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The Return of Belorussia and the Ukraine

The Bells of Sancta Sophia

To the modulating sound of the bells of the Sophia Cathedral, never heard by at least two generations of Kievans, the fourth All Union Festival of Slavic Written Language and Culture was solemnly opened. (Grigor'ev 1989)

The above quotation from a Soviet weekly in 1989 was an eloquent testimony to the fact that a reality long suppressed and seemingly forgotten had returned. The sound of church bells after decades of silence indicated that a period in history was coming to its close: Soviet communism. Moreover, only a few years earlier, official concern for the heritage from Kievan Rus' had been restricted to the RSFSR. The celebration of Slavic festivals entailed attention to the Christian heritage common to all three East Slav nations, but the three first festivals had been Russian undertakings. They had been held in Murmansk, Vologda, and Novgorod, respectively, under the auspices of the Union of Writers of the RSFSR and the Council of Ministers of the RSFSR. (Navstreču... 1988) In the same vein, the millenium of Christianity in Rus' was officially celebrated in the spring and early summer of 1988 as a Russian and Soviet jubilee. The Secretary General of the CPSU, Michail Gorbačev, stressed this aspect in his audience with Patriarch Pimen in the Moscow Kremlin on 29 April 1988. He declared that the Russian Orthodox Church and the Soviet state were united by a common history and fate. (Vstreča... 1988)

Kiev and the Ukraine were also pushed into the background when the official celebration of the millenium took place in June 1988. Notwithstanding the fact that Moscow was chosen as the focus, there were celebrations in Kiev (and Vladimir) as well. However, in spite of Moscow's attempt to monopolize the heritage from the past, the year 1988 meant a turning point in the modern history of the so far neglected part of the inheritance from medieval Rus', i.e. Belorussia and the Ukraine. In the wake of the national renaissance in the Western oriented Baltic Soviet republics, national manifestations and a reassertion of national self-consciousness took place also among Belorussians and Ukrainians. That Kiev became the host of the Slavic festival in 1989 may be regarded as a symbolic expression of the

recognition of the 'birthright to Kiev' (Plenum... 1988) for today's Ukrainians. Similarly, Belorussian national traditions were recognized through the decision to hold the festival in 1990 in this republic. (Grigor'ev 1989)

The Slavic festivals in the Soviet Union in the late 1980s were Panslavic in their conceptualization. Bulgarians played a prominent part and were hailed as the precursors of East Slav culture, and the unity of the three East Slav peoples was underlined. (Navstreču... 1988; Grigor'ev 1989) This was in line with the official Soviet interpretation of the history of Russia and the USSR, which says that all three East Slav peoples have the same birthright to Kiev and constitute three branches on the same tree. In practice this view comes close to the traditional Russian nationalist version, which draws a straight line from Kievan Rus' through Muscovy to Imperial Russia and the USSR. This convergence of Russian and Soviet perspectives is manifested in the fact that Moscow rather than Kiev is the official centre of Soviet research on Kievan Rus'. (Pelenskyj 1988, 38-39)

The traditional Ukrainian and Belorussian interpretation of the relationship between past and present highlights the fact that the culture and language of Kievan Rus' survived in Galicia, Volynia and other territories that came to form part of the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth from the fourteenth to the end of the eighteenth century. It is also underlined that this tradition was revitalized and reinforced through the work of Petro Mohyla and his Kievan Academy and in the Cossack state of Bohdan Chmel'nyckyj in the 17th century. These alternative perspectives were an important background to the national revival in Belorussia and the Ukraine at the close of the 1980s. The bells of the Sophia Cathedral recalled a specific past, a non-Russian East Slav history. The bells in Kiev were tolling for the USSR.

