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# Cultural emancipation and identity formation in Georgia and Ukraine throughout the XX and XXI century

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# INTRODUCTION

Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union states that countries such as Georgia, Moldova and Belarus (like any other European state) have a "European perspective", and may therefore apply to become members of the Union; in this context, a serious study on the future of the European Union should include a deep analysis of such countries, which in the short-run can still be regarded as "far and foreign" but in the long-run will surely come into play as a source of both internal European conflict (among different EU members with different views regarding their access to membership) and external EU-Russia conflict (considering that many European Union candidates are ex-soviet republics, such as Moldova or Ukraine, still under heavy Russian Influence).

In this work I will analyze two of such possible future EU members:

1) *Georgia*: a country located in the Caucasus, one of the most culturally diverse and therefore complicated areas in the world, comprising over fifty different ethnic groups, 2 major world religions (Christianity and Islam) and the influence of 2 world powers (Russia and the EU);
2) *Ukraine*: a nation struggling with the identification and affirmation of an autonomous cultural identity given its common historical path with Russia throughout the centuries earning it the name of "Little Russia" (Малая Россия).

The two nations share a common modern history, as both have strong Russian-oriented minorities, the presence of which caused a civil war resulting in Russia's problematic and traumatic intervention, further destabilizing the country and weakening any "European hope". The thesis will start by introducing Georgia and Ukraine through an account of their history, from the early Middle Ages until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, hence allowing us to discover the roots of their national identity, and

its subsequent development throughout the centuries up to the moment in which it became vital for the establishment of an independent state.

The dissertation will continue by drawing a picture of the political, economic and social situation experienced by the two countries post-1991: from the early years remembered as the “Transitional Period”, marked by great instability and violence resulting from the power vacuum caused by the dissolution of the USSR, up to the most recent events. This section is fundamental to understand the different approaches that the two ex-soviet Republic have had to the process of State-building, deeply shaping the countries on their roads to modernization and leading them to their current state of being.

Moving away from a mainly historical approach, the third chapter will focus on the development of national identities in the two countries throughout the XX and XXI century: starting by providing a theoretical base with which to analyze Nationalism to subsequently deal with such phenomenon first within the USSR and later within Independent Georgia and Ukraine; the third section of this chapter will focus on the points:

1) The strategies pursued on a political level in relation to the process of cultural emancipation of the newly formed nations, thus allowing us to obtain a clear understanding of how the governments of Georgia and Ukraine relate to Russia and the EU, and whether their aim in the last thirty years has been that of distancing themselves from Moscow or the one of further promoting a culture of dependency.

2) The role played by important non-political figures and their contribution to the national awakening of both countries. For intellectuals have always been fundamental to the forging of states' identities, the study of such “Intelligentsia” will clarify the strength of the links between the two ex-Soviet Republics and Russia in the intellectual context, therefore providing a measure for the “Autonomy of thought” of Georgia and Ukraine.

The fourth chapter will analyze the ethnic conflicts arisen in the two countries as a result of the nationalist policies aimed at culturally emancipating Ukraine and Georgia. This part of the work will focus on the popular response to the political and intellectual actions dealt with in the previous chapter, providing a synthesis between downward stimuli and upward reactions, thus testing the closeness of intentions between lower and higher classes (too often in the analysis of a country's orientation its common people's feelings are often neglected) and allowing us to better understand the two countries as a whole. To conclude, the thesis will analyze some future scenarios in which Georgia and Ukraine might find themselves, trying to predict, resting on the information previously illustrated, a possible realignment with Russia, or a definitive departure from their Soviet past.

# I
## I.I History of Georgia

Dating back to ancient times, Georgia was a land divided into two main kingdoms: the Kingdom of Colchis, located in the Western part of modern Georgia and closely connected to Hellenistic culture, and the kingdom of Kartli (or Iberia), located in the South-Eastern part of modern Georgia and including parts of today's Turkey and Armenia, influenced by Persian and Turkish traditions. At the beginning of the IV century AD, King Mirian III declared Christianity the state religion, making Georgia the second country in the world (after Armenia) to adopt Christianity as the state religion, and further contributing to the decline of Zoroastrianism and the distancing of the country from Persian influence; to this very day, 82% of Georgians practices Orthodox Christianity. The new religion became a (if not the) fundamental factor contributing to the shaping of a Georgian identity: King David the Builder (1089-1125) turned the country into a center of Christian culture and learning, further connecting it to Greek influence; this coincided with the struggle for independence against Arabs and Turks (being Georgia and Armenia the only two Christian countries to be almost entirely surrounded by Muslim countries). Such struggle was followed by the Golden Age, under the reign of Queen Tamar (1184-1213), during which Georgia reached its maximum territorial expansion (including parts of modern Iran, Turkey, Russia, Armenia and Ukraine) and cultural progress. This ruler is one of the key figures in Georgian History, and the borders established under her reign were to be taken by many patriots into consideration in the early stages of the XX century, when shaping the basis of a free Georgian Republic. The arrival of the Mongols in the 1220s and the subsequent spread of the Black Plague signed the end of Georgia's brightest period, and threw the country into five centuries of internal wars between the several smaller kingdoms into which it had split. The consequent weakening of a no longer unified Georgia opened

the way to the neighboring Muslim Empires, which conquered the whole territory and made Georgia nothing but a mere province frequently shifting between Ottomans and Persians.

