and the setting seemed orderly. Ukraine's famous "black earth" appeared genuinely fertile.

At Kiev's central train station I stepped out of my railway car onto a massive construction site. How it could possibly be finished before independence day celebrations at the end of August stumped me. But locals assured me it would be done. (In contrast, when the powerful Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov promised that a number of his own pet development projects would be finished in time for the city's 850th anniversary celebrations in 1997, he was giving a pledge that wouldn't be met despite even his massive political will power.)

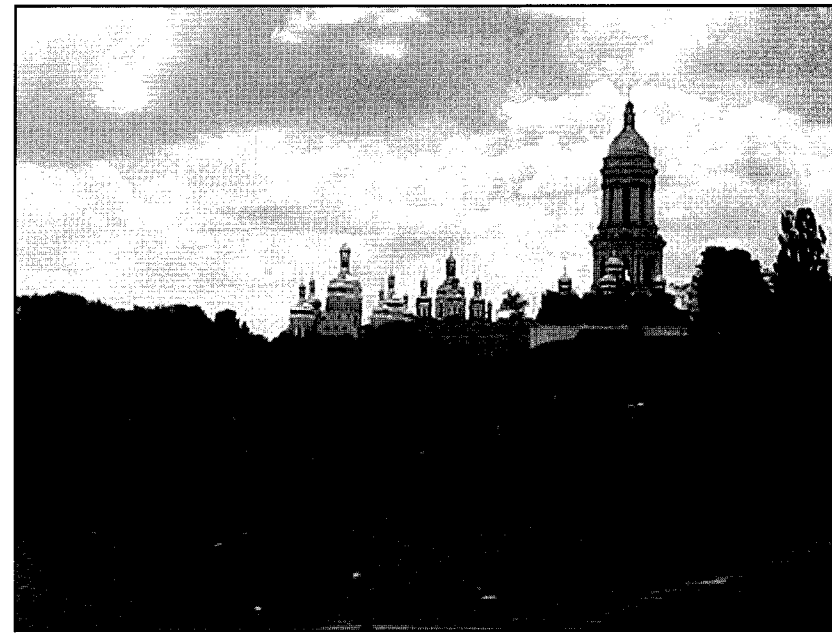
Driving into Kiev, I noticed that the ubiquitous Soviet-era concrete-slab buildings seemed better-constructed than Russia's. It was a Sunday, and perhaps that was why the city was quiet, which reinforced the un-Russian sense of cleanliness. The city's central shopping street, Khreshchatyk, was closed off to cars. Vivaldi wafted from Soviet-era public-announcement speakers, which had to compete with a troupe of those international troubadours, Chilean musicians. The atmosphere seemed relaxed, civilized, unlike—as I can't stress too much—anywhere in Moscow. The crowds stayed on late into the night, wandering into and out of boutiques, bars and restaurants. Street performers put on a dance involving a bonfire, lit torches and a papier-mâché monster. I thought the spectacle to be an allegory of the end of communism—humanity battling the monster and coming out into the light. But the show—applauded vigorously by crowds surrounding the performers—turned out to be part of an AIDS-awareness campaign.

Reconstruction of Kiev's main Khreshchatyk Street. Completely rebuilt in Stalinist style after the destruction of the Second World War, the mile-long thoroughfare is a center for shopping and sauntering.

German bombs destroyed much of downtown during the Second World War. The buildings that replaced them are typically Stalinist—imposing, grimly grey-toned neoclassical structures—but somehow they seemed less austere than the Russian variety (and cleaner, of course). Many older neoclassical buildings still stand, however, and some of these are ornate and beautiful, especially since many are being restored (while Soviet-era asphalt is being ripped out of public parks and replaced with

brick). The following Monday, the city was still as civil as on Sunday, and still more western-seeming despite the outward similarities to Russian towns.

The broad Dniepr (Dnipro in Ukrainian) River borders the western side of the city center. Between the city and the river lies a long stretch of green parkland punctuated by buildings including the parliament and some of Kiev's vast number of churches, among them the stunning Caves Monastery. Much of that sprawling complex is being rebuilt. The ornate Baroque main cathedral has just been redone, so that—using directions from a guidebook that fixed the previously ruined structure as a central point-of-reference—it took some time to figure out how to find my bearings. It heightened the sense that things really seem to be changing.



The gold domes of the Caves Monastery on the wooded slopes above the Dniepr River. The complex became Kievan Rus's intellectual center.

Founded in 1051 three kilometers south of Kiev proper, the lower part of the Caves Monastery does indeed contain underground labyrinths lined with mummified (and very short) monks wrapped in fine cloths and placed inside glass coffins. The monks dug out and lived in the caves, which are quite dank and humid, narrow and dark—not the place for a fit of claustrophobia. Later, a series of elaborate cathedrals were built in the complex. The monastery became Kievan Rus's intellectual center, and produced many famous chronicles and icons.

Ukrainian Orthodox architecture differs from Russian. There are virtually no onion domes, but rather more European-looking, bell-shaped structures. The scale of the architecture is also more balanced. The Baroque, while still ornate, somehow avoids the absurdly disproportionate lines so many Russian churches display.

In the center of town, Kiev's most famous church, the St. Sophia, was originally Byzantine in style, and the interior still contains its 11th-century structure and a number of original Byzantine-style frescoes. The city's oldest standing church, it was completed in 1031 and named after Constantinople's Aya Sophia, Christendom's greatest church for roughly a millennium. The Kievan version's Byzantine design announced the new religious and political authority of Kiev, which had not long before accepted Christianity. The church also housed the first school and library in Kievan Rus. Its frescoes' decorative design and simplicity, together with the structure's somber arches, make the inside one of the most beautiful I've seen. The outside also retains the original plan, but was rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries with Baroque domes and whitewash. It was abandoned for centuries since being partly ruined by the Mongol Empire's Tatars in 1240. After the most recent renovation, some of the original simple, Byzantine-style stone skin has been left uncovered.

Closed off on weekends, the broad Khreshchatyk Street attracts crowds wandering around, watching street performers and listening to classical music piped in though Soviet-era public announcement speakers.

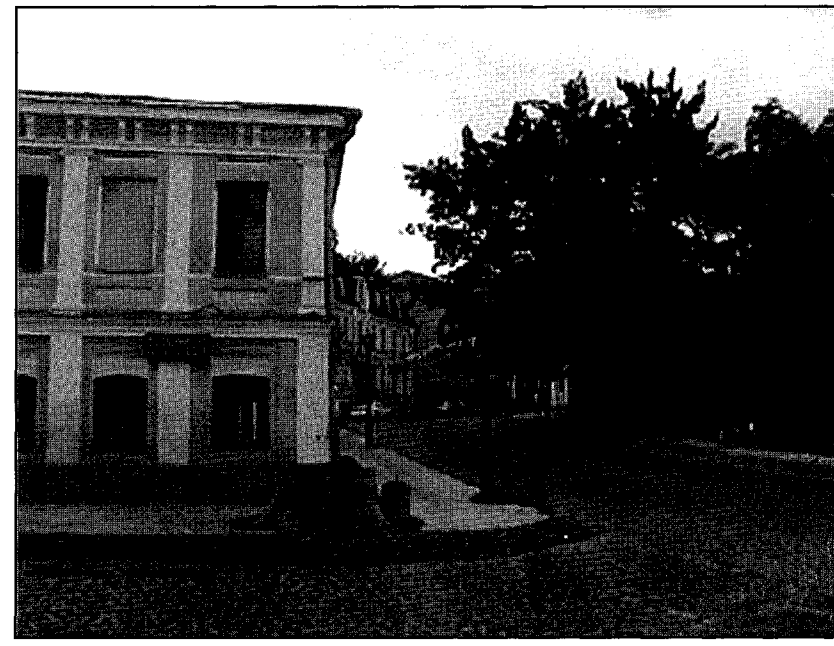
Kiev's Byzantine influence also lies closer to the surface. A neo-Byzantine church built in the late 19th century stands near the city center. The building is also suffused with Baroque, however, and painted in the type of light blue common on neoclassical buildings. The interior design is a dark Art Nouveau emblazoned with swaths of gold accents. A number of frescoes were

painted by the Russian Viktor Vasnetsov, famous for his stylized historical and legendary scenes that epitomized the "Russian revival" of the turn of the 19th century. The inside of the church resembles a large-scale fairy-tale book.

Beside Kiev's picturesque greenery and stunning architecture also stand some heinous Soviet eyesores, chief among them a behemoth 72-meter stainless-steel statue of a woman brandishing a sword and a shield called "Defense of the Motherland" (also dubbed "Mother Russia" and "She Who Must be Obeyed"). It almost ruins the vista. Nevertheless, standing at the top of the parkland looking down at the river affords a pretty, almost quaint view of the Dniepr.

Down a sloping hill northwest of the city center—the so-called upper town—lies Podil, the old mercantile quarter. It dates back to the earliest settlements and is perhaps the most beautiful part of the city, with narrow streets and small, chiefly 19th-century buildings. Russia held sway during the construction of most of the buildings visible today, but the area still seems unmistakably Polish-Lithuanian in character. The influence seems to lie in the smaller scale of the structures, the meandering lanes and broad central square. A large number of buildings have been restored and repainted, giving an almost Disneyland feel.

I heard spoken Russian as often on the streets as Ukrainian, but found almost no signs written in Russian. Walking back to my lodgings along Kiev's nice, broad sidewalks one night, I couldn't help thinking what a tragedy 70 years of communism has been for this country—especially because, despite the decades of oppression, it still seems so different from its northern neighbor.



A street corner in Podil, the old mercantile quarter. Podil's small scale and meandering, 19th-century feel make it the most attractive part of town, particularly since so much of it is now being restored.