History and religion

The phrase 'the return of Belorussia and the Ukraine', which has been chosen as title to this paper, is an acknowledgment of the fact that the year 1988 saw the open re-emergence of a distinct national identity among the peoples who have given their names to these Soviet republics. As a consequence of the greater freedom of expression and organisation which resulted from Gorbachev's policy of *glasnost*, it was revealed that the notion of 'Soviet man' was illusory. The much celebrated '*sovetskij narod*' turned out to be, much as had been asserted in the free world, a euphemism for russification of the non-Russian nations. When people were able to show their feelings

openly, it became clear that what mattered and what led people to mobilize and organize politically was not concern for the fate of the Soviet Union but rather concern for their own natural environment and cultural landscape, the native language, religion and history, i.e., all that which traditionally has formed the individual's social identity. Of all the more than a hundred peoples in the Soviet Union, only the Russians, who identify with the empire, with *Rossija* rather than with *Rus'*, could identify their territory and history with the Soviet state. For the rest 'Soviet' had come to mean Russian in disguise, something to be both resented and despised.

Whereas the Baltic republics, Transcaucasia and Moldavia witnessed the strongest and most extreme anti-Soviet reactions in 1988 in terms of the establishment of popular fronts and mass demonstrations against Moscow-led destruction of the natural environment and russification of official and cultural life, developments in Belorussia and the Ukraine were less dramatic but potentially politically more disruptive. One reason is that Belorussians and Ukrainians amount to a near 60 million of the 290 million inhabitants of the Soviet Union and represent a sizeable part of the Soviet population. Moreover, the Ukraine especially is an important base of industrial and agricultural production and of energy transformation and thus vital to the Soviet economy.

It was a further challenge to Russian cultural identity when the issue of the Ukrainian Catholic Church became a component in the process of national awakening in the Ukraine. This church traces its origins back to the Union of Brest in 1596, when the Ruthenian subjects in the Polish-Lithuanian state were incorporated in the Catholic Church but were allowed to retain their Church Slavonic language and Orthodox liturgy. The so called Uniates were never recognized by the Russian Orthodox Church or by the Tsar and were persecuted both in Tsarist and in Soviet Russia. In 1946, the church was forced to dissolve at a council in L'viv. Thereafter, it led a clandestine existence in the USSR, with an estimated membership of four million people.

In August 1988, a priest of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, Mychajlo Havryliv, was arrested. On 12 September *Pravda* carried an article which revealed KGB infiltration of the emigré Bandera Ukrainian organisation. According to Radio Liberty's researcher, Bohdan Nahaylo, the article could be seen as a reaction to the reconciliation between the Polish and the Ukrainian catholics which had been manifested in a joint Polish-Ukrainian celebration of the millenium of the Christianization of Kievan Rus', held at Czešto-

chowa in Poland on 11 September. The nationalist strife was also obvious within the frame of Orthodoxy. In the Ukrainian journal *Žovten'* the writer R. Dalyn complained that patriarch Pimen, the head of the Russian Orthodox Church, had failed, in an interview in *Izvestija* on 9 April 1988, to mention the Ukrainian and Belorussian peoples as shareholders of the history and culture of Ancient Rus'. Dalyn also observed that whereas in most countries the liturgy was carried out in the native language, the Russian Orthodox Church did not allow this in the Ukraine. (Nahaylo 1988a, 1988b, 1988c) The significance of the reassertion of the underground Ukrainian Catholic and Autocephalic Orthodox Churches (the latter was organized in the Ukrainian republic in 1918 and was allowed to operate until 1929) lay in the fact that the nominal stronghold of the Russian Orthodox Church was in the Ukraine. In 1987 more than a thousand of six thousand church buildings in operation were situated in the L'viv-Ternopil' diocese, the traditional area of Ukrainian Catholicism. (Pavlov 1987, Ellis 1986, 13) If the Ukrainian Churches were to be officially recognized, the Russian Orthodox Church would lose a substantial part of its followers to them. Its status as a kind of Soviet 'First Church' would be impaired and its claim to represent all East Slavs in the country would become hollow.

