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Census: Ukraine, more Ukrainian
By Taras Kuzio

CENSUS: UKRAINE, MORE UKRAINIAN

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In December 2001 a long-awaited census took place in Ukraine, the partial results of which were released in December. The results confirmed fears of a demographic decline and gave some pointers to its causes. The census also showed a sharp 5-percent drop in the number of people identifying themselves as ethnic Russians, and a corresponding upsurge in those describing themselves as Ukrainian and speaking the Ukrainian language.

POPULATION DECLINE

The census confirmed what had long been predicted concerning the dramatic decline in Ukraine's population. The 2001 census registered a 6.1-percent decline [3 million, from 51,706,700 to 48,457,100]. Only two oblasts and the city of Kyiv registered small increases in their populations. Such a dramatic reduction in Ukraine's population only occurred twice in the Soviet era: during the 1933 artificial famine and in World War II. According to well-known Kyiv prolific scholar and academician Yury Shapoval, Ukraine lost 10 million during the Soviet repression and 3 million in World War II.

The acute socioeconomic crisis of the 1990s discouraged families from having children, especially in urban areas, something that affected Russians and Russian speakers more than others. In addition, as recent studies have shown, men are dying earlier, on average at age 62, than

women, average 73. The health of the population has also worsened. In Ukraine and other CIS states people drink more alcohol, smoke more, eat less and visit doctors less frequently than they once did.

Studies prior to the census predicted that the population decline would be higher than in fact it was. In November 2002 the State Statistics Committee (SSC) reported that Ukraine's population stood at only 48,069,000. The discrepancy between this figure and the census results are to be found in those people registered as members of the household who are currently considered to be only "temporarily" abroad.

A large numbers of Ukrainians are working outside the country, often semi-legally after overextending their visas, or temporarily visiting Poland, Russia and central Europe to earn funds from shuttle trade. These migrant workers are not classed as emigrants as they are deemed to be only temporarily absent from Ukraine. Sometimes this "temporary absence" can last for many years, during which funds are sent home to families. In some western Ukrainian oblasts, such as Trans-Carpathia and Ivano-Frankivsk, it is typical for at least one male to be absent from each household. Nina Karpecheva, Ukraine's parliamentary commissioner for human rights, claimed last year that upwards of 7 million Ukrainians were seeking work abroad because of poverty and unemployment at home. This high figure has been disputed by the SSC.

A major group of those temporarily abroad are women working either voluntarily or involuntarily in the sex industry. According to the Ukrainian parliamentary newspaper Holos Ukrayiny of August 14, 2002, 120,000 young Ukrainian women were trafficked in 2001 alone, with 500,000 involved over the past decade. The International Organization for Migration estimated a higher figure, 1 million, for those Ukrainians abroad likely to be involved.

In February 2001, the UN predicted that Ukraine's population would drop by as much as 40 percent by the year 2050. Presidential adviser and academic Emma Libanova predicted a lower decline to 42 million by the year 2025, but still representing a fall of 10 million over three decades.

One factor that could contribute to this further population decline is the AIDS epidemic. AIDS is growing faster in the former Soviet Union than

anywhere else outside Africa. Ukraine has the highest rate of AIDS infection in post-communist Europe. The UN estimates that 400,000 people, 1 percent of the population, may have been HIV-positive.

ETHNIC COMPOSITION

In a U.S. Bureau of the Census paper entitled "Ethnic Re-identification in Ukraine" published in 1997, Stephen Rapaw had predicted that a sizeable number of those who identified themselves as "Russian" in the 1989 census were likely to now re-identify as "Ukrainian."

In the Soviet era the terms "Russian" and "Soviet" were understood interchangeably, signifying identity with the Soviet state, given that Russian was the language of Soviet power. Not surprisingly, in the 1989 Soviet census most then chose "Russian." Defining oneself as Russian could be easily adopted by those who had mixed marriages and had a "Soviet" identity, or who lived in areas with large numbers of ethnic Russians. (In the Russian language there is a separate term for ethnically Russian--"Russkii.")

The core group likely to re-identify would be the 25.3 percent of families with mixed parents--one ethnic Russian and one Ukrainian, for example. In Ukraine in the Soviet era, 59 percent of Russians and 75 percent of Jews married outside their ethnic group. Only 18 percent of Ukrainians did so. Ethnic intermarriage was especially prevalent in heavily industrialized regions, such as the Donbas in Eastern Ukraine.

A typical example: President Leonid Kuchma. Kuchma was born in Chernihiv but spent most of his adult working life in Dnipropetrovsk, in the east, and registered himself as "Ukrainian" when he entered parliament in 1990. Ukraine's first defense minister, Konstantin Morozov, was born in the Donbas and registered as a "Russian" in the Soviet era by his parents. He decided later that both he and his parents were in fact "Ukrainian."