Industrious Lot

Ukrainians are proud of their surroundings. The countryside may be wracked with poverty, but locals see the increasingly beautified Kiev as one of the positive things in their lives. If the city is indeed a collective statement, it's perhaps not insignificant that it is now adding a new layer of "pan-European" influence to its many architectural coats of culture.

Andrei, a taxi driver in his 20s, proudly pointed out landmarks and assured me the protestors about whom I'd heard so much constituted just a small minority. "They're mostly students and elderly pensioners," he said waving his hand in dismissal. "They've got time on their hands." It was to such people Andrei attributed the city's most intractable obstacles. "The problem in Kiev is that people don't know how to work," he said. "They became used to having no incentive." One hears that kind of criticism in Russia, too, but usually from the well-traveled élite. The simple free-market ideology that advancement in life takes hard work—and that the country's ills may stem from not realizing that—is not a common view in Russia, where the populace still expects the state to provide all its basic needs (despite hard evidence to the contrary). In Ukraine, Andrei seemed to reflect an extreme reaction in the opposite direction.

"Under the Soviet Union, people would go to work from nine to six. Then they'd come home and do nothing. They got used to that." Andrei had more hope for rural dwellers. "In the country, people know how to work much better," he said. "When they came home, they'd still have their own work to do, to fix up their houses and so on. But seventy years of communism pretty much wiped out our ideas of capitalism." Andrei also made exceptions for western Ukrainians living on land controlled by Poland until Moscow took it over during the Second World War. "They've only been spoiled since 1945," he said. "They have some memory of how to work."

Andrei held himself up as a model. "I finished university, but I know how to work if I have to," he said. "I worked three years without a single holiday. I didn't even relax by going swimming once. And now I'm only working as a taxi driver because I have to while I'm setting up my business." He didn't specify further about his other line of work, other than to mention that it involved "buying and selling things."

He continued. "Others don't understand that. A neighbor recently asked me to find her son a job and I proposed doing what I do. 'He didn't earn a university degree for that!' his mother retorted. That's the attitude of these

The rubble of a decayed balcony that had just collapsed. No one was hurt in the accident, which would have surely involved the taxi I was in had it happened seconds later.

As we drove through an archway leading into the inner courtyard, an ear-splitting crack-and-boom rang out. In front of us, a cloud of dust and debris materialized. Andrei slammed on his brakes and jumped out. Just around the corner, a balcony on a 19th-century building had collapsed onto another below it and both had slammed onto the sidewalk. Several passersby stood frozen, staring at the rubble on what was seconds before a quiet lane. Upstairs we heard a woman's wail: "Someone call the hospital!" Andrei grabbed his cell phone.

It turned out no one was hurt. The woman's husband had been on his balcony, felt it moving and stepped off just in time. He was just in shock. Andrei, whose car would have been pulverized if we had emerged from the archway seconds earlier, breathed a sigh of relief. "Good he's all right," he said. So he wasn't completely indifferent to the plight of others.

people—they sit around and do nothing because they feel rolling up their sleeves and doing tough work is beneath them."

There's a flipside to such self-righteous single-mindedness. In Andrei's case, it took only a few minutes to emerge. Choked up with anti-communist sentiment, he still called those living on the dole "parasites" (*tuniadetsy*), a vintage Soviet-era epithet. "They may not be paid directly any more, but they're still subsidized through discounts on their rent," he said. "And it's people like me who have to make up the difference when others don't want to work." As a result, Andrei added, he doesn't want to pay taxes. "Why should I when it only goes to those on welfare? I don't when I can get away with it. I only pay ninety dollars [a year] on my car because I can be stopped if I don't."

Andrei went on to propose his own tax reform. "There should be a fine of five dollars for littering," he suggested. "Then the city will be clean and the coffers will be full." He was only getting warmed up. Penal reform was next. "People who steal should also be rounded up and... well, if not shot, then such a thing should be staged. Then others will become scared and they won't steal themselves. Because if they continue to get away with it, they'll continue to steal.

"I'm not saying Hitler was a good person—I wouldn't say that. But you can take ideas from people and change them. I think those who break the law should be turned into examples."

While I listened, trying to hide revulsion, we pulled up to the apartment building in which I would be staying.

Kuchma Out

Ukraine is still gripped by political scandals and a government reshuffle that recently led some commentators to wonder whether the country would completely fall apart. The biggest crisis sparked last year, when a former presidential security guard released audiotapes on which a voice similar to President Leonid Kuchma's was heard ordering officials to "deal with" a reporter in shockingly crude language. The journalist, Georgiy Gongadze, who edited the Internet newsletter *Ukrainska Pravda* and criticized high-level corruption, disappeared last September. His headless corpse was discovered in November buried in a shallow grave. Kuchma denied any involvement, but thousands took to the streets demanding his resignation, chanting the slogan "Kuchma Out!" and clashing with police.

Kuchma was first elected in 1994. He replaced President Leonid Kravchuk, the former Ukrainian Communist Party boss, in a vote directly coinciding with the country's geography: the industrialized east and Russian-speaking Crimean peninsula largely voted for Kravchuk while those living west of the Dniepr supported Kuchma. (The same dynamics were evident in elections in 1999, when Kuchma's closest rival was a Communist.) Kuchma, a former missile-plant director, proved to be a cautious reformer during his first five-year term. The West continues to see him as the best alternative for president, but his administration has long been dogged with accusations of massive corruption. After Kuchma won re-election in 1999, rivals complained that the race, marred by mud slinging and allegations of media bias in favor of the incumbent, had been unfair. A

number of critics said there was evidence of vote rigging in some districts.

As the crisis begun last November escalated, political parties tried to use the new tensions to their advantage. Ukraine's 450-seat parliament is divided roughly into three groupings: the pro-Kuchma faction, the Communists, and the left-wing and national democratic faction. The Communists and centrist pro-Kuchma wing teamed up to sack liberal Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko and his government in April. It was a devastating blow to post-communist reform. Yushchenko had been credited with achieving the first signs of economic growth in Ukraine after nearly a decade of decline. He was a favorite with the West for his liberal reforms and one of Ukraine's most popular politicians. But his belt-tightening measures and efforts to clean up Ukraine's murky economy had angered deputies and big business interests.

In late May, Ukraine's parliament, the *Verkhovna Rada*, narrowly approved business lobbyist Anatoly Kinakh as Yushchenko's replacement, bringing at least a temporary lull to the crisis. But political analysts and media commentators in Ukraine say the country will be saddled with a lame-duck acting premier until parliamentary elections are held in March 2002. That may further hobble reforms by delaying vital legislation. The country can ill-afford the setback. Since the end of communism, Ukraine's economy has steadily shrunk, and major industries have gone virtually bankrupt as corruption and bureaucracy gripped the country. Meanwhile, a maze of tax laws is helping stifle business development. Foreign investment is minimal, while heavy borrowing abroad has resulted in massive debts. Cultural life has declined as has education, health and social care.

Balancing reform and social calm hasn't been easy, nor will conditions improve until tricky steps are taken. Kuchma must still deal with the country's loss-making coal industry while avoiding closing the mines that feed most of eastern Ukraine. He needs to carry out radical administrative reform, attract investment, boost budget revenues and secure the continuation of a suspended $2.6 billion International Monetary Fund aid program. He also needs to pay back more than $12 billion in foreign debt, revive industries, speed up privatization, implement tax reform, combat corruption, and reform an inefficient Soviet-style farming sector. It's a tall order by any standard.

Kuchma promised radical reforms before winning re-election in 1999. But it's still not clear how he will be able to create 1 million new jobs and bring about 7 percent annual economic growth, as he pledged to do in his electoral program. In response to the waves of criticism directed against him, Kuchma has blamed parliament for the foot-dragging, accusing the legislature of blocking reforms. He went so far as to warn that he might seek a referendum on creating a new, bicameral legislature and disbanding the current parliament.

The situation has been little helped by Ukraine's democratic opposition in recent years. It has long been weak and ineffective, a situation that hit bottom two years ago, when the country's largest democratic opposition party, Rukh, split in two. The party was formed by a group of influential writers and other dissidents who played a crucial role in independence. But there's hope that Rukh will now reconsolidate. Last June, the two rival factions signed a declaration agreeing to rejoin forces ahead of parliamentary and local elections next year, giving political observers hope for a strengthened opposition. Members of both factions also say they hope ousted Prime Minister Yushchenko will eventually head the reunited party. (Opinion polls show Yushchenko remains Ukraine's most trusted and well-liked politician.) There's also speculation about Yulia Timoshenko, Yushchenko's former deputy and another well-known opposition figure who was recently briefly jailed on corruption charges—dramatically boosting her popularity. The widely admired Timoshenko has not yet said whether she might also join Rukh.

Protest

I went to the parliament building to see the protestors about whom I'd read so much. I almost missed them. On the opposite side of a square in front of the somber legisla-

The parliament building, seat of the Verkhovna Rada and the site of many of Kiev's recent protests

ture stood a row of several tents, a few slogan banners and a handful of mostly young, rough-looking men. They were cordoned off by flimsy metal barriers and eyed lazily by two guards. The anti-Kuchma rallies were at a low point and the participants said support would soon pick up again. The sterile-looking scene looked like a small museum exhibit of a meek curator's vision of political protest.

A row of tents erected by protesters in front of parliament. The banners display anti-Kuchma slogans.

Most of the picketers were members of the Patriotic Party headed by Nikolai Gaber, a member of parliament. The party calls itself centrist. Gaber's deputy, Grigory Kostinsky, a grey-haired man in his forties, manned the barricade. The rest of the protesters were mostly members of the Ukrainian National Congress, a self-proclaimed rightist group that claims 13 of its own are still in jail after having been arrested during the loud protests last March.

"We have four basic demands," Kostinsky told me. "And no one's rushing to meet a single one of them."