In 1783 King Heraclius II of Kartli-Kakheti (a kingdom located in Eastern Georgia) asked to be taken under the protection of the Russian Empire in an attempt to solve the persistent Turkish threat. Despite the agreements between the two countries granting the Georgian ruling dynasty and its kingdom full autonomy, already by 1801 Georgia had lost its autonomous status, thus being integrated into the Russian Empire with the title of "province". In the following century Tsarist Russia used Eastern Georgia as an outpost from where to wage the Caucasian War (1817-1864), with which it asserted its dominance over the whole Caucasus, turning former Khanates and Muslim tribal states into districts of the Empire.

Having conquered the region, Russia put forward a policy aimed at the Russification of what was, and still is to this day, one of the most complex and culturally diverse areas in the world (as written by the Roman historian Pliny, once the Romans arrived in the Caucasus, they needed 134 interpreters to deal with the clutter of languages they found); such process rested on two pillars:

1. <u>The incorporation of the local aristocracy into the Russian gentry</u>

aimed at alienating the Caucasian ruling class from the rest of society, thus reducing the risk of revolts.

2. <u>The settlement of Russian peasants into the Caucasus and the subsequent displacement of local tribes</u>

having the purpose of altering the ethno-demographic structure of the region, and triggering a series of rebellions that, not finding leaders among the now "corrupted" local elite, soon came to be guided by spiritual figures (the Avar Imam Shamil being the most prominent) who changed the nature of the conflict from nationalist to religious (Jihad), resulting in a strengthening and

radicalization of Islam throughout the region whose effects can still be seen to this very day (1st and 2nd Chechen War, War of Daghestan, etc.)


-Map of Ethno-linguistic groups in the Caucasus region in 1887.

On the 22nd of April 1918, following the chaos brought by the Russian Revolution, the short-lived "Transcaucasian Democratic Federative Republic" (comprising Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Abkhazia and parts of Turkey and Russia) was founded, to be later the same year dissolved because of the too different cultures forming it. As a result, the *Democratic Republic of Georgia* was proclaimed: a de facto independent state only lasted from 1918 to 1921 (with Abkhazia and South Ossetia being part of it), before being invaded by the Red Army to be annexed to the USSR first as a member of the Transcaucasian Federation, then independently as "Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic". The forcible incorporation of Georgia into the Union of Soviet Republics and the border rearrangements with which it lost consistent parts of its pre-Soviet territories to SSR Azerbaijan, SSR Armenia and Turkey fueled anti-Russian sentiments, which later worsened following the 1921 famine and the persecution of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The

diffused popular discontent culminated in the August Uprising of 1924, a secessionist revolt soon turned into a massacre of the local population, determining the final Sovietization of Georgia.

In the decades to come, under the rule of the ethnically Georgian Joseph Jughashvili (better known as Joseph “Stalin”) the violence with which political initiatives were repressed prevented the creation of any nationalist party; despite this, Georgia enjoyed a particularly high number of privileges:

1. Greater political autonomy compared to other Soviet Republics

which enabled the local Nomenklatura to control large shares of the Republic's industry (instead of leaving it to the central administration based in Moscow, as it was for the other Soviet Republics), keeping most of Georgia's wealth within its boundaries.

2. The incorporation of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into Georgia as “autonomous territories” in 1931

without a popular referendum in either region preceding it, thus setting the basis for that hatred which would in the decades to come be accentuated by Moscow's policies.

3. The affirmation of the Georgian identity over other Caucasian ethnic groups

a process of cultural dominance promoted by Stalin which established for each Republic the assimilation of minorities into the predominant ethnicity.

Becoming the center of high-class tourism due to its sunny weather, sanatoriums, resorts, and roads were built; the inflows of money and an effective administration of its own resources made Georgia one of the richest republics in the USSR. “Georgia had the highest education level, the best housing conditions, and the largest number of doctors in the whole of the

USSR."[1] These wealthy decades preceding the fall of the Soviet Union are still seen with nostalgia by the older generation, and the way they are perceived is often the issue on which public opinion splits.

Mass deportations carried out in the 1940's and the migration towards nearby Republics (mostly Armenia and Azerbaijan) resulted in a steady decrease of those minorities present in Georgia, which along with the growth of the Georgian population drastically changed the ethnic composition of the Republic in favor of the latter. Such development increased fears among minority groups (especially Abkhazians and Ossetians) of being culturally absorbed by the Georgian majority, resulting in growing tensions which ultimately led to two civil wars (War in South Ossetia, War in Abkhazia).

