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Who Are the Ukrainians?

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Ukraine is an East European territory which was originally forming a western part of the Russian Empire from the mid-17th century. That is a present-day independent state and separate ethnolinguistic nation as a typical example of Benedict Anderson's theory-model of the "imagined community" – a self-constructed idea of the artificial ethnic and linguistic-cultural identity. Before 2014 Ukraine was a home of some 46 million inhabitants of whom, according to the official data, there were around 77 percent of those who declared themselves as the Ukrainians. Nevertheless, many Russians do not consider the Ukrainians or the Belarus as "foreign" but rather as the regional branches of the Russian nationality. It is a matter of fact that, differently to the Russian case, the national identity of the Belarus or the Ukrainians was never firmly fixed as it was always in the constant process of changing and evolving [on the Ukrainian self-identity construction, see: Karina V. Korostelina, Constructing the Narratives of Identity and Power: Self-Imagination in a Young Ukrainian Nation, Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014].

The process of self-constructing identity of the Ukrainians after 1991 is basically oriented vis-à-vis Ukraine's two most powerful neighbours: Poland and Russia. In the other words, the self-constructing Ukrainian identity (like the Montenegrin or the Belarus) is able so far just to claim that the Ukrainians are not both the Poles or the Russians but what they really are is of a great debate. Therefore, an existence of an independent state of Ukraine, nominally as a national state of the *Ukrainians*, is of a very doubt indeed from both perspectives: historical and ethnolinguistic.

The Slavonic term *Ukraine*, for instance, in the Serbo-Croat case *Krajina*, means in the English language a *Borderland* – a provincial territory situated on the border between at least two political entities: in this particular historical case, between the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania as the Republic of Both Nations (1569−1795) and the Russian Empire. A German historical term for Ukraine would be a *mark* – a term for the state's borderland which existed from the time of the Frankish Kingdom/Empire of Carl the Great . The term is mostly used from the time of the treaty (truce) of Andrussovo in 1667 between these two states.

In the other words, *Ukraine* and the *Ukrainians* as a natural objective-historical-cultural identity never existed as it was considered only as a geographic-political territory between two other natural-historical entities (Poland and Russia).

All (quasi)historiographical mentioning of this land and the people as Ukraine/Ukrainians referring to the period before the mid-17th century are quite scientifically incorrect but in majority of cases politically inspired and coloured with the purpose to present them as something crucially different from the historical process of ethnic genesis of the Russians

[for instance: Alfredas Bumblauskas, Genutė Kirkienė, Feliksas Šabuldo (sudarytojai), *Ukraina: Lietuvos epocha, 1320−1569*, Vilnius: Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos centras, 2010].

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It was a Roman Catholic Vatican that was behand the process of creation of the "imagined community" of the "Ukrainian" national identity for the very political purpose to separate the people from this borderland territory from the Orthodox Russian Empire. Absolutely the same was done by Vatican's client Austria-Hungary in regard to the national identity of Bosnian-Herzegovinian population when this province was administered by Vienna-Budapest from 1878 to 1918 as it was the Austria-Hungarian government who created totally artificial and very new ethnolinguistic identity – the "Bosnians", just not to be the (Orthodox) Serbs (who were at that time a strong majority of the provincial population) [Лазо М. Костић, *Наука утврђује народност Б-Х муслимана*, Србиње−Нови Сад: Добрица књига, 2000.].

A creation of ethnolinguistically artificial *Ukrainian* national identity and later on a separate nationality was a part of a wider confessional-political project by Vatican in the Roman Catholic historical struggle against the eastern Orthodox Christianity (the eastern "schism") and its Churches within the framework of Pope's traditional proselytizing policy of reconversion of the "infidels". One of the most successful instruments of a soft-way reconversion used by Vatican was to compel a part of the Orthodox population to sign with the Roman Catholic Church the Union Act recognizing at such a way a supreme power by the Pope and dogmatic *filioque* ("and from the Son" – the Holy Spirit proceeds and from the Father and from the Son).

Therefore, the ex-Orthodox believers who now became the Uniate Brothers or the Greek Orthodox believers became in a great number later on a pure Roman Catholics but as well as changed their original (from the Orthodox time) ethnolinguistic identity. It is, for instance, very clear in the case of the Orthodox Serbs in Zhumberak area of Croatia – from the Orthodox Serbs to the Greek Orthodox, later the Roman Catholics and finally today the Croats. Something similar occurred and in the case of Ukraine. On October 9th, 1596 it was announced by Vatican a Brest Union with a part of the Orthodox population within the borders of the Roman Catholic Lithuanian-Polish Commonwealth (today Ukraine) [Arūnas Gumuliauskas, *Lietuvos istorija: Įvykiai ir datos*, Šiauliai: Šiaures Lietuva, 2009, 44; *Didysis istorijos atlasas mokyklai: Nuo pasaulio ir Lietuvos priešistorės iki naujausiųjų laikų*, Vilnius: Leidykla Briedis, (without year of publishing) 108.]. The crucial issue in this matter is that today Ukraina's Uniates and the Roman Catholics are most anti-Russian and of the *Ukrainian* national feelings. Basically, both the *Ukrainian* and the *Belarus* present-day ethnolinguistic and national identities are historically founded on the anti-Orthodox policy of Vatican within the territory of ex-Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth that was in essence an anti-Russian one.

The Lithuanian historiography writing on the Church Union of Brest in 1596 clearly confirms that:

> "… the Catholic Church more and more strongly penetrated the zone of the

> Orthodox Church, giving a new impetus to the idea, which had been cherished since the time of Jogaila and Vytautas and formulated in the principles of the Union of Florence in 1439, but never put into effect – the subordination of the GDL Orthodox Church to the Pope's rule" [Zigmantas Kiaupa et al, The History of Lithuania Before 1795, Vilnius: Lithuanian Institute of History, 2000, 288].

In the other words, the rulers of the Roman Catholic Grand Duchy of Lithuania (the GDL) from the very time of Lithuania's baptizing in 1387−1413 by Vatican had a plan to Catholicize all Orthodox believers of the GDL among whom overwhelming majority were the Slavs. As a consequence, the relations with Moscow became very hostile as Russia accepted a role of the protector of the Orthodox believers and faith and therefore the Church Union of Brest was seen as a criminal act by Rome and its client the Republic of Two Nations (Poland-Lithuania).

Religions in Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1573 (Catholics in yellow, Orthodox in green, Protestant in purple/gray)

Today, it is absolutely clear that the most pro-western and anti-Russian part of Ukraine is exactly the West Ukraine – the lands that was historically under the rule by the Roman Catholic ex-Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the former Habsburg Monarchy. It is obvious, for instance, from the presidential voting results in 2010 as the pro-western regions voted for J. Tymoshenko while the pro-Russian regions do it for V. Yanukovych. It is a reflection of the post-Soviet Ukrainian identity dilemma between "Europe" and "Eurasia" – a dilemma that is of common nature for all Central and East European nations who historically played a role of a buffer zone between the German *Mittel Europa* project and the Russian project of a pan-Slavonic unity and reciprocity.

In general, the western territories of the present-day Ukraine are mainly populated by the Roman Catholics, the East Orthodox and the Uniates. This part of Ukraine is mostly nationalistic and pro-western oriented. The East Ukraine is in essence Russophone and subsequently "tends to look to closer relations with Russia" [John S. Dryzek, Leslie Templeman Holmes, *Post-Communist Democratization: Political Discourses Across Thirteen Countries*, Cambridge−New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 114].

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