The first is for the adoption of a law on impeachment. "Im-*Kuch*-ment," laughed one young fellow protester. "We need a law—and there's no such thing now—that would allow the president to be able to prove his innocence if he's innocent," Kostinsky continued. "Or it would remove him if he's guilty—without violence. It would be good for all involved." Kostinsky accused Kuchma of taking the presidency illegally during his recent re-election bid. "There were too many irregularities," Kostinsky said. "The extent of the corruption was clear to everyone."

The second demand is for the holding of a referendum on the president's actions. The third is for a release of all political prisoners—specifically those arrested along with Yulia Timoshenko. "We all know what happened in March," Kostinsky said, referring to the arrests. "And there are others," he added. "Timoshenko's husband has been sitting in jail for a year and a half and there's been no publicly announced accusation yet." The party's final demand is for one hour of broadcast time to be given to political opposition parties on state television.

Anti-Kuchma protesters. Grigory Kostinsky, deputy head of the Patriotic Party (second from left), flanked by thuggish-looking youngsters from the Ukrainian National Congress movement

Passersby slowed to observe the protesters. One elderly woman approached the group. "Everything is done wrong in this country!" she announced, making a sign of solidarity. Another woman overheard her. "Nonsense! You're a shameful embarrassment to your country!" she shrieked. "You're not even speaking Ukrainian. And you call yourselves Ukrainians?!"

Questions about the murdered Gongadze aroused the fiercest emotions. "Everyone knows it was a political assassination," Kostinsky said. "Only political assassinations would result in the an-

nouncement that the murderers had been found out—and that they had already been killed." Police had indeed recently said the killers had been uncovered, and that they themselves had already been murdered. Few Ukrainians believed the claim, which came after months of bungling autopsies and contradictory statements. "And Gongadze is only the top of the iceberg of what's going on around here," Kostinsky said. It's also the last straw. Where's his head? It's not a coincidental question. If the murder was simply a matter of criminality and not politics, there would have been no need to behead him."

Apart from the handful of protestors, most Kievans seemed almost completely apathetic to Kuchma. Alexander Skidsky, a 26-year-old street vendor selling mobile telephones on Khreshchatyk Street, said he didn't care one way or another about the president. "The main problem is that our country has no direction," he said. "We're not yet ready to choose where we want to go." I asked whether he meant toward Russia or the West. Neither, it turned out. It's between further reform and stagnation—and both directions have little to do with Russia. "We've chosen a different road from Russia's. Russia wants to take Ukraine back, like Belarus. But Ukrainians don't really think about that much. They have enough worries of their own."

Andrei, the twenty-something taxi driver, meanwhile, had told me he didn't much care for the president. But not because of the Gongadze case. One of the alleged crimes of which Kuchma is accused involves the disappearance of around $3 million given by western financial organizations, he said. "It's not just three hundred dollars," the practical-minded driver opined. "That kind of money doesn't simply disappear. He's the president after all." But Andrei made no attempt to explain where the money might have gone. His accusations were almost rhetorical, part of a general cynicism.

Andrei dismissed the Gongadze murder as an inter-

Alexander Skidsky, a 26-year-old street vendor selling mobile telephones, says Ukrainians have enough problems of their own to worry about Russia's threats.

mafia group affair. "It's just one criminal group trying to oust another," he said. "As far as the general opinion about the case, it's clear that the leftists say one thing and the right-wingers another—and there's some measure of truth in what both sides say."

Poverty and Pressure

Since the Soviet collapse, economists have been bemoaning Ukraine's political and economic morass—especially since the country once seemed to have had a great advantage over Russia, behind which it is now regularly ranked in terms of economic prosperity. The burden most Ukrainians bear is heavy indeed. A television producer who works in Kiev told me his parents, who still live in the provincial town where he was born, spent nine years last decade living with rolling blackouts of electricity. Each night, power would be shut off for four hours before being switched on for the same duration.

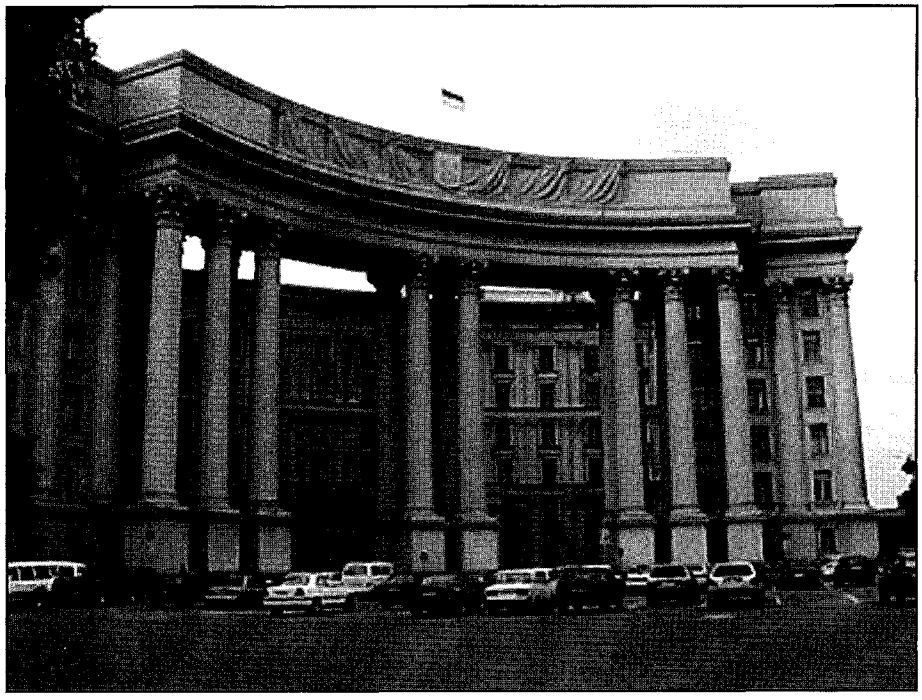
That state of affairs gives Russia great potential influence. So much that, despite Ukraine's firm assurances that it wants to be part of Europe, the influential *Economist* magazine has recently claimed that a "new misery curtain"—not quite "iron" yet—is pulling Ukraine toward Russia.[2] The magazine's view is remarkable only in that it reflects the general western perception of Ukraine.

"After a decade of independence," the *Economist* wrote recently, "this unhappy trio—Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova—are a shambles. Russia is picking up the pieces." Ukraine's big failure, the magazine added, was Yushchenko's removal. Russia—meaning chiefly its big business—is the biggest beneficiary, witnessed by Russian President Vladimir Putin's naming of Viktor Chernomyrdin as ambassador to Ukraine earlier this year. Chernomyrdin was a longtime Russian prime minister and once head of the behemoth Gazprom state gas monopoly. The onetime premier has been likened in Ukraine to a 19th-century tsarist governor-general. His appointment, the *Economist* said, means Russia is tightening the screws on a country already over-dependent on Russian oil and gas.

There is indeed plenty of reason to worry. Ukraine currently owes the Russian gas monopoly $2.2 billion, an amount equal to Ukraine's entire industrial base.[3] Russia is also sore over Ukraine's ongoing pilfering of gas piped across its territory in transit to third countries. Meanwhile, Kremlin-backed industrialists have been buying up Ukrainian industry, something Yushchenko's government had tried to stop. Gazprom has used its leverage to acquire a controlling stake in the Ukrainian company Rospan, which is developing one of the country's largest gas fields.

Using Gazprom, Russia is also maneuvering for ownership of Ukraine's greatest prize, the nine trunk pipelines that carry Russian gas across Ukraine to Europe. If the pipe-

[2] *The Economist*, "A New Misery Curtain," May 31, 2001.
[3] Yulia Laytnina, "From Sprats to Diamonds: Just Add Gas," *The Moscow Times*, May 16, 2001.



The absurdly imposing building now housing the Foreign Affairs Ministry was put up in 1937 as the Ukrainian Communist Party's Central Committee headquarters.

lines are privatized, Gazprom may have to outbid competition from western companies. Chernomyrdin's stature may help convince Kuchma to put off any such privatization plans. Russia is also threatening to build its own rival pipeline through Poland to Slovakia, which would cost Ukraine up to $1 billion a year in lost tariff revenues, the *Financial Times* reported.

Russian investors are also eyeing Ukrainian assets in power supply, defense and heavy engineering. Since last year, Russian companies have bought into the Mykolayiv alumina refinery, the Lysechansk oil refinery and the Zaporizhia aluminum smelter. They are also said to be jockeying for possession of Kryvorozhstal, Ukraine's largest and most profitable steel mill. Such stakes in Ukrainian industry—on top of Ukraine's energy bill—gives the Kremlin increasingly greater leverage.

Moscow is making its actions out to be purely benevolent. A Kremlin-connected website, strana.ru—founded by Putin public-image guru Gleb Pavlovsky—writes that Chernomyrdin's tapping is a positive step. "The appointment of Viktor Chernomyrdin to the post of ambassador to Ukraine underscores the principally new importance that the Russian leadership attaches to Ukraine," the website wrote in May. "... a dire political crisis in Ukraine demonstrated to the Ukrainian elite and the Ukrainian president that certain venturesome political players would like to make Ukraine a plaything in dangerous games they conducted against Russia.

"By firing Viktor Yushchenko, Leonid Kuchma gave it to understand that he wanted to develop relations with Russia as the most important priority," strana.ru continued. "By appointing Viktor Chernomyrdin, Putin gave it to understand that the policy of ignoring Ukraine was a thing of the past."

Such views coming from the Kremlin seem ominous indeed. Kuchma himself owes a large personal favor to Putin, who stood firmly by the Ukrainian president throughout the recent scandals. Kuchma seems to understand that. "My priorities changed after Vladimir Putin became president, after relations between our countries became absolutely pragmatic and constructive," Kuchma said in May in comments reported by the *Financial Times*. "The new policy of the new Russian leadership has changed my vision and actions."