Kruschëv's process of de-Stalinization signed a reduction of those benefits previously enjoyed by Georgia, and was perceived by its citizens as seeking to undermine Georgian cultural identity ; this led on the 9th of March 1956 to the first major "nationalist" demonstration carried out in the Republic (Tbilisi) since the 1924 revolts, signing the beginning of modern Georgian nationalism and the rebirth of national liberation movements.

The works of intellectuals such as *Mukhran Machavariani* and *Akaki Bakradze,* along with the growing students' patriotic commitment, further contributed to the emergence of powerful national political organizations such as the National Independence Party. In 1978 protests took place in Tbilisi, demanding and obtaining the reintroduction of Georgian as the *sole* State language of the Republic.

The freedom enjoyed under Gorbachëv led to a growth in national parties and movements, however, as such organizations primarily rested on ethnic basis, the struggle for independence quickly came to be identified as the pursuit of an ethnic Georgian State, impeding civil cohesion between the population

[1]V. Naumkin and L. Perepyolkin, Ethnic conflict in the former Soviet Union, CEMISS-Roma, 2004.

majority and those minorities which saw Georgian ethnic nationalism as a threat to their rights.

On the 9th of April, 1989 an anti-Soviet demonstration held in the capital of the Republic was brutally dispersed by the Soviet Army, resulting in the death of 21 civilians and the injury of over 4000. The "Tbilisi Massacre" (as it came to be known) and Moscow's headquarters subsequent denial of responsibility provided the final impetus for Georgia's secession from the USSR, and gave rise to the so-called *"Tbilisi Syndrome"* (the reluctance of military officers and soldiers to take any tactical decisions or even obey orders without a clear trail of responsibility to a higher authority[2]), greatly contributing to the final dissolution of the USSR.

A referendum aimed at restoring Georgia's independence of 1918 was held on the 31st of March, 1991 and approved by 99.5% of voters (though largely boycotted by the Abkhazian and Ossetian population).


[2]Archil Gegeshidze, The 9 April tragedy – a milestone in the history of modern Georgia, Observer Research Foundation, 2019.

## I.II History of Ukraine

Before the creation of the Kievan Rus, Ukraine was home to a great variety of radically diverse populations, which mutually influencing each other gave birth to both military conflicts and cultural exchanges shaping the area in the centuries to come. Such different cultures varied according to the macro-region: 1) the Black Sea coast, heavily influenced by the contemporary Mediterranean powers, first being colonized by the Greeks in the 6th -7th century BC, to later pass under the control of first the Roman Empire and successively the Byzantine Empire; 2) the "open steppe", ranging from the south-eastern part of Ukraine to the mouth of the Danube River, home to central Asian nomadic horsemen such as the Huns or the Avars using the territory as a natural gateway to Europe; 3) the mixed forest-steppe and forest belt of north-central and western Ukraine in the 5th century occupied by the Slavs which started practicing trade and building fortified settlements. Among such settlements, the town of Kyiv began to flourish due to its strategic position on the banks of Dnieper River, connecting the Baltic to the Byzantium.

In 882 Slavicized Vikings known as "***Rus***" conquered the city of Kiev, establishing under prince Oleg of Novgorod the Kievan State, soon known as "Rus".

Kievan Rus converted into Christianity under Vladimir the Great in 988, further promoting closer ties with the Byzantine Empire and encouraging a process of opening towards the West which, under Yaroslav the Wise (978 – 1054), turned Rus into a large, strong and respected State, with Kiev, its capital, asserting itself as a major European center of culture and trade for the following two centuries. This extraordinary economic and cultural development was later used by nationalists in the XIX and early XX century as one of the central elements around which to construct a Ukrainian identity

and boost national pride.

With the start of the Mongolian invasions in 1223, the Kievan State gradually lost power, until the final fall of Kyiv in 1240. The domination by the Golden Horde hindered the development of Rus and its ties with Europe, creating a gap between the two areas of the Kievan State:

a) The north-eastern region, which due to its closeness to the Golden Horde (based in Moscow) experienced a longer and stricter Mongolian rule thus completely isolating itself from the West and maintaining more autocratic traits.

b) The southern regions (corresponding to modern-day Ukraine), which never completely detached from Europe, hence always striving for the West and being able to develop, even if partially.

Such gap between the two macro-regions of Rus was crucial to the understanding of the subsequent relations between Ukraine and Russia.

As the Golden Horde started to disintegrate in the 14th century, Poland (subsequently the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) began seizing most of Southern Rus, further allowing Ukraine to absorb those Renaissance ideals coming from Europe. Such domination also caused religious tensions to rise between the Catholic Poles and the Orthodox Ukrainians, which resulted in a revival of Orthodoxy all throughout the occupied Rus, considered a symbol of the resistance against foreign polish occupation.