The new internal and foreign Ukrainian passports have no ethnic entry, unlike Soviet passports, which registered ethnic identity in the infamous paragraph number 5 that became invalid in 1998. Ethnic identification is now only requested in censuses. Because the birth rate dropped to a greater degree in urban than rural areas, the number of registered Ukrainian births increased. Ethnic Russians are primarily an urban

group in Ukraine. Mixed marriages are nearly three times more prevalent in urban than rural areas.

Rapawy estimated that the number of "real Russians" could be as low as 11 percent, less than half the recorded number in the 1989 census, because upwards of 16 percent had mixed parents. In the 2001 census the share of Ukrainians and Russians had changed in line with Rapawy's forecast, but not to the extent he had predicted. The share of Ukrainians between the two censuses grew from 72.7 to 77.8 percent. That of Russians declined from 22.1 to 17.3 percent.

Today's Ukrainian (77.8 percent) and Russian (17.3 percent) ethnic shares have therefore reversed the Soviet trend and returned Ukraine to the 1959 census, which recorded 76.8 percent Ukrainians and 16.9 percent Russians. The proportion of education conducted in the Ukrainian language (approximately 70 percent) has also returned to the level of the 1950s just prior to the mass Russification campaigns of the Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev eras.

The drop, by over 3 million, in the number of ethnic Russians was a 27-percent decline in their share of the overall population. Besides re-identification and higher rural births, out-migration may have also played a role. Out-migration of Russians and in-migration of Tatars affected the Crimea in particular, where the share of ethnic Russians declined from 65.6 to 58.3 percent.

If these trends continue, by the next census in 2011 the Crimea will lose its position as the only region with a Russian majority, the main reason an exception was made when its status was upgraded from oblast to autonomous region in 2001. Losing this status would come only six years before the lease of Sevastopol bays by the Russian Black Sea Fleet ends in 2017.

Western Ukraine, where pressure to assimilate and out-migration is highest, experienced a radical decline of 40-50 percent in the Russian population. But, a decline of 12-24 percent was also registered in Russian-speaking areas such as Odessa and Donetsk. The Ukrainianization of Kyiv, where schools shifted to the Ukrainian-language in the early 1990s, has continued a trend begun in the Soviet era. The Ukrainian share of Kyiv's population has risen steadily over the past half-century, from 60.1 percent (1959), 64.8 (1970), 68.7 (1979),

72.5 (1989) to 82.2 percent (2001). In the last Tsarist census, in 1897, it was only 22.2 percent.

LANGUAGE USE

The language factor proved to be one of the most difficult questions in the census. In the mid 1990s Western scholars criticized the concept of "native language" (*ridna mova*) as not providing a true reflection of the language situation, because people tended to regard "native language" as a test of ethnic identity rather than language use. Hence more attention was placed on the question of "language of convenience" (that is, everyday use). Based on "language of convenience" Ukrainianophones and Russophones were seen as roughly equal. A minority of Western scholars went on to then predict that conflict was inevitable if the "nationalizing" policies of the Leonid Kravchuk era (1991-1994) continued under Leonid Kuchma, because they expected Russophones to resist the pressure to change their preferred language.

Western scholars continue to find evidence for the symbolic importance of language found in "*ridna mova*." Ukrainians can hold an attachment to their "*ridna mova*" while still using Russian or either Russian or Ukrainian depending on circumstance. Totally ignoring an attachment to "*ridna mova*" removes the largest Ukrainian population group who are bilingual, have a symbolic attachment to the Ukrainian language but do not see Russian as a "foreign language" (for example, Kuchma). This group is not opposed to moderate Ukrainianization. Its attitudes are reflected in government policy, which backs an evolutionary expansion of Ukrainian in education to match the country's ethnic composition.

Pure Ukrainophones and Russophones are in the minority, and exist only in Western Ukraine (where Russian has been removed from the education system) and the Donbass/Crimea (where Ukrainianization of education has made the least headway). In Western Ukraine, ethnic Ukrainians are nearly 100 percent of the population. In the Donbass/Crimea, the proportion of Russians is the highest.

The 2001 census registered a 2.8-percent increase in the adherents of "native language," to 67.5 percent. Only 14.8 percent of Ukrainians declared Russian to be their "native language." Further research would have to be undertaken to see if this group overlaps with the approximate Communist vote of 20 percent. Only 3.9 percent of ethnic Russians

(possibly residents of Western Ukraine and/or Kyiv) declared Ukrainian to be their "native language." Based on these trends moderate Ukrainianization will continue.

CONCLUSION

The period between the last Soviet (1989) and first Ukrainian censuses (2001) returned Ukraine to the position it had in the 1950s of nationality and language composition and to the mid 1970s in demographics. If these trends continue--and the UN and other population predictions are correct--Ukraine's population is set to continue to decline even as it becomes more ethnically Ukrainian.

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