But Moscow may be counting its chickens before they've hatched. While there's no doubt Russian influence may be growing, the Ukrainian president, at a very low point in his political career, may also be engaging in necessary rhetorical realpolitik. That game plays both ways. In June, Kuchma's administration announced that Ukraine sees its future firmly linked to the West and has no interest in a proposed union with Belarus and Russia. "Of course we want good relations with Russia, but there is a clear consensus in Ukraine today that our development must be linked to European structures," Vladimir Litvin, head of the presidential administration, told *The Washington Times*. "No other alternative is even being considered."

Post-Imperialism vs. Post-Colonialism

Perhaps one of the most telling differences between Ukraine and Russia lies in the roles of each in their relationship. Some of Russia's most pervasive problems, affecting the whole of its social and political life, stem from the country's current condition of post-imperialism. The majority of Russians rue the loss of Soviet power and influence. They yearn for a return to the glory days in which Moscow was the center of an expansionist, vastly inflated state. Such attitudes have consequences for Russia's strategy in dealing with Ukraine. As I've indicated, Moscow wants to bring its southern neighbor—together with almost all the former Soviet states—back under its influence.

There are many other differences between political life in Ukraine and Russia. (By the same token, Russia's imperialism is but one of the effects of its own fundamental political culture. Medieval Muscovy, for example, triumphed over its many rival principalities in part because it was politically stable enough to expand and swallow unstable

neighbors, which is true of the core areas of most empire states.) But the post-imperialist condition is perhaps the most evident difference between Russia and Ukraine because of its multitudinous ramifications for Russian society. One of these is that all levels on the social ladder are seeking new identities to replace the Soviet varieties. In the absence of any agreement about what they should be—a situation some say is the only factor holding Russia back from becoming lost in total fantasy—various images have been plucked from different periods of history to create tattered amalgams. Tsars and Soviet general secretaries are revered in one breath.

One of the uses for the filched symbols of past achievement is to glorify current leaders. In the process, the images are taken out of their historical context. Their cultural significance is wiped clean for their new purposes, leading to a dangerous level of amnesia. As a result, Russian politicians are able to conjure up any argument to justify actions that exclusively serve their own political ends—at the expense of the population they hoodwink.

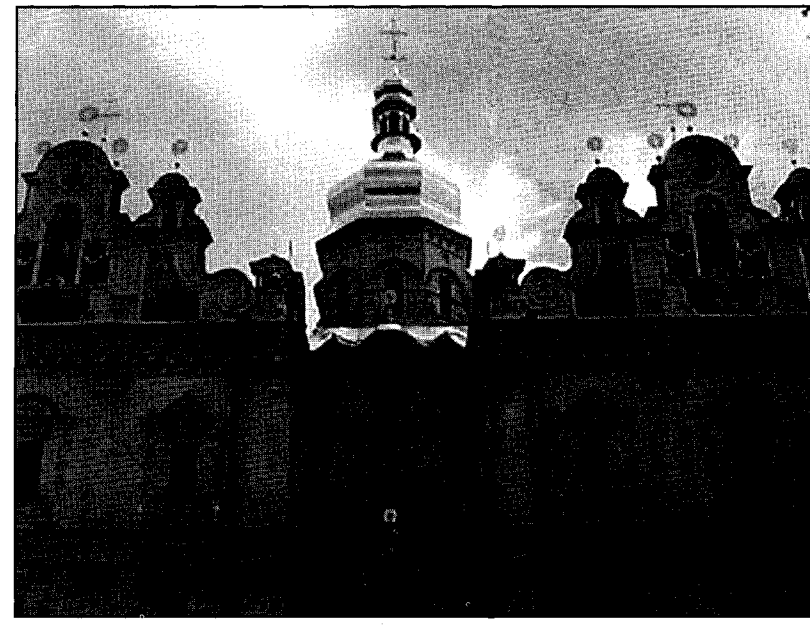
When NATO began its bombing of Yugoslavia in March 1999, for example, Russian politicians raised a cry of protest about the way in which the Serbs—suddenly Russia's closest and most valuable "Slav brothers"—were being treated by the West. Russia suddenly remembered twisted strains of its old product: pan-Slavism. (Why veiled threats—instead of similarly lavish displays of friendship—are being directed at the much closer Ukrainians is never discussed.) The United States, said more than one prominent official, was practicing an intended assault on Russian soil. In the absence of a general public dialogue (due in no small part to the lack of a sufficiently developed press), Russian society at large bought this sort of reductive nationalistic argument. And who can blame it? Most Russians lead lives so oppressed that any sort of release or distraction is welcomed. The kind of chest-beating in which their leaders increasingly engage vicariously salves the downtrodden souls, however fleetingly.

Ukraine, on the other hand, has always been at the receiving end of Russia's imperialism. As one American diplomat put it during my trip, Ukraine is experiencing post-colonialism, not post-imperialism. The difference is crucial. While nationalism is a problem—as it is in any country—Ukraine doesn't have to deal with an identity crisis on Russia's massive scale. Indeed, the opposite is true. The collapse of the Soviet system allowed Ukraine to find its own pace and begin to rebuild. While the country may remain mired in economic crisis and political corruption—what state wouldn't after decades of communism?— the difference in attitude is highly significant. It is reflected in the daily lives of Ukraine's citizens; beginning with the respect they have for their capital city and one another. Most Muscovite drivers floor their accelerators when they see pedestrians crossing the street in front of them. Kievans, like the citizens of most western countries—except perhaps France—slow down and even stop.

Russia's type of myth-making is nothing new. Indeed, it has been so pervasive that it has even helped shape the very course of Russian—and Ukrainian—history. And that's why, despite its seemingly overwhelming problems, Ukraine, independent at last, now can't be deprived of its fundamental optimism.

It's not a feeling shared by all, of course. Another taxi driver, in his thirties, provided an almost complete counterpoint to Andrei's views. "Everything was better before [the Soviet collapse]," he said. "We always had enough food and you always knew what you were getting. Now you have to find out for yourself what's good and what isn't. People were also nicer under communism. There was less crime." The driver manned a South Korean Daewoo, and I asked him whether the car was an improvement over his old Russian-made Volga. Not really, he said, launching into a glowing description of another Soviet car, the Lada, which is still based on an old Fiat model named European car-of-the-year in 1966. The Daewoo was light-years ahead in all respects including efficiency, comfort, handling, emissions and design—but that seemed to escape the driver's notice. More important was a barely noticeable change in the Lada fender design—circa early 1980s—that gave it an especially "modern" look.

The cab had picked me up on a street the name of which



The stunningly elaborate Dormition Cathedral, the center of Caves Monastery complex. The church was recently rebuilt after having lain in ruin since its destruction by the Red Army during the Second World War. The Soviet forces claimed, absurdly, to have blown it up to slow the advance of the German Army—and then blamed the act on the Germans.

Street performers dancing with fire during an AIDS-awareness campaign

had recently been changed from its Soviet-era incarnation: Zhdanov Street, after Andrei Zhdanov, a close associate of Stalin's and Leningrad's longtime political boss. The notorious Bolshevik was responsible for severely tightening the ideological guidelines for postwar cultural activities and oversaw the founding of the international Soviet propaganda arm, the Cominform. "Never heard of him," the cabbie said.

Kievan Rus

Most Russians believe their state to have developed directly from Kievan Rus. That is not the case. Kievan Rus was a separate political entity that reached its peak in the 10th century and declined before the rise of Muscovy. The settlement was founded by Scandinavians who had been exploring, trading and settling east of the Baltic Sea since the 6th century. Known as Varyagi (Varangians)—and "Rus" to the Slavs they dominated—one of their leaders, Oleh of Novgorod, declared himself ruler of Kiev in 882. The Scandinavians, who prospered and expanded through trade—chiefly of "luxury" goods such as fur and slaves—dominated the region's nomadic and pasturalist Khazars and Bulgars as well as the Slavs who had spread into the region in the 6th and 7th centuries.

Originally an outpost, Kiev grew to become the capital of a large unified Rus political organization, which, under Prince Svyatoslav in the late 10th century, stretched from the Volga to the Danube and up to the Baltic. Its prosperity was due to its control of trade from the Baltic to the Black Sea via the Dniepr River and other waterways.

In time, the Nordic rulers of Rus became assimilated into their Slavic subjects' culture and the society added new cultural traits onto what was essentially a massive fur-trading corporation. Perhaps the chief influence came from Constantinople. In 988, Prince Voldymyr ("Vladimir" in Russian) accepted Byzantine Christianity—via Bulgaria—founding what would later become the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. With the religion came Byzantine ideas of imperial authority, literature, education and law. Art and architecture were also brought north, and helped form a culture that would henceforth dominate Eastern Slavic tradition.[4]

By the 11th and 12th centuries, Kievan Rus began splintering into rival principalities. Present-day Russia evolved from breakaway northern satellite principalities around the northern forests of the Novgorod and Vladimir-Suzdal regions. These principalities grew more powerful as northern overland trade routes—and associations such as the Hanseatic League—developed. Kiev, meanwhile, lost out. Prince Andriy Bogolyubov of Suzdal (just south of Mos-

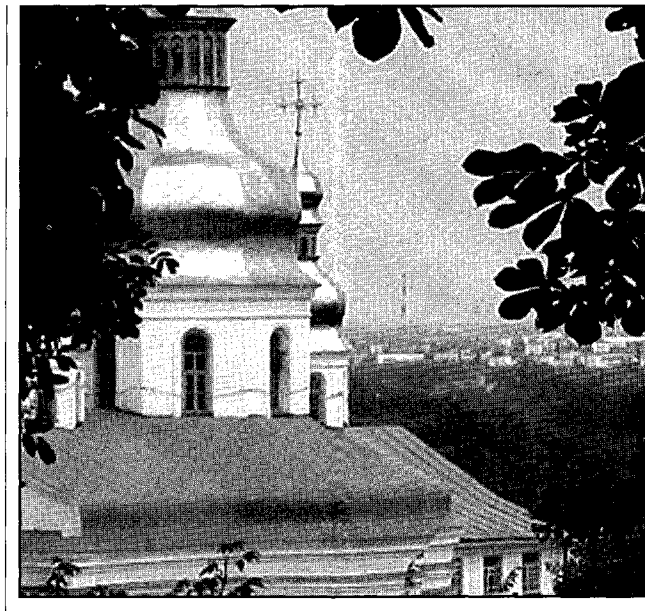
[4] Ukrainian icons are much more painterly than the Byzantine and Russian varieties. In a number of icons dating from the 14th- to the 18th-centuries in Kiev's Ukrainian State Fine Art Museum, depicted horses resemble Chagall's. That is but one of the cultural manifestations of Ukraine's different path. In short, via Poland-Lithuania, it is more westernized than Russia's, whose icons more closely resemble the Byzantine because the culture was more cut off from western influence and hence changed less.

cow) sacked Kiev in 1169, followed by the Mongols 70 years later, helping bring about the end of an empire that had ruled the region for three-and-a-half centuries.