In the meantime, the melting-pot into which the region had turned itself set the basis for the birth of semi-independent Slavicized Tatars known as "*Cossacks*", product of the encounter of the East with the West.

These people started populating the Wild Fields near the Dnieper River north of the Black Sea, in the border territory between the Crimean Khanate (last remaining splendor of the once vast territories controlled by the Golden Horde) and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. From such territories derives the word "*Ukraine*", which means "borderland".

Soon Cossacks' image among the population changed: by defending the region's population from both polish oppression and Tatar raids, they began to be perceived as local heroes rather than mere semi-nomadic bandits. Their freedom and complete independence further contributed to the increasing charisma surrounding them; Cossack culture quickly spread throughout the region, with people from all over Ukraine starting to join them, adapting to their culture, lifestyle and form of government.

As Cossacks started expanding and people simultaneously started to willingly adopt their cultural traits, the word “Ukraine” slowly became more prominent, until completely replacing the old word “Rus”.

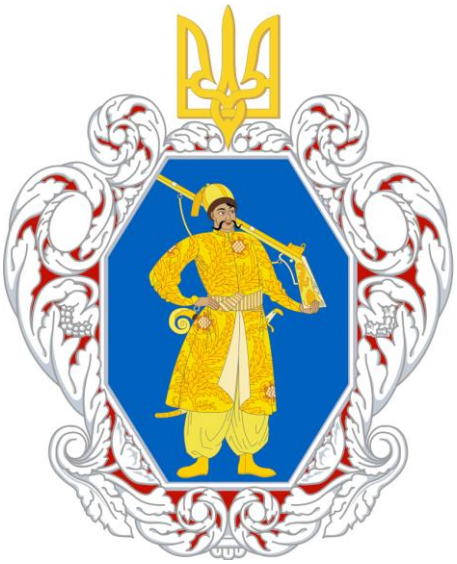
In the following wars waged by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Cossacks formed a vital regiment of the army, actively fighting against Turks, Tatars and Swedes. The “Cossack Myth” grew in popularity, as well as the region of Ukraine, from where such memorable warriors came. With the consequent “Polonization” of the Ukrainian noble families Cossacks replaced aristocracy as the symbol of Ukrainian identity, this link between Cossacks and Ukraine would further be encouraged by famous writers such as Nikolaj Gogol' (in his book “Taras Bul'ba”), to later develop into one of the pillars on which Ukrainian nationalist movements would rely when shaping a national consciousness.

In the first half of the 17$^{th}$ century a series of violent Cossacks revolts led by Bohdan Khmelnytsky put an end to the Polish occupation of Ukraine, thus leading in 1649 to the creation of the *Cossack Hetmanate,* whose borders served as a foundation for the future aspirations of an independent sovereign Ukraine.

In order to fight the constant Polish threat, in 1654 the Hetmanate joined Russia (which in the meantime had grown into being one of the great powers of Europe) under the “*Pereyaslav Treaty*”; though still preserving an “autonomous status” within it. The Hetmanate secured military protection

from the Tsardom of Russia in exchange for allegiance to the Tsar. Such treaty signed the beginning of the long Russian domination of Ukraine, which only ended in 1991 (even though some might argue it to still persist to this very day), and it was often instrumentally used during the Soviet Era to create a sense of false brotherhood among the two republics whenever Ukrainian nationalism seemed to have been on the rise.

-Coat of arms of the Cossack Hetmanate, representing a Cossack with musket (1648).



-Coat of arms of the Ukrainian State (1918); drawing inspiration from the Hetman State's one, with the inclusion of other national symbols.


-The Cossack Hetmanate in 1654 (against the backdrop of contemporary Ukraine).

In the decades following the Pereyaslav Agreement Cossacks filled the ranks of the Russian army, participating in all major wars against Poland, Sweden, Turkey and the several Khanates, giving a fundamental contribution to the creation of the Russian Empire.

The death of the charismatic Cossack leader Bohdan Khmelnytsky in 1657 soon resulted in a loss of authority by the Hetman State, which gradually lost its autonomy and strength (in part due to the ferocious persecutions against the Cossacks ordered by the Tsar Peter the Great), until being finally abolished in 1764 by the Tsarina Catherine II.

No longer belonging to an autonomous State, the Cossack Elite was gradually assimilated into the Russian aristocracy; a process of naturalization of the Ukrainian high-class carried out by Russia with the ultimate intention of depriving Ukraine of its nobles, transforming it into an exclusively rural and marginalized area.

Only with Romanticism intellectuals started rediscovering the forgotten history and traditions of the region; folk culture is was re-evaluated together with peasant Ukraine. Artists and writers from all over Europe, such as Lord Byron and Adam Mickiewicz, brought Ukrainian popular music and tales to fame in the West. The process of the formation of Ukrainian literature was initiated by the collectors and popularizers of Ukrainian folk songs and historical ballads called “Dumas”, comprising respected academic figures such as Mykhaylo Maksymovych and Izmail Sreznevskij.

