

END NOTE

AUTONOMIST AND SEPARATIST SENTIMENT GROWS IN WESTERN UKRAINE

By Taras Kuzio

Autonomy and even separatism, subjects that were long taboo in Ukraine, are now being openly discussed in mainstream Ukrainian publications. Unlike the earlier association of this phenomenon with Russophone eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, it is now to be found in Ukrainophone western Ukraine. Although calls for autonomy are more common than separatist demands, a recent poll found that 40 percent of western Ukrainians would support separatism if Ukraine were to join the Russia-Belarus Union.

In 1990-1991, Galicia led the way for a federalized Ukraine when three oblast councils in which the Democratic (Rukh) Bloc won a majority in the March 1990 republican elections and created the Galician Assembly. This move was seen by its ideological leader, now deceased Rukh leader Vyacheslav Chornovil, as a way to defend anticommunist and pro-reformist western Ukraine from communist-controlled eastern Ukraine. Chornovil dropped the idea when Ukraine became independent in 1992 because federalism became secondary to preserving Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Eastern Ukraine first seriously promoted the idea of a federalized Ukraine as a way of opposing the highly exaggerated threat of Ukrainianization in the Leonid Kravchuk era from 1991-94. Some of Leonid Kuchma's closest advisers in the 1994 presidential elections, such as Vladimir Grynev, were among the strongest proponents of federalism. Kuchma went on to win these elections. Again, the demand for federalism was soon dropped in the interest of preserving territorial integrity.

Autonomist and pro-federalist tendencies began to again manifest themselves in western Ukraine after Kuchma was re-elected for a second term in November 1999. Taras Wozniak, editor of the Lviv journal "Ya" (I), recently published a special issue of his journal devoted to questions of western Ukrainian autonomy and a federalized Ukraine. Wozniak, who has been termed Lviv's unofficial "minister of foreign affairs" because he heads the department of international affairs of Lviv's City Council, has propagated his views to a wide audience. As a result, his intellectual circle in Lviv has found itself under the scrutiny of the Security Service. The Lviv newspaper "Postup" also provides space for authors to discuss these views.

Wozniak recently wrote that "the Ukrainian nomenklatura — with its sovietized and Russified mentality -- is contributing to the neo-colonization of Ukraine by Russia, which is proceeding at a ferocious pace." Another author, writing in "Ukrayinska pravda," believes that the only choice for western Ukraine is either

"autonomization" or "assimilation," because Kuchma is continuing Soviet-era Russification policies. The author believes that by 2010, western Ukraine will look no different from Kuchma's Russified and sovietized home city of Dnipropetrovsk.

Yuriy Andrukhovych, who lives in Galicia and is considered one of Ukraine's best and most influential writers, has poked fun at Russian-speaking Kyiv in writings such as "My Last Territory" in the newspaper "Krytyka." Andrukhovych visits Kyiv to take part in literary affairs but dislikes the city and prefers his "real" Ukraine in Galicia.

These growing demands in western Ukraine for regional autonomy and, in a minority of cases separatism, are due to three interrelated factors.

First, although western Ukraine propelled Ukraine to independence in 1987-91, residents believe the region has lost out since then. Some 100 officials from the presidential administration, government, and National Security and Defense Council visited Lviv in July 2000 to investigate regional problems following large nationalist riots. The unemployment rate in Lviv Oblast is one of the highest in Ukraine and entire industrial sectors have lain dormant for many years.

Many western Ukrainians have either emigrated to North America, work illegally in Central and Western Europe, or are involved in daily shuttle trade to Poland. The shuttle trade will be badly affected by the imposition of visas on all CIS countries by Poland on 1 July 1 2003, which will create a feeling among pro-European western Ukrainians of being isolated within Europe.

Second, under Kuchma there has been stagnation in Ukraine's domestic and foreign policies. Western Ukrainians feel that the country they propelled to independence is being transformed not into a more nationally conscious Ukraine that is "returning to Europe" but into a "Little Russia" they fear will be subjected to "Belarusianization." Writing in a recent issue of the prestigious journal "Suchasnist," the academic Borys Bakhteyev complained that it is the "Little Russian" and Sovietized east that formulates the state's international image and the manner in which it develops." According to Bakhteyev, eastern Ukraine threatens western Ukraine with its "oligarchization."

Presidential support for the Russian Orthodox Church rather than a united Ukrainian autocephalous Orthodox Church, the planned commemoration in 2004 of the 1654 Periaslav Treaty that placed Ukraine under Russian rule, the creation of a joint Russian-Ukrainian historical commission on textbooks, and the refusal to "rehabilitate" the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) that fought the Nazis and Soviets from 1942-53 all play a part in influencing the western Ukrainian view of government policies as "Little Russian." The writer Volodymyr Pavliv commented in "Ukrayinska pravda" that the Lviv City Council's refusal to accept a Kyiv-brokered compromise over inscriptions on graves of Polish soldiers is seen as its "revenge" against Kyiv's refusal to rehabilitate the UPA.

Third, western Ukraine has a very different view of Ukraine's future than does eastern Ukraine. Bakhteyev wrote in "Suchasnist" that he views Ukraine as similar to Germany in its division into

westernized and sovietized halves. But although western Ukrainians look to emulate Central Europe's drive to "return to Western Europe," eastern Ukraine has created an authoritarian, one-party regime in Donetsk Oblast where the pro-presidential For a United Ukraine (ZYU) finished first in the March elections. Oligarchic clans are only to be found in eastern Ukraine.

The Communist Party of Ukraine (KPU) was removed from power in Galicia in March 1990 and was never able to rebuild its support base there. In the March elections, the pro-presidential ZYU, oligarchs, and Communists failed to win support outside eastern Ukraine, while pro-Western reformist Viktor Yushchenko's Our Ukraine and the anti-Kuchma Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc swept western Ukraine.

Kuchma has ensured that ZYU and its allies, which lost the election, continue to control the government and through bribery and blackmail have taken control of the parliamentary leadership, factors that further fuel western Ukrainian anger at Kuchma's undemocratic policies. Our Ukraine's victory in the elections has been "stolen" by Kuchma.

The straw that may yet break the camel's back will be the October 2004 presidential elections. If Kuchma succeeds in thwarting a Yushchenko victory by ensuring his chosen successor is elected, autonomist (and in a minority of cases even separatist tendencies) are likely to grow stronger in western Ukraine, which will not wish to experience another five or 10 years under another "Little Russian" groomed in Kuchma's image.

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