Muscovy and other northern principalities that formed the foundations of what would later become Russia grew out of new political traditions. It was only in the 17th century that Kievan Rus came to be seen as a lost golden age. That came after the discovery of Kievan chronicles, before which the northern princes didn't much think of themselves as connected with Kiev at all. Although Kievan Rus provided a cultural seedbed, the idea that the northern principalities shared a continuous history with Kievan Rus is myth. Later, the idea helped justify Russia's domination of Ukraine.

Russia's Imperial Cooptation of Ukraine

Like all frontier lands, Ukraine was the battleground for competing centers of power.[5] Between the 14th and 19th centuries, borders changed constantly during the forging and breaking of alliances and fighting of wars. Present-day Ukraine evolved from the Kievan Rus splinter western principalities of Galicia and Volyn, which were absorbed by the expanding Polish and Lithuanian kingdoms in the mid-14th century.



The domes of a church in the Caves Monastery complex. The 18th-century Baroque-style structures went up during reconstruction that followed destruction by Tatars in the 13th century and a series of disastrous fires.

By the late 15th century, the sparsely-populated Ukrainian steppe between the Ottoman Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth began to attract runaway serfs, criminals and other seekers of freedom from the Polish and Lithuanian domains to the northwest. Along with a few semi-independent bands of Tatars, these men formed self-governing militaristic communities for protection. They became known as kazaks (Cossacks), a Turkic word roughly meaning outlaw. The most powerful of these groups, the Zaparozhian Cossacks, was based below the rapids (*za porozhy*) of the Dniepr. Later, various Cossack groups banded together to form what was called the Cossack Hetmanate under one ruler, or hetman.

The St. Sophia Cathedral, the city's oldest standing church, first completed in 1031. The church is part of a monastery complex that was a center of Kievan culture. The original Byzantine exterior was rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries in the ubiquitous Baroque style, but some of the interior still dates from the 11th century.

The Polish government tolerated the Cossacks, enlisting them to defend its southern frontier against the Tatars and Turks. In return, the Cossacks received what they called "rights and privileges," such as self-government, exemption from taxation, the right to own land and hunt, fish and trade.

In 1596, the Union of Brest gave the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom a big boost in the Ukrainian lands by setting up the Uniate Church, also called the Ukrainian Catholic or Greek Catholic Church. The church recognized the Roman pope as leader, but followed Orthodox forms of worship and used the Old Slavonic language. This development brought millions of peasants in the eastern and

[5] Until independence in 1991, Ukraine was usually referred to as "the Ukraine," as in "the borderland." I've stuck simply to "Ukraine" throughout for clarity.

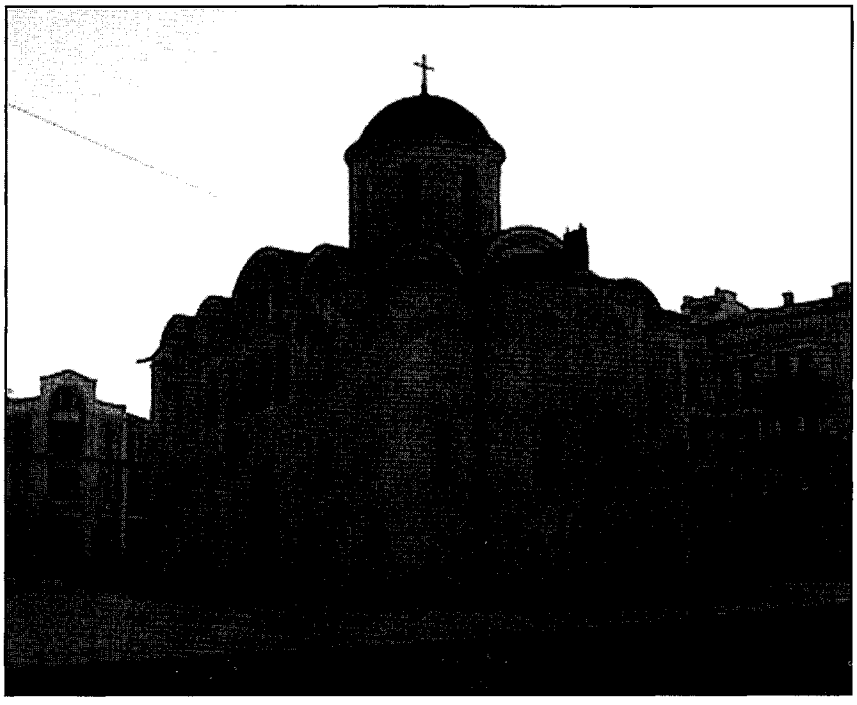
southern border areas on the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom (once part of Kievan Rus) into the Catholic fold. These early Orthodox Ukrainians under Polish and Lithuanian control became known as Ruthenians.

Meanwhile, dissatisfaction grew between the ruling Poles and the Cossacks since the Poles often tried to limit the Cossacks' autonomy. Partially as a result, the Zaparozhian Cossacks swore allegiance to the Kievan Orthodox Brotherhood in 1620, pitting them against the Uniate Church and in turn creating more complaints their Polish rulers. After a series of unsuccessful uprisings against the Poles, the famous Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytskyi led a rebellion that developed into a Ukrainian-Polish war. The Cossacks led Orthodox nobles, burghers, clergy, and peasants and succeeded in smashing the Polish army at the battle of Pyliavtsi.

When Polish authority over the Cossacks collapsed, the Zaparozhian Cossacks took over the functions of the civil administration. To protect himself from the Poles, Khmelnytskyi decided to ask for Russian protection. In 1654—a date that has since lived in infamy—he signed the controversial Periaslav Agreement, under which the Zaparozhian Cossacks recognized Muscovite suzerainty. The Cossacks' intent was to create a contractual relationship with Moscow, as they had had with the Poles. During the submission ceremonies in 1654, Khmelnytskyi asked the Russian envoys sent from Moscow to swear an oath in the name of the tsar. Khmelnytskyi wanted the Russians to promise that they would not give Ukraine back to the Poles, that they would defend the territory and—crucially—maintain the Ukrainian "rights and privileges" that had been granted by the Poles. The envoys refused, saying their tsar was autonomous and did not make pledges to his subjects. Khmelnytskyi walked out of the ceremony.[6] But he subsequently returned to sign the agreement, under the assumption that he had formed the contractual relationship with Moscow he'd wanted.

The Cossacks turned out to be gravely mistaken. By 1686, after a period of general warfare called "The Ruin" involving Poland, Crimea, the Ottoman Empire and Muscovy, the Ukrainian lands were divided once again. A treaty of "eternal peace" gave recognition of Moscow's rule over Left-Bank Ukraine—that is, east of the Dniepr. The Poles kept the territory to the west, laying the foundation of the division between east and west that is still evident today.

The Cossacks, together with the emerging Ukrainian gentry—which closely resembled the Polish variety, called the *szlachta*—continued to chafe.[7] Another famous hetman, Ivan Mazepa, whose aim was to unite Polish and Russian-dominated Ukraine, allied with Sweden against Russia's Peter the Great, but was beaten at the famous battle of Poltava in 1709. It was then that Russia finally became the ascendant power in the region. Later, following a series of victories against the Ottomans, Catherine the Great announced the resignation of Hetman Kiriil Rozumovskyi in 1764, abolished the hetmancy, and appointed her favorite Pyotr Rumiantsev as governor-general of "Little Russia," as the Ukrainian left-bank lands were known.



While most layers of Kiev's Byzantine-influenced past may have been superceded by later styles, the old forms are still alive, such as in this 18th-century neo-Byzantine church in Podil.

Between 1764 and the early 1780s, Rumiantsev implemented a number of wide-ranging reforms in the Hetmanate that integrated its political administration into the Russian empire. At first, Catherine favored gradual integration. While Ukrainian institutions continued to exist, Rumiantsev slowly subordinated them to imperial

[6]The Muscovite envoy's description of the event is in *Vossoedineniie Ukrainy s Rossiei, dokumenty i materialy v triekh tomakh*, vol. 3. Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1953, p.464.

[7] I refer to what others call the Ukrainian—and Russian—nobility "gentry" to distinguish it from its counterpart in Western Europe. Neither Russia nor Ukraine underwent feudalism in the western sense. Its élite developed differently, and hence the distinction. It was only during Catherine the Great's drive to make Russia more closely resemble the rest of Europe that the gentry's forms and titles became less distinguishable from the western variety.

structures. That changed in 1782, when Catherine introduced reforms to the Hetmanate aimed at ending any remaining autonomy and making it into a subordinate region of the Russian Empire.