Such a cultural revival had an enormous impact on the younger generation of Ukrainian intellectuals until now gravitating around the sphere of Russian culture, leading many of its exponents, such as Nikolaj Ivanovič Kostomarov, to become ardent patriots of the Ukraine.

The nationalist drive inspired by Romanticism was soon brought to an end by the strict policies of Tsar Nikolas I aimed at creating a more homogeneous society and rotating around three pillars:

1) Orthodoxy: resulting in the ban of the Greek Catholic Church, created in the 17th century with the intention of bringing Ukraine closer to Catholic Poland, and until that moment widely diffused in several areas of Ukraine.

2) Tsarist Autocracy: leading to the imposition of restrictions on autonomous Ukrainian intellectual circles and further control on Ukraine, which began to be identified as an integral part of Russia, earning the name of "Little Russia".
3) Ethnic Identity: aiming at the Russification of the Empire, thus undermining the flourishing of the different cultures within the Empire, such as the Polish one.

In the meantime, western Ukrainians living in Galicia (part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire) enjoyed a far more tolerant regime, being able to freely develop their own culture and language. The Greek Catholic Church (not banned in Austria-Hungary) served as initiator in the awakening of the national consciousness in Western Ukraine; among its clergy, several scholars published collections of those folk songs, poems and historical articles emerged in Russian-Ukraine during the Romantic period.

The most famous collection, published by the seminarians Markiyan Shashkevych, Yakub Holovatsky and Ivan Vahylevych was entitled "*The Mermaid of the Dniester*", and it introduced the vernacular of the Galician Ukrainians to the literary world and put into light the similarities between that language and the language of the Ukrainians living in Russia; for the first time since the fall of the Kievan Rus, Western and Eastern Ukrainians felt to belong to one and the same nation.

Among the younger generations of intellectuals shaped by Romanticism, the writer **Taras Schevchenko** emergd as one of the founding fathers of modern-day Ukraine. His masterpiece, "*Kobzar*", published in 1840 as a harsh critic of the Russian Tsars, was written in a language created by Schevchenko

himself by comprising the three different major Ukrainian dialects, thus helping laying the foundations of contemporary Ukrainian language.

The book's impact on the strengthening of the Ukrainian national consciousness was immense: rejecting both the idea of the inseparability of Great and Little Russia and that of complete submission to the Tsar, Schevchenko's poetry combined the seek for social justice by ordinary people with the glorious past of the Cossack Elite, appealing to all classes within the future nation.

Following the 1848 Revolutions and the 1863 Polish uprising Tsar Alexander II strengthened Russian cultural dominance within the Empire: books in Ukrainian were outlawed and many Ukrainian patriots were forced to emigrate to Hapsburg Galicia, where, by entering in contact with Western Ukrainians they accelerated the process of national cohesion, making Galicia the Ukrainian Piedmont.

In this context, the historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky published in 1898 “History of Ukraine-Rus”, the first detailed scholarly synthesis of Ukrainian history; his work led both Western and Eastern Ukrainian intellectuals to further grow aware of their regions' shared history. With this historiography, the word “Rus” was ultimately replaced by the word “Ukraine”.

As the First World War broke out in 1914, Ukrainians, filling the ranks of both Austria-Hungary (Western Ukrainians) and the Russian Empire (Eastern Ukrainians), were forced to fight each other. Their meeting, although conflictual, had a positive impact: common people (soldiers) from the two parts of Ukraine entered for the first time into contact with one another, realizing their common cultural traits; that sense of belonging to the same nation, until that moment felt only by those higher classes able to read the articles published by intellectual Ukrainian patriots, was now spread among the majority of the population.