Developments in the two republics are very important for the future of the Soviet state because an alienation of Belorussia and the Ukraine, coinciding with the possible secession of the Baltic republics, Moldavia and Transcaucasia from the Soviet Union, would mean a major blow to the identity of the Russian - Soviet - empire as a European state and as an inheritor to European civilization. The 'Easternness', the 'Byzantine' or 'Asiatic' character of a Muscovite Soviet rest-state, would be emphasized instead, much to the chagrin of Gorbačev and the other Russian leaders.

The last assertion brings us to the question of perceptions of the past and images of neighbours as central to the sense of a collective national identity. In the formation of ethnic identity, history plays an important role. Both for historiography and teaching, the constructivist aspect must be stressed. 'History' is not a matter of any self-evident identification with a certain actual past, but rather the result of a conscious construction of suitable traditions by intellectuals aiming at promoting a distinct, collective identity for people that share some characteristics such as language, religion and geographical location. Historiography and its derivation, mythology, are used to support a sense of national identity. (Hay 1968, xxi) It is not remarkable for this to occur in today's Belorussia and Ukraine. Referring to historiography in general, the American historian Hayden White has made

an observation regarding different modes of historical understanding which is highly relevant in our context:

...it is not a matter of choosing between objectivity and distortion, but rather between different strategies for constituting "reality" in thought so as to deal with it in different ways. each of which has its own ethical implications. (White 1978, 22)

We should add: and ethno-political implications. With the help of history, reality was defined in different, mutually exclusive ways in the late 1980s by representatives of the Soviet state and by non-Russian intellectuals. In the Ukraine and Belorussia, everything pertaining to the economy, to the natural environment and to cultural life, was perceived through lenses that were coloured by a certain historical understanding. Instead of stressing a mythological unity of the three East Slav peoples throughout history, Ukrainian and Belorussian intellectuals began to treat the Russians and the Soviet state as 'the significant other', i.e. as something to identify against, not with.

Under the circumstances of *glasnost'*, the official Soviet historiography, giving to Moscow the status of *primus inter pares*, was finally criticized, in 1988, for being unscientific. (Kruglyj... 1988, 13-16, 28-30) In the West, scholars had kept the alternative interpretation alive throughout the decades. They pointed to the relations between Kiev and the Roman Catholic Church in the eleventh century as an important stage in the development of the culture of Rus'. (Dvornik 1962, 212-215; Pritsak & Reshetar 1963) They recalled a continuous, western-oriented Russian history "from Kiev to Kiev", i.e. from the medieval Kievan state to the Ruthenian national renaissance in the seventeenth century, referred to above. The scientific foundations of this interpretation had been laid in the early 20th century by the Ukrainian historian Mychajlo Hruševs'kyj. A vehement dispute about Hruševs'kyj's contributions to historiography and his role in furthering Ukrainian self-consciousness in the early Soviet period became an important ingredient in the assertion of Ukrainian nationalism in 1988-1989. When Ukrainians and Belorussians began to nurture hopes for the survival of their culture and for a better future, the appropriate interpretation of history became a very important ideological need. The status of the native language and the fate of nature in the respective republics also became political questions once the distinct national and religious traditions were recognized.

Language

In March 1988 the Board of the Union of Soviet Writers held a plenary meeting in Moscow, devoted to the national question. Among the speeches subsequently printed in *Literaturnaja Gazeta*, three were by Ukrainians and one by a Belorussian. The Ukrainian contributions were from Juryj Mušketik, first secretary of the Union of Writers of the Ukrainian SSR, Roman Lubkivskyj and Borys Olijnyk. Mušketik remarked that in the Ukraine parents made their children opt out of Ukrainian classes. They argued that the Ukrainian language was not needed in matters concerning higher education, transportation or law courts, nor the Komsomol or higher levels of administration. However, according to Lubkivskyj the time had come to redress the situation and make instruction in Ukrainian obligatory for Ukrainian schoolchildren. Why were the strivings of the Ukrainians to retain their native language condemned as a negative "ism", Olijnyk asked. He was alarmed by the lack of prestige of the Ukrainian language. This deplorable state of affairs had made not only the population at large but also the intellectuals lose their hope for the future of the Ukrainian culture and nation. People had been encouraged to inform on those countrymen who used the native language. Not a single informer had been brought to court or criticized in the press. Olijnyk urged the planned plenary meeting on the nationality question of the Central Committee (scheduled for the summer of 1989) to decide about new laws against denigration of national pride through the use of epithets such as "nationalist" and "chauvinist". (Plenum... 1988)