Catherine had first promulgated the reforms—called the Basic Statute for the Administration of the Provinces of the Russian Empire—in 1775. The measures were meant to be applied to the whole of the empire to standardize the central administration of its provinces and districts. They succeeded in bringing about the most comprehensive administrative reorganization since Peter's reforms almost a century earlier.

The sublimely ornate little St. Andrews Church is a Kiev landmark. It's an interpretation of the traditional Ukrainian Baroque designed by Rastrelli, the famous Italian architect of St. Petersburg's Winter Palace.

Within the Hetmanate, an integral part of the reforms was the cooptation of the Ukrainian élite into the Russian imperial system. A key aspect of the policy change was that it split the gentry from the Cossacks. After Rumiantsev's initial reforms, the gentry had loudly protested, along with the Cossacks and the clergy. But from the 1760s until the promulgation of the provincial reforms, the gentry underwent a fundamental change. During the second stage of reform, it no longer saw its future as the élite of a semi-autonomous state. By the 1780s, after independent Ukrainian institutions had been abolished, many members of the gentry—some unconsciously and others unwillingly—already saw themselves as part of the Russian social and political structure from which they drew their status and their power.

The codification of the gentry's position in the empire finally concluded its transformation into a closed estate, separating it from the Cossacks (who had initially provided most of its original members in the mid-17th century). The clergy was also completely subordinated to the Russian administration, placed under the direction of the Russian Orthodox Holy Synod and forced to comply with Russian regulations.

According to the historian John LeDonne, one factor in the decision to carry out reforms in the Hetmanate that would transform it into a seamless region of the empire was Ottoman defeat. After the Russian victory over the Ottoman Empire, the provisions of the ensuing 1774 Treaty of Kuchuk Kainarji extended the Russian Empire along the Dniepr River and the Black Sea littoral, ending the Hetmanate's buffering role as a border territory.[8] It meant that the Russian imperial administration no longer needed to rely upon local élites of an "outer" frontier area to protect its border. Making an argument that fits into a strict model of empire-building theory, LeDonne compellingly argues that the territory could be—and was—coopted into the "inner" frontier.

By the end of the 1780s, the foundation had been laid for Ukrainian society to approximate the Russian. The historian Zenon Kohut writes that a polarization occurred as a result of the Hetmanate's integration: towns became Russified while the countryside remained Ukrainian.[9] Furthermore, as more provincial nobles became Russified and an increasing number of Cossacks merged with the peasantry, the division between peasants and the rest of society began to resemble the Russian pattern even more closely. This outcome seemed to justify the idea held by many Russians that Ukrainians and Russians were the same, and that the separation of their cultures had only taken place as a result of Polish intervention. This perception helped deprive Ukrainian society of a traditional élite that would protect the interests of its culture, while strengthening the idea of a Russian unitary state, an idea that has dominated its history from Muscovy's first conquests to the present day.

A number of Soviet historians have attempted to frame the transfer of suzerainty to Moscow as a Ukrainian "national people's struggle" to join their Russian brothers for Marxist socio-economic reasons. This was by no means

[8]John P. LeDonne, *Ruling Russia*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, pp.310-311.
[9]Zenon Kohut, *Russian Centralism and Ukrainian Autonomy, Imperial Absorption of the Hetmanate, 1760s-1830s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988, p.303.

unique to the Soviets—Aleksander Lazarevskii, who has been called the best of the 19th-century Ukrainian historians—also tried to put events in a populist context. But western historians have largely dismissed such attempts, seeing the relationship between Russians and Ukrainians in the context of an expanding Russian empire and a local élite that sought to establish and consolidate its privileges and stability.

From the 17th century to the present, Ukraine's culture and status have been the subject of Russian mythologizing. At first, northern principalities sought to heighten their status by claiming direct descent from Kievan Rus, while tsarist Russia later tried to justify its takeover of Ukrainian lands by claiming them to be an integral part of the Russian Empire. Even today, Russians continue to see Ukrainians as little different from themselves. In fact, much of Ukrainian history has differed from the common conception.

Religious Angst

Current Russian anger over Ukraine's westward bent is nowhere more evident than the battle over religion. Russians were up in arms over a long-planned trip by Pope John Paul II to Ukraine at the end of June. Some historians say Russians are still paranoid about Catholic influence in what they see as their sphere of influence. Such fears may be deep-seated cultural traits, given the historic role of Catholicism in the Ukrainian lands once controlled by the Polish-Lithuanian Empire. But they are being revived for very real present-day struggles.

The pope's visit to Ukraine followed trips to three other countries with Orthodox majorities—Romania, Georgia and Greece—over the past two years, part of his effort to break a deadlock over how to heal the Catholic-Orthodox schism. The split dates from 1054, when a French cardinal representing the pope traveled to the Constantinople's Aya Sophia Church to excommunicate the city's patriarch, who sinned by having forced some Latin churches to use the Greek language in liturgy. Orthodox and Catholic churches have significant theological differences to this day, including whether to use unleavened bread in the Eucharist, whether to require that priests be celibate and how to interpret the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

The pope's visit to Ukraine produced fury in Moscow where Patriarch Aleksii II, head of the Russian Orthodox Church, angrily accused the Vatican of launching an "invasion." He has claimed that his priests are being beaten and his parishioners "hounded" from their churches. The anger has its most immediate origins in the rebirth in western Ukraine of the Uniate Church—commonly called Greek Catholic today—which was outlawed under the Soviet Union. To the dismay of the Russian Orthodox Church, Catholicism rebounded quickly in Galicia following its resurrection. The Catholic Church now has five million members, almost completely replacing Orthodoxy in the territory. That has poisoned the atmosphere between the church hierarchies in Moscow and Rome, with the Moscow patriarchy claiming that Catholics are infringing on its own "canonical territory" by stealing its faithful.

The ostensible problem was caused by the Greek Catholics' taking over properties they say once belonged to them. Ukrainian Catholics were fiercely persecuted under Stalin. Many were arrested, tortured, killed, and sent off to prison camps and much of their church property was turned over to the Orthodox Church. Since the Greek Catholic Church's revival, Moscow's Aleksii II has accused its members of violently and illegally seizing Orthodox churches. In western Ukraine, hundreds of Orthodox churches changed sides or were taken over and priests and parishes fought, sometimes physically, over ownership of church property. In statements reported by the London Independent, the Orthodox Archbishop of Lviv claimed that, when he sought to enter a church in the village of Urizh, Greek Catholics tried to throw him down stairs and ripped his surplice. Aleksii II also claimed that Greek Catholics attempted to destroy an Orthodox church in Lviv to clear the way for the pope's procession.

The pope did not travel to Lviv by accident. The city—markedly different in architecture from cities further east with its Baroque Catholic church spires—is the heart of Ukrainian nationalism and the center of the Greek Catholic Church. Back in Kiev, in the run-up to the pope's visit, thousands of marchers rallied in the Caves Monastery brandishing banners reading "The Pope—Persona Non Grata" and "Orthodox Ukraine Has Not Yet Died."

The issue is a complicated one. Religious allegiances in Ukraine are confusing because, in addition to the Greek Catholics, there are three different Orthodox churches. The largest, followed by around 70 percent of Orthodox believers, gives allegiance to Aleksii II in Russia. Another Orthodox church, the autocephalous (independent) Ukrainian National Church, was founded by anti-Russian nationalists after the Soviet collapse, and uses the vernacular instead of Old Church Slavonic in its liturgy. The third is the Kiev patriarchy. Members of both Ukraine-based Orthodox churches have said they don't know what all the fuss concerning the pope's visit was about.

Another factor laden with great symbolism was the pope's nationality. As a Pole, John Paul II represented not only the Vatican, but Poland and the earlier Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom that long controlled land now part of Ukraine. (The pope's mother was Ukrainian, and he speaks the language fluently. He even went through military training near Lviv.) Moscow feels the connection acutely. There was also a conflict between the pope's various agendas. John Paul II said he traveled to Ukraine in part to advance the unity of Christianity. But he also paid tribute to the martyrdom of Ukrainian Catholics who suffered under Soviet rule, something he knows well from his days as archbishop of Krakow in Poland.

The differences between views over the pope's visit

may not be reconcilable in the near future—if only because the Moscow patriarchy is doing everything possible to widen the divide with its bitter vitriol. Aleksii II has repeatedly turned down the Vatican's overtures, refusing to even consider a much-desired papal trip to Moscow. (He changed his mind over a planned visit in 1997.) In late May, a prominent Moscow bishop a held news conference in the Russian capital to discuss "problems in relations between Orthodox and Catholic churches in light of the upcoming papal visit to Ukraine." It was typical of the patriarchy's heated agitation campaign against the visit. One couldn't but conclude that most of the "problems" regarding the visit were created by Russia's ongoing suspicion of the alleged Catholic attempt to convert Orthodoxy's faithful.