The power vacuum and successive chaos following the Russian Revolution

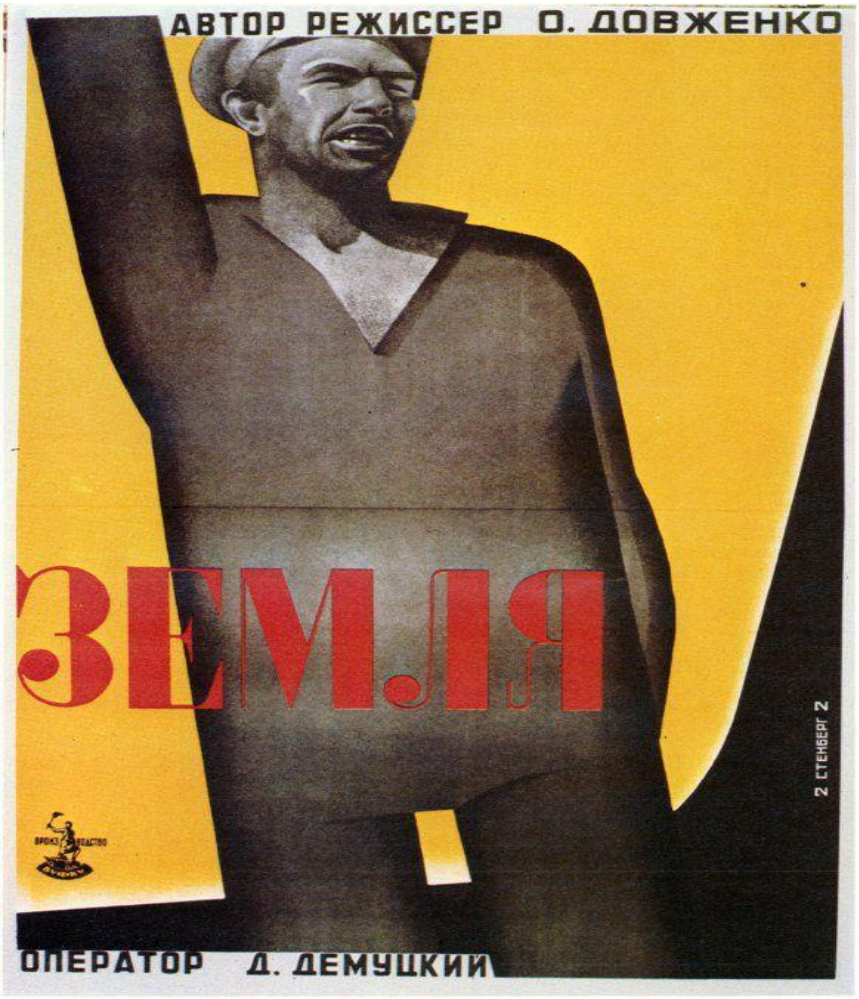
of 1917 gave Ukraine the chance to seize the long-awaited freedom. With the *Ukrainian War of Independence (1917-1921),* Tsarist Ukraine proclaimed itself independent in the January of 1918, under the name of **Ukrainian National Republic (UNR)**. This State, after a short period of independence, soon served as stage to several chaotic conflicts between Poles, Ukrainian patriots, Anarchists, Bolsheviks and Tsarist forces, finally resulting in its partition in 1921, mostly between Poland and Bolshevik Russia.

Despite having lasted less than a month, the Ukrainian National Republic was the first attempt to an independent modern Ukrainian State, and many of its elements, such as its constitution or its parliament, would later serve as an inspiration in the process of Ukrainian State-building following the events of 1991.

With the creation of the USSR in 1922 Ukraine started enjoying a large degree of freedom never experienced since the abolition of the Hetmanate in the 18$^{th}$ century. In order to strengthen the links between the new Soviet Republic and Moscow, an ambitious policy of "Ukrainization of Communism" was promoted, aimed at the penetration of Communist ideas into Ukrainian society (until that moment indifferent to such ideology). Ukrainian language entered schools, newspapers, politics and arts, mingling with Soviet ideology and leading to the flourishing of Ukrainian culture.

The first generation of Soviet Ukrainian intellectuals arose out of this context, writers, artists and movie directors able to combine modern Soviet ideals and Ukrainian traditions, re-evaluating Ukraine's folkloric past.

Such benefits enjoyed by Ukraine USSR in its early years were soon brought to an end by the harsh Stalinist policies following the beginning of the Great Purges in 1936.




The movie “Earth” by Alexander Dovzhenko (1930), considered to be one of the masterpieces of silent cinema.

As World War II started in 1939 with the invasion of Poland by both Germany and Russia, Western Ukraine (until that moment under Poland) voted to annex to the USSR. After having been occupied by the forces of the Third Reich in 1941, Ukraine experienced a series of clashes between Nazi, Soviet, Polish and Ukrainian forces, witnessing several episodes of Ethnic cleansing in the multi-ethnic region of Galicia.

After the liberation of Kyiv by the Red Army in 1943 and the end of WWII in 1945, Ukrainian USSR and those Ukrainian lands previously under Poland and Romania unified, finally bringing Western and Eastern Ukrainians together into the same Soviet Republic of Ukraine.

The beginning of the Cold War signed a dramatic turn for the sorts of Ukraine: the migration of ethnic Russians into newly annexed Western Ukraine promoted by Stalin, aiming at the "Sovietization" and Industrialization of the region, was followed shortly after by a purge of Ukrainian patriots, intellectuals, and all those people entered into contact with the West, leading to the loss of most of that human capital cultivated during the 1920's policies. After the death of Stalin in 1953 and the subsequent rise to power of Nikita Krushchëv (previously serving as Leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party) Ukraine started playing an increasingly important role within the USSR. "The Krushchëv Era" (1953-1964) was also signed by a lessening Authoritarianism; in this context, Ukraine gave birth to the "*Sixtiers Generation*", a group of intellectuals greatly contributing to the cultural growth of the Republic and to its partial opening towards the West.

With the Transfer of Crimea of 1954 Ukraine received the control of the peninsula under Krushchëv's decision, and obtained the borders with which it would gain its independence in 1991.