Nil Hilevič from Belorussia declared that an end must be set to the whitewashing of the situation and to the outright deceit regarding the situation for the native languages, for example the Belorussian language. He castigated political centralism, rule from Moscow, as the root of the evil and suggested that the status of the language which had given its name to the republic must be codified by law. (Plenum... 1988). Hilevič's arguments were officially endorsed when the Belorussian Communist Party approved, on 27 September 1988, a resolution called "Fundamental Measures for the Further Development of Public Education in the BSSR" with a special clause on "The Further Development of Belorussian-Russian Bilingualism and the Strengthening of the Patriotic and International Upbringing". Although bilingualism was referred to as a goal, the focus of the document was on the Belorussian language and its broad introduction in schools, universities and mass media. (Solchanyk 1988b)

In June 1989, Borys Oliynyk returned to the language question in his speech to the National Congress of People's Deputies in Moscow. He spoke both in his capacity as a secretary of the Ukrainian Writers' Union and as a deputy of the CPSU. It is significant for the development in the national question that Oliynyk was more radical now than in his speech in March the previous year. He declared that the language question must be solved by the republican authorities, without any interference from Moscow. The national language must become 'a proud master in its own home'. Ukrainian must become the state language of the republic, Oliynyk said. He dismissed the idea of giving Russian equal status as a second state language, because it ran counter to the opinion of the majority of voters in the Ukraine. He added that making Russian a state language would be an insult to the Russians, because such a move would imply that Ukrainians were not prepared to learn Russian voluntarily. Oliynyk then made a further remark the implications of which were far reaching. Repeating the rather common assertion that the Russians are especially poor as far as national culture is concerned, owing to the fact that they have not got their own Academy of Sciences or Communist Party, but have to be content with the respective Soviet institutions, Oliynyk used the occasion to express regret that Russia, which together with Belorussia and the Ukraine had born the brunt of the burden in the Great Patriotic War, was not a member of the United Nations. (S"ezd... 1989). The reference was to the fact that in addition to the Soviet Union, Soviet Belorussia and Soviet Ukraine are members of the UN. Giving Soviet Russia the same status as the two other East Slav republics would imply that the Soviet Union as such was superfluous as a member of the UN and that the idea of the USSR as the natural successor state to Russia, with only a new name, must be abandoned. Russia to the Russians, but nothing more, was the obvious conclusion from the argument.

Politicisation of history and landscape

In 1988-89 a new, post-Soviet frame of reference, anchored in a new interpretation of history, was evidently emerging in Belorussia and the Ukraine. The separatist tendency was politicized when nationally defined independent groups and popular fronts appeared on the public scene. At a meeting in the capital of Belorussia, Minsk, on 2 August 1988, the informal nationalist group *Talaka* (the word denotes a workers' community: cf. Finnish 'talko') demanded that the old national symbol *Pahonja* and the historical red-on-white flag be reinstated in Belorussia. The symbol was the heraldic emblem

of the the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the flag was adopted by the nationalist Belorussian *Hromada* government in 1918. Moreover, as early as July the historian S. Dumin demanded, in an article in *Literatura i mastactva*, a thorough revision of the historiography of Belorussia. He argued that it was necessary to revise the official thesis of Belorussia's natural belonging to Russia and to state instead that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had been the state not only of Lithuanians but also of the Belorussians. Dumin observed that, in parallel to Moscow, there had existed another state in eastern Europe that could rightfully lay claim to the heritage from Kievan Rus'. Dumin also took exception to the official Soviet description of the history of the Belorussians under Polish rule as an incessant struggle against Catholicism. (Solchanyk 1988a) In the Autumn of 1988, the Politbureau of the Belorussian Communist Party took some measures to enhance the popularisation and dissemination of Belorussian history. It was decided to investigate the possibility of launching a monthly journal of history called 'Heritage'. More time would be spent on Belorussian history in the schools and a new textbook on the subject was to be published. (Solchanyk 1988 b)