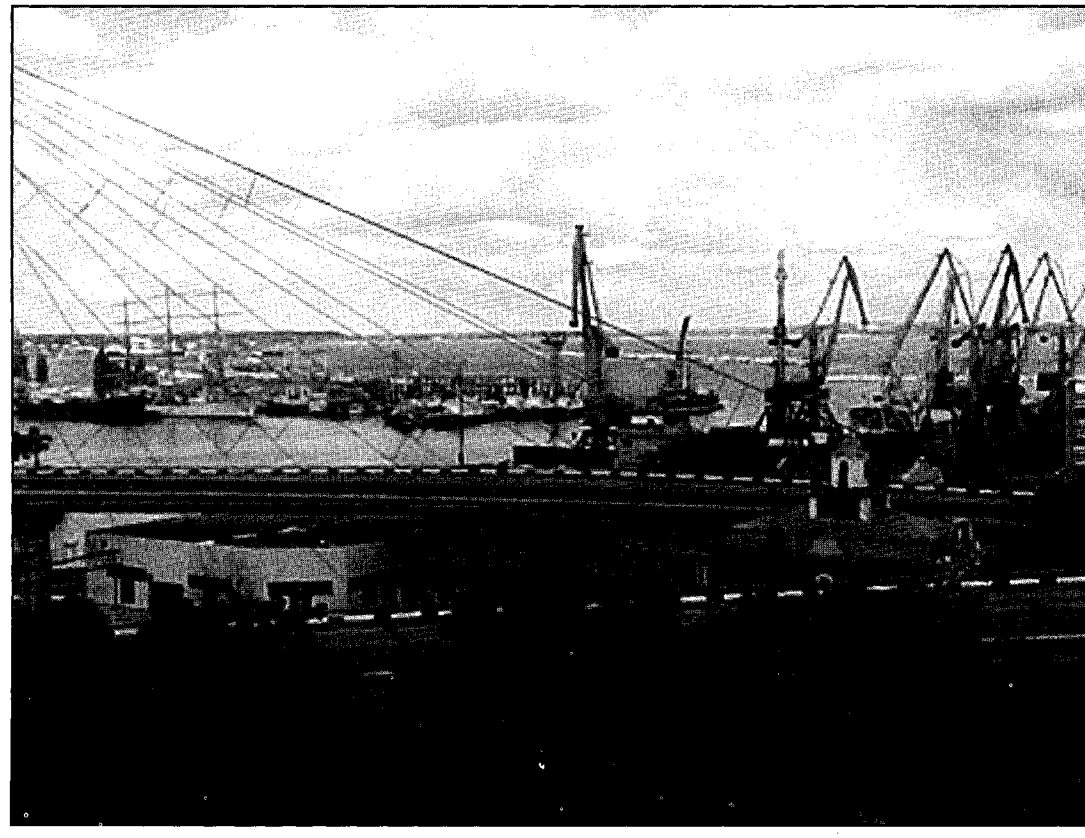
These kinds of attitudes have been felt for centuries, of course. In fairness to the Russian view, the Polish-Lithuanian Empire did indeed often provide a direct threat to Muscovy. But such arguments are absurd today. For many outside observers, the dispute boils down to an opinion over Russia's influence in Ukraine. The Moscow patriarchy steadfastly refuses to acknowledge the pope's stated desire for rapprochement between Christian churches, part of his effort to boost his legacy in his waning days. But there's more than simply religion in the matter, as always. The rabid rhetoric is also part of the Moscow patriarchy's attempt to play an increasing role in domestic politics. To demonstrate its usefulness to the Kremlin, the church is adding fuel to the growing Russian suspicion of the West.

That kind of search for an enemy has been used by Russian leaders to direct attention from their own corruption and repression for many decades. The church is no different in blaming the Vatican for Russia's "problems" than politicians denouncing NATO's bombing of Kosovo. Aleksii II—widely believed to have been a Soviet-era KGB spy—is the head of a church that is notorious for its corruption. It engages in many illegal activities—on top of the Kremlin-sanctioned (and tax-free) trade of alcohol and oil—and is part and parcel of the web of organized criminal activity that grips much of Russia.

In the end, the patriarchy's reaction over Ukraine's religious affiliation fits a long pattern of mythologizing and repression. It's just part of Russia's centuries-old attempt to increase its sphere of influence by claiming Ukraine to be no different from Russia. Such tactics are still being brandished to try to influence the course of Ukrainian development.

Odessa

After Kiev, I made a quick foray to the Black Sea port city of Odessa. The city was long renowned as a commercial and cultural center, a center of heady capitalism, rampant crime and literary culture. Odessa produced some of Russia's best 20th-century writers including Yuri Olesha and Isaac Babel, who helped make famous the city's Jewish quarters and petty criminal life. Founded by Catherine the Great in the 18th century on the site of an old Ottoman fort, Odessa was constructed under the French Duc de Richelieu, who fled the French Revolution's guillotine. It was the site of the 1905 mutiny on the *Potemkin Tavrichevsky* battleship immortalized in Sergei Eisenstein's 1925 film "The Battle-



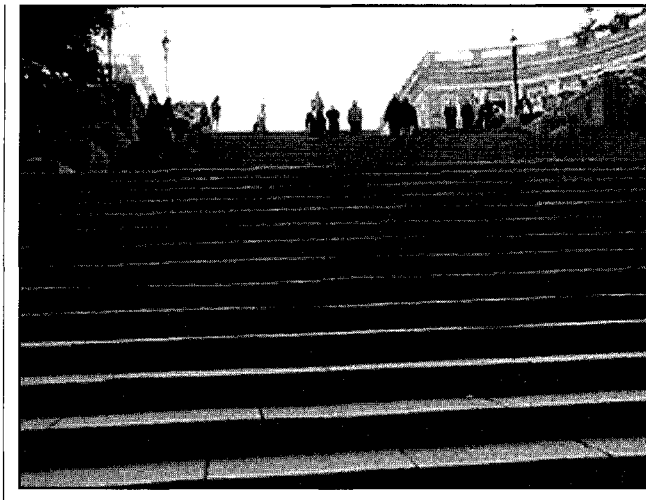
A famously bustling port for centuries, Odessa's harbor cranes now stand largely idle.

ship Potemkin." Under communism, Odessa attracted multitudes to its beaches, which were often so packed with Soviet flesh that little sand could be seen. The grand old planned city is now in a state of massive decay. Nonetheless, it still boasts a tidiness and civility lacking in Russia. The most frequented streets are slowly being renovated, and it's a pleasure to stroll around, soaking in Odessa's easy charm.

Despite its wonderful architecture—one broad, leafy neoclassical street after another, punctuated by much Art Nouveau—the city seems to have lost its cultural significance. History still looms large, of course, but the uniqueness is now chiefly only history. Odessans' old signature swagger is gone. The roof of the old synagogue fell in five years ago. The famed beaches are filthy. I was slightly surprised to find the Potemkin Steps, which figure centrally in Eisenstein's film, to sweep from the edge of the city to pretty much nowhere—a dirty street in front of a gaudy new passenger-port complex.

The famous Moldovanka quarter, once home to criminal groups, and where Babel's character Grisha Yaponchik (the Japanese) roamed amid its two-story buildings, is now just another part of town. Local mafia groups still rule Odessa, but they're no different from their counterparts all over the former Soviet bloc. They've also moved into the center. Versace-clad toughs can be seen in three or four of Odessa's most expensive restaurants and bars.

"We don't have business here—we have Mafia," said an Odessa lawyer working as a "consultant" to small companies. Much of his livelihood depends on the desperate economic state of affairs. He told me a lot of his work comes from money-lending outfits that lost the loans they'd given when the borrowers' businesses collapsed. Many such companies were set up after the Soviet fall. "Now many people can't even afford apartments for themselves," he said. "But look at the number of Mercedes cars on the roads. What does that tell you?"

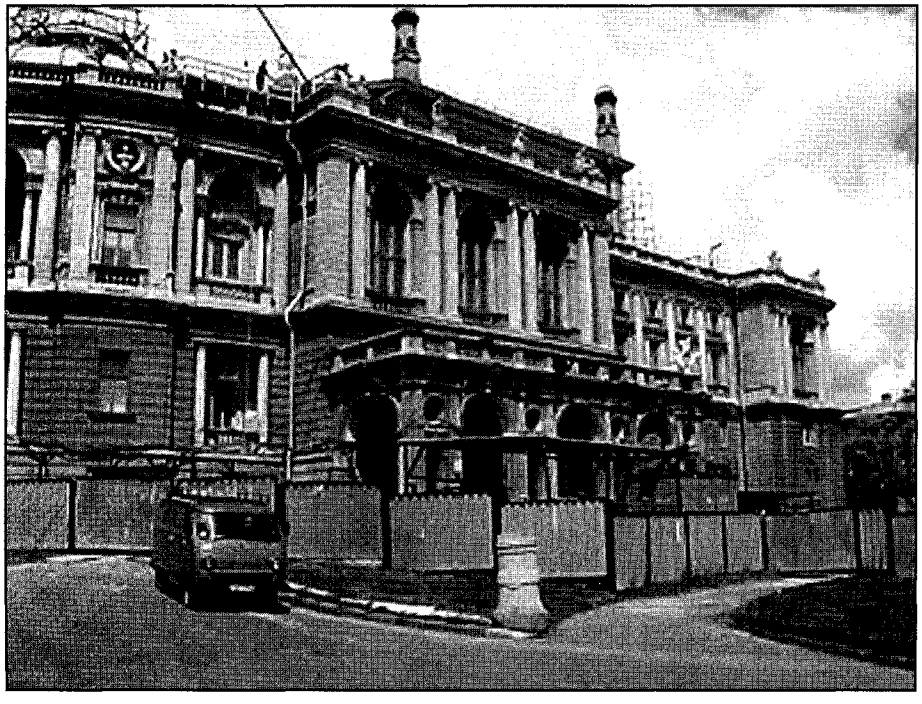


The famous Potemkin Steps, completed in 1841, look higher than they are because of a gradual narrowing from the bottom.

Despite its tinge of depression, Odessa's easy southern atmosphere and ruined splendor still fascinated. It was tough having to leave the outdoor cafés to head back to polluted, menacing Moscow.