-Territories annexed to Ukraine throughout the centuries.

The arrival of Leonid Brezhnev in 1964 was followed by a strong process of Russification carried out throughout the USSR; Ukrainian intellectuals and patriots flourished thanks to Krushchëv's policies were now imprisoned or forced to emigrate to Europe.

As the backwardness of the USSR becomes more and more obvious, the Party seemed to understand the need for renovation, designing in 1985 as leader of the country the tolerant Michail Gorbachëv.

The Gorbachëv Era (1985-1991) was based on two pillars: *Glasnost* ('Transparency') and *Perestroika* ('Restructuring'), initiating a wave of modernization and democratization which resulted in a greater autonomy given to each Republic. The optimistic atmosphere generated by such policies was soon brought to an end by the Chernobyl Disaster, seen by many historians today as the ultimate cause of the Collapse of the USSR; the catastrophe was indeed the final proof of Soviet disorganization, leading to national uprisings all throughout the Republics, no longer willing to be part of a country perceived as too big and inefficient.

Within the context, Ukraine issued in 1987 the "***Declaration of Principles***", a program containing important cultural and political demands, such as the release of political prisoners from camps and jails, which allowed many Ukrainian intellectuals imprisoned during the Brezhnev Era to return to their Republic, contributing in the following years to the shaping of an independent Ukrainian identity.

The violence of the 1991 Soviet Coup d'Etat attempted in Moscow by the Communist conservatives urged many Republics to immediately seek for their independence, in fear of a harsh Communist repression similar to that experienced with Stalin; thus, on the 24$^{th}$ of August 1991, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the "*Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine",* with which Ukraine finally became an independent (at least 'de jure') country.

In December of the same year a national Referendum was held, in which over 90% of Ukrainians voted for independence from the USSR.

-Members of the Ukrainian Parliament carrying the national flag to be hoisted in replacement of the USSR one.


-Ukrainians living in Canada celebrating their country's independence; the sign says: “Ukraine will leave the USSR”.

-Members of the Ukrainian Parliament cheered by the crowd on the day of the country's independence.

-Ukrainian Soviet general taking his oath of allegiance to the independent Republic of Ukraine; most of the Ukrainian former Soviet officers swore its allegiance to the newly formed country.

# II

## II.I Independent Georgia

Georgia proclaimed its independence on the 9th of April 1991, the fourth Republic to leave the USSR after the three Baltic countries, under the guidance of nationalist intellectual Zviad Gamsakhurdia. Soon the country descended into chaos, with Tbilisi becoming the theater of street fighting between the current government and armed gangs willing to overthrow it. Shortly after its independence, Georgia was already facing one of its most serious problems: *criminal organizations.*

*Georgian Organized Crime*

Having its roots in the region's long history, Georgian Mafia bears several similarities with the Sicilian one: both criminal organizations were born in lands historically characterized by foreign domination (Greeks, Arabs, Normans, Spaniards and Northern Italians in Sicily; Persians, Turks and Russians in Georgia.), leading to a sense of general distrust towards state authority (perceived as conqueror) and the resulting detachment of the population from central power, which soon came to be replaced by family and clan-based power structures. Loyalty towards the local community was further promoted by the elite, that, by irresponsibly governing large estates greatly impeded economic growth and the consequent flourishing of a civil society able to take the region away from its alienation.

The poor conditions in which both regions found themselves at the end of the XIX century led to rebellions against the central state, in the case of Georgia impersonated by the Tsar.

Organized crime in the region developed from early bandits assaulting imperial carriages directed towards the extreme south of the Empire. Among such bandits of the early 1900's was a young Joseph Stalin, soon noticed by

Bolshevik revolutionaries due to the funds he and his fellow partners in crime helped raising for the “Cause” by robbing banks and engaging in similar illegal activities. The important link between the Bolshevik Party and the Georgian criminal world consolidated with Stalin's rise to power, as many of his former criminal associates were given prestigious positions within the Party (such as Lavrentiy Beria, Stalin's right hand, or Grigorij Ordžonikidze, creator of the Stakhanovite movement).

The advantages given to ethnic Georgians were both reflected within the official and “unofficial” power structures of the State ( At the close of the Soviet Era, one-third of the “thieves in law”, the elite of professional criminals, were Georgian, whereas Georgians represented about 2% of the Soviet population.[3]), with Georgian criminals being used to control political prisoners and labor camps.

The Brezhnev Era signed the emergence of a properly structured Georgia Mafia thanks to the direct alliance between Georgian criminal groups and Moscow, in which the former provided commodities and “dirty work” to the latter in return for protection and privileges.

As the link between State and Organized Crime grew stronger, Georgian-like Mafia spread throughout the different Republics, contributing to the flourishing of an underground economy which greatly afflicted the USSR during its last two decades.