In January 1989 the Moscow weekly *Ogonëk* carried an article by an Ukrainian writer which amounted to a wholesale rejection of the Soviet heritage in the republic. The focus was on the destruction of the natural environment and the devastation of the Ukrainian cultural landscape. A passage on Soviet history expressed a certain Ukrainian resentment:

Today much is written about the mass repressions in 1937-1938 and ever new names are rehabilitated. However, there is little information about the tragedy in 1932-1933 when mass starvation spread in the country because of insane "exaggerations" during collectivisation. Starvation hit several regions - the Kuban', Povol'z'e and the Urals - but the Ukraine, the previous grainery of Russia and Europe, suffered incomparably the most. According to certain witnesses (although the archives are still silent) the republic lost millions of people and whole villages were annihilated. In addition, the Ukraine had to pay for "the genial ideas of the leader of the country" with the majority of the peasants being deported from the Black Earth area and sent in special trains beyond the Urals into Siberia and the Far East, where wheat could not be sown or people be buried in a decent way... The Stalinist "clearings" at the end of the 1930s annihilated above all the intellectuals, the protectors of the soul of the people. Ukrainian actors, scien-

tists, doctors, teachers, writers and poets were accused of nationalism and extinguished almost to the last man. (Djačenko 1989)

At the Writers' Union meeting in Moscow in March 1988, Roman Lubkiv's'kyj complained that the *basavrjuki* (the expression recalls a Gogolian bureaucrat) were doing their best to eradicate Ukrainian culture and nature. Not only the Čornobyl' power plant but also other nuclear reactors, in operation or planned, constituted lethal threats to the Ukraine. Chortycja, the island famous for housing the Zaporog Cossacks, was under threat and the same was true of Čyhyryn, Bohdan Chmel'nyc'kyj's capital, which had seen the birth of the idea of Ukrainian reunion with Russia. This linkage between history and natural environment was underlined also by Borys Olijnyk in his speech to the National Congress in June 1989. He argued that the republican authorities must be given sovereign political rights in order to protect the environment from the attacks of the central bureaucracy in Moscow. The latter enforced nuclear power stations, monstrous chemical factories and enormous irrigation systems on the Ukraine. Thereby cultural and historical centres such as Kiev, Čyhyryn, Kaniv, Zaporizžja, Rovno and Chmel'nyc'kyj were destroyed.

In his speech in March 1988, Borys Olijnyk dwelt on the Cossack state of old. He asserted that during the last two hundred years, from the day when Catherine II had dissolved the Zaporog community, the Ukrainians had repeatedly been deprived of their national rights. However, in spite of all hardships and struggles, the Ukrainian people had not forgotten Kievan Rus', theirs by birthright (*pervorod*), nor the old dream of reunification with the Russian brother. The Ukrainian writer thus took care to adhere to the official ideology of unity of the three East Slav peoples, but at the same time he asserted that the Ukrainians had the birthright to Kievan Rus', that they and not the Russians were the *primus inter pares*.