New Path

Ukrainian nationalism was born in the 1840s in Kiev and led by the beloved national poet and writer Taras Shevchenko. Toward the end of the 19th century, tsarist authorities attempted to suppress the movement by banning Ukrainian language in schools, journals and books, after



The elaborate Opera and Ballet Theater, designed in the 1880s by Viennese architects Felner and Gelmer in the Hapsburg Baroque style to cater to Odessa's cultural elite and the nobility who built mansions here. The famous structure is even more ornate inside. Sadly, it's in desperately bad shape, with large, dangerous-looking cracks running down its walls. The productions—now aimed at a small handful of locals and whatever foreign tourists happen to be in town—are even more depressing. I went to see a performance of Johann Strauss waltzes, which couldn't have fit the rococo-ish venue better. But the musicians, some of them veteran performers, had to silently bear the indignity of playing to the awkward spectacle of dancing children.

which the movement's center moved to Lviv, the seat of the Greek Catholic Church (and, as I've mentioned, the second site of the pope's June visit).

Ukraine gained independence in 1918. But civil war broke out, and, after having changed hands five times in one year in fighting waged by six different armies, Kiev was taken by the Bolsheviks in 1919. Meanwhile, a West Ukrainian National Republic was declared in Lviv, but succumbed to Polish domination after a short war and several redivisions. In the following years, East Ukraine suffered heavily under Stalin, who engineered a brutal famine in 1932-33 to stamp out nationalism and aid collectivization. Estimates put the death toll at between five and seven million.

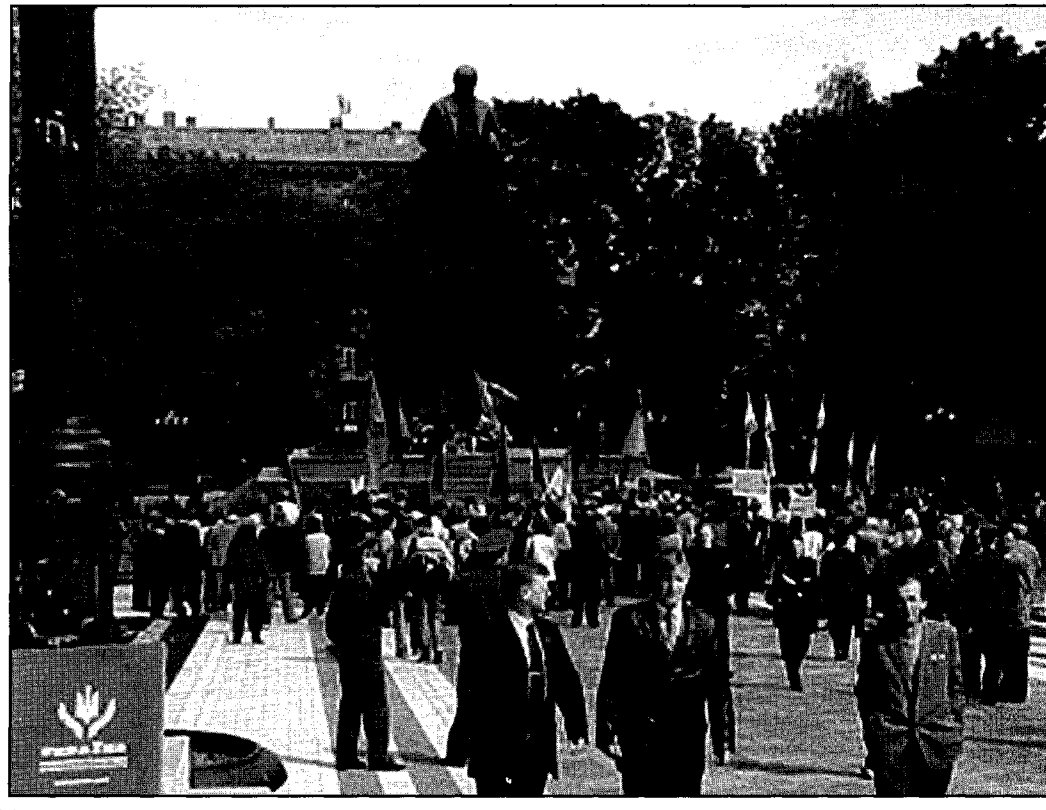
In September 1939, the Red Army took much of West Ukraine from Poland, but relinquished most of Ukraine to the Germans by the end of 1941. In 1939, Lviv was half Polish and more than a third Jewish. Ukrainians made up only 15 percent of the population. Today, the city is entirely Ukrainian. The Nazis killed most of the Jews. Following the war, Moscow kept most of the eastern Ukrainian territory and Stalin transferred many of the Poles to parts of eastern Germany he had given to Poland. Ukraine only regained independence in August 1991.

In contrast to those who still lump Ukraine and Russia together, at least one American observer of Ukrainian politics has said that that Ukrainians now actually have an ambivalent attitude toward pretty much everyone—including Russians and Westerners. That attitude also seems to extend to the financial western assistance that seems crucial if Ukraine is really to escape Russia's orbit.

Officially, Ukraine talks of itself as European, and even critics of the government don't deny that urge. The real problem with political reform, they say, is not really at the top—which is geared toward the West—but in the middle levels of bureaucracy and officialdom, which are deeply infected by corruption. However, while Ukraine, among former Soviet states, is more "independent" from Moscow than others—including Georgia, for example—the continuing plight of being stuck between opposing centers of power is inescapable. One Kiev resident bemoaned the situation during a street meeting held to celebrate the arrival of Shevchenko's corpse in the capital following his death in St. Petersburg in 1861. The gathering was held in front of the city's largest statue of Shevchenko, in the central Shevchenko Park, which abuts Shevchenko Boulevard. "Ukraine is always being oppressed," the 83-year-old man told me. "It's a tragedy."

I'd addressed him in Russian, and he'd insisted at first on speaking Ukrainian, not believing my protestations that I was an American. "The oppression continues today," he said in Russian, finally relenting. "This meeting wasn't even announced in the papers. Where's our spirit?"

He seemed a bit of a pessimist. The spirit appears to be there. Ukraine faces a difficult path—and western countries and financial institutions should be doing everything possible to help Ukraine along. Russia, being Russia, will continue to try to bring Ukraine back to the fold. But, possibly for the first time in its history, there's a real chance Ukraine will develop along its own path. ❑



A gathering of Ukrainian nationalists in Taras Shevchenko Park in front of a statue of the famous 19th-century nationalist poet and writer

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FELLOWS AND THEIR ACTIVITITES

Shelly Renae Browning (March 2001- 2003) • **AUSTRALIA**
A surgeon specializing in ears and hearing, Dr. Browning is studying the approaches of traditional healers among the Aborigines of Australia to hearing loss and ear problems. She won her B.S. in Chemistry at the University of the South, studied physician/patient relationships in China and Australia on a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and won her M.D. at Emory University in Atlanta. Before her ICWA fellowship, she was a Fellow in Skull-Base Surgery in Montreal at McGill University's Department of Otolaryngology.

Wendy Call (May 2000 - 2002) • **MEXICO**
A "Healthy Societies" Fellow, Wendy is spending two years in Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, immersed in contradictory trends: an attempt to industrialize and "develop" land along a proposed Caribbean-to-Pacific containerized railway, and the desire of indigenous peoples to preserve their way of life and some of Mexico's last remaining old-growth forests. With a B.A. in Biology from Oberlin, Wendy has worked as communications coordinator for Grassroots International and national campaign director for Infact, a corporate accountability organization.

Martha Farmelo (April 2001- 2003) • **ARGENTINA**
A Georgetown graduate (major: psychology; minor, Spanish) with a Master's in Public Affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton, Martha is the Institute's Suzanne Ecke McColl Fellow studying gender issues in Argentina. Married to an Argentine doctoral candidate and mother of a small son, she will be focusing on both genders, which is immensely important in a land of *Italo/Latino machismo*. Martha has been involved with Latin America all her professional life, having worked with Catholic Relief Services and the Inter-American Development Bank in Costa Rica, with Human Rights Watch in Ecuador and the Inter-American Foundation in El Salvador, Uruguay and at the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Gregory Feifer (January 2000 - 2002) • **RUSSIA**
With fluent Russian and a Master's from Harvard, Gregory worked in Moscow as political editor for *Agence France-Presse* and the weekly Russia Journal in 1998-9. He sees Russia's latest failures at economic and political reform as a continuation of failed attempts at Westernization that began with Peter the Great — failures that a long succession of behind-the-scenes elites have used to run Russia behind a mythic facade of "strong rulers" for centuries. He plans to assess the continuation of these cultural underpinnings of Russian governance in the wake of the Gorbachev/Yeltsin succession.

Curt Gabrielson (December 2000 - 2002) • **EAST TIMOR**
With a Missouri farm background and an MIT degree in physics, Curt is spending two years in East Timor, watching the new nation create an education system of its own out of the ashes of the Indonesian system. Since finishing MIT in 1993, Curt has focused on delivering inexpensive and culturally relevant hands-on science education to minority and low-income students. Based at the Teacher Institute of the Exploratorium in San Francisco, he has worked with youth and teachers in Beijing, Tibet, and the Mexican-American agricultural town of Watsonville, California.

Peter Keller (March 2000 - 2002) • **CHILE**
Public affairs officer at Redwood National Park and a park planner at Yosemite National Park before his fellowship, Peter holds a B.S. in Recreation Resource Management from the University of Montana and a Masters in Environmental Law from the Vermont Law School. As a John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow, he is spending two years in Chile and Argentina comparing the operations of parks and forest reserves controlled by the Chilean and Argentine governments to those controlled by private persons and non-governmental organizations.

Leena Khan (April 2001-2003) • **PAKISTAN**
A U.S. lawyer previously focused on immigration law, Leena is looking at the wide-ranging strategies adopted by the women's movement in Pakistan, starting from the earliest days in the nationalist struggle for independence, to present. She is exploring the myths and realities of women living under Muslim laws in Pakistan through women's experiences of identity, religion, law and customs, and the implications on activism. Born in Pakistan and immersed in Persian and Urdu literature by her grandfather, she was raised in the States and holds a B.A. from North Carolina State University and a J.D. from the University of San Diego.

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