Demands for greater concern for national culture and traditions were advanced also by informal political groups such as the Ukrainian Helsinki Union (UGS) and the Ukrainian Democratic Union (UDS). The UGS stressed human rights, whereas the UDS wanted to develop democracy with the ultimate aim of achieving an independent, pluralistic Ukrainian state. Both groups were advocating making Ukrainian the official state language of the republic. Russians would have to learn Ukrainian and get used to being guests, not masters, in the republic. The campaign was not totally ineffective

as Nikolaj Šul'ga, deputy head of the ideology department of the Ukrainian Communist Party, in an interview with a British journalist in early 1989, acknowledged the fact of a language crisis. He announced that the government was making Ukrainian history a subject in its own right and not just a brief chapter in the history of the USSR, as had previously been the case. However, he ruled out legalization of the Ukrainian Catholic Church, arguing that it had collaborated with the Nazis during the war. (*The Independent*, 10 January 1989)

Šul'ga's information regarding language programmes and history education revealed that even the conservative Ukrainian Communist Party felt obliged to heed some of the fundamental demands of the informal groups. A re-definition of history with political implications, similar to the one in Belorussia, was apparently under way. In December 1988 a document containing an eleven point programme of the "Renewal" National Front of Belorussia reached the West. The platform expressed commitment to the ideals of democracy and *perestrojka*, support for Belorussian sovereignty and economic self-management of the republic, respect for human rights, concern for the fate of the natural environment, and the provision of a truthful and objective history of Belorussia. The programme was not published in the Belorussian press. (Mihalisko 1988b) This was hardly a matter of chance. In contrast to what was simultaneously going on in the Baltic republics, in Belorussia the local Party leadership and the broad layers of the population were not easily won over by the popular front people. The writer Vasyľ Bykov noted that the authorities' resistance to the national renaissance was strong and that the masses had been conditioned to be passive. He deemed the reactionary forces to be so powerful that it remained for himself and the like-minded 'to do all we can to prevent Belorussia from becoming the Vendée of *perestrojka*'. (Mihalisko 1988 a) Vendée, as is known, was the stronghold of conservative resistance in 1793 in rural, western France to the revolution of 1789. A similar pattern could be discerned in the Ukraine. By breaking up unauthorized public meetings, for example in August 1988 in L'viv of a mass gathering by the 'Democratic Front to Promote *Perestrojka*', the authorities in the Ukraine showed that they were determined to prevent the emergence of a national mass movement. (Nahaylo 1988a) In April 1989, the Party attacked the *Narodnyj Ruch Ukrainy za perebudovy* and admonished the nationally minded intellectuals to cooperate with the Communist Party and realize that *perestrojka* could not be 'purely national' but must be 'international' (i.e. all-union). For the time being, the critical writers in Kiev had to abide. The initiative now lay with the popular masses, who in June 1989 still remained rather passive. (Solchanyk 1989b)

The national re-awakening: preliminary gains

In spite of the political stalemate, the national cultural renaissance in the Ukraine and Belorussia in 1988-89 gained momentum and made this side-effect of the *glasnost* and *perestrojka* policies well-nigh irreversible. In the context of the construction of a distinct national past for Belorussians and Ukrainians, the rehabilitation of Hruševs'kyj, who had earlier been condemned as a "bourgeois nationalist", was especially noteworthy. In December 1988 a special commission on Hruševs'kyj's work was formed at the Institute of History of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. The aim was to clear Hruševs'kyj of Stalinist accusations of espionage. The rehabilitation of 'Ukraine's foremost historian', who was the head of the Central Rada in 1917 and the first president of the pre-Bolshevik Ukrainian People's Republic, was significant as a further step in the reconstruction of a new, suitable, separate national tradition for the Ukraine. It was also significant that the fact that Hruševs'kyj's works were made available to the public in the library of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, was vehemently criticized by the head of the Department of the History of Friendship of Peoples of the USSR at the Institute of History in Kiev, and that the leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Ščerbyč'kyj, dismissed Hruševs'kyj as a 'nationalist'. (Solchanyk 1989 a) In a book against Ukrainian catholicism by a certain K.E. Dmitruk, which was published in an edition of 100,000 copies in Moscow in 1988, Hruševs'kyj was still condemned as a "bourgeois nationalist". (Dmitruk 1988) It is typically Stalinist to regard subservience to the Russians as an expression of 'Friendship of Peoples' and equally so to criticize all non-Russian nationalism as 'bourgeois', i.e. as ideologically suspect. The suppression of Hruševs'kyj's work prior to 1988 was an expression of this official attitude. The rehabilitation of the national Ukrainian historian thus signalled a farewell to official Soviet ideology and the rebirth of national pride. Hruševs'kyj's comeback indicated a self-conscious Ukrainian dismissal of established Soviet 'internationalist' slogans.

Both for the Ukrainians and for the Belorussians the language question was central in the political mobilization process in 1988. The Russian language was no longer regarded as the self-evident mainstream of the East Slavonic languages or as the foremost inheritor of the language of the Kievan State. In addition to this revision of official Soviet ideology, Belorussian and Ukrainian intellectuals imputed a new, positive meaning into historical processes and symbols that had been discredited in Soviet historiography. Most important was the challenge to Muscovite Russia as the true heir to Kievan Rus' and the promotion of the alternative thesis of a Kievan-

Lithuanian/Belorussian-Ukrainian continuity in history. In addition to this came the positive identification with the national traditions of the 1920s, i.e. with the only previous period in Soviet history not marked by russification and oppression, a policy which at times amounted to no less than genocide towards non-Russians.

After the Second World War the Muscovite State, which had become Russia and then the Soviet Union, finally defeated Kiev. Or so it seemed. It was evident that it was the Russian Orthodox Church, with its centre in Moscow, that celebrated the millenium of the christianization of Rus'. However, in the very year of the millenium, at the moment of final recognition of the Russian Orthodox Church by the Soviet state, the Ukraine and Belorussia were in a process of awakening. In speeches, demonstrations and literary products a distinct national self-consciousness and assertiveness came to the fore. At the close of the 1980s, the "Soviet Union", Lenin's and Stalin's construction on the ruins of the tsarist empire, remained an ideological illusion. Three "Russian" cultures and languages recalled and claimed the traditions from Kievan Rus'.

It was obvious that recognition of a separate ecclesiastical tradition was part of the new sense of Ukrainian and Belorussian identity. The official Soviet mythological view of the cordial and intimate relationship between the Russian Orthodox Church and the three East Slav peoples of the Soviet Union was dismissed by quite a number of those directly concerned. The Ukrainian churches, both the Catholic and the Autocephalous Orthodox, re-emerged as carriers of a specific Ukrainian national identity, and as an ideological alternative to the Russian Church. In a way that bore resemblance to developments in neighbouring Poland, religious denomination proved to be important as an ethnic marker and for the sense of national identity. A mythological echo from the time of Saint Vladimir, symbolized by the sound of the bells of the Sophia Cathedral in Kiev, reached the cracking Soviet state.

Conclusion

The movement away from Soviet communism in the Ukraine and Belorussia will probably not lack Vendées, conservative counter-reactions inspired by Party leaders committed to the system. In June 1989, when these lines are written, the old Party leadership remained in power at the same time as nationalist intellectuals became increasingly assertive in their political

statements. The legacy from the Stalinist and Brežnevist past may disturb developments towards democracy and freedom. However, the legitimacy of the oppressive Soviet communist regime was continuously eroding in 1988-89. This was eloquently demonstrated by the poor record of many Party candidates in the elections to the National Congress in March 1989, especially in the Baltic republics.

'The one and indivisible Great Russia', as it is expressed in the Soviet anthem, melted into air when the bells of the Sophia Cathedral finally began to toll. The place of the Soviet Russian empire was on the threshold of being taken by smaller 'Russias', with Moscow being just one in the number and the Ukraine and Belorussia emerging as its equals. Kiev had finally taken up the challenge from Moscow. The struggles over religion, history, language and nature turned out to be a struggle both for national identity and for the right to decide one's future. The fight over the right to the heritage from Ancient Rus' was not a harmless exercise in historiography but a demonstration of the political potential of historical myths. In 1988-89 a new 'reality' was constructed in Belorussia and the Ukraine. Recalling history, these nations returned to the contemporary map of Europe.

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