Only with Gorbachëv the danger of such organizations was finally acknowledged by the Party, and a series of policies were carried out by Shevardnadze (then Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union) aimed at “liberating” Georgia from its criminal clans. However, such actions soon proved to be destructive, as many Mafia exponents soon fled the Republic and moved to Russia, increasing the Georgian criminal diaspora in the

[3]L. Shelley, E. Scott, A. Latta, Organized Crime and corruption in Georgia, 2001.

Republic and strengthening the links between Russian and Georgia Mafia.
After the independence of Georgia in 1991 Djaba Ioselani, the most prominent Georgian Mafia boss and founder of the “Mkhedrioni” (lit. 'Georgian Knights', a criminal militia playing a key role in the early developments of the independent Republic) took advantage of the country's instability to promote his illegal businesses, further increasing his power up to the coup carried out against President Gamsakhurdia in 1992.
Having eliminated his main rival, Ioselani became a member of the parliament and promoted Shevardnadze's return to Georgia and election to President. He then became an important advisor to President Shevardnadze, consolidating ties between Organized Crime and State, and allowing important criminal figures to obtain large shares of Georgia's economy following the post-USSR process of privatization (the rise of the “Oligarchs”, widely diffused in all of the Republics after the dissolution of the USSR). This greatly contributed to the destruction of the country's economy, as well as a “profound moral degradation of society as a whole and a disintegration of normal civic relations, that is, to the country's Latin-Americanization[4]”.

Despite its ties with the local criminal bosses, Shevardnadze's government managed to promote important reforms and boost the country's international reputation. However, internally the situation in South Ossetia and Abkhazia continued to worsen due to separatist movements becoming more and more demanding, culminating in both the *South Ossetian War* (1991-1992) and the *Abkhazian War* (1992-1993), which saw the defeat of Georgia and the subsequent displacement of almost 250.000 ethnic Georgians living in the two regions: a huge humanitarian crisis in a country already destroyed by years of internal conflicts.

[4]V. Naumkin and L. Perepyolkin, Ethnic conflict in the former Soviet Union, CEMISS-Roma, 2004

The two civil conflicts plaguing the new independent country brought to light *ethnic tensions* radicalized and widely ignored during Soviet times (which will be discussed in the next chapter), and had disastrous consequences for the country: Georgia's per capita Purchasing Power Parity decreased by 61%[5], somehow equal to Germany's decrease in PPP after World War II. This economic disaster was further aggravated by the criminal organizations and rampant corruption infesting the country.

*The Rose Revolution*

Meanwhile Shevardnadze's regime governing under the legitimacy of the 1995 Constitution started to assume the traits of a "liberal autocracy"[6]: while elections were mostly symbolical, as real power always remained in the hands of a well-defined political elite, the government allowed for a certain degree of freedom which couldn't be found in most other former Soviet Republic. Such dual nature was called "managed democracy", having the aim of partially "satisfying" the population with minor concessions without promoting any major changes. However, the level of freedom allowed was sufficient to promote the growth of a civil society that started demanding a more democratic government and reforms to tackle the corruption eroding all spheres of society. The growing popular demands for reforms were confronted by Shevardnadze with stricter policies (such as trying to shut down the most prominent independent media-outlet "Rustavi-2" in 2001), leading to the creation of several radical opposition parties, among which, Mikheil Saakashvili's "National Movement".

Protests also spread among students, creating several youth movements such as the "Kmara" which demanded a total reform of the educational system,

[5]IMF, Georgia's Economy in the wake of the 21st century.

[6]G. Nodia, Civil Society Development in Georgia: Achievements and Challenges: Policy Paper, 2005.

characterized by bribes and lack of meritocracy.

The combination of free media, growing civil society, youth movements and radical opposition parties (all resulting from partly liberal policies) mixed with the government's inability to solve major economic issues and systemic corruption led in 2003 to what later came to be named the "*Rose Revolution*": a peaceful protest carried out in Tbilisi ending with the resignation of Shevardnadze and new presidential elections, won by the young and western-oriented Mikheil Saakashvili.

The non-violent nature of the revolution and its success had a dual effect, for on one side it gave hope to all former Soviet Republics that democracy could have been achieved in a peaceful way, and on the other it encouraged western NGOs and policymakers to give their support to the following democratic protests carried out throughout the Ex-Soviet Republics without the fear of promoting endless civil wars. Both factors proved to be fundamental for the outcome of the Revolution that would have taken place in Ukraine the following year.

Importantly, both the Rose Revolution and the Orange Revolution (carried out in Ukraine in 2004) didn't have a "revolutionary" character, but rather aimed at defending the already existing constitution and demand its correct application.

In the following years protests were carried out in 2007 due to the need of social and economic reforms.

From 2010 the economy started recovering, and despite an initial stagnation in 2013 due to the change in government (from Saakashvili to Margvelashvili), it kept on improving to this very day, with a decline in poverty from 32.5% in 2006 to 16.3% in 2017. New policies of income redistribution have greatly benefited the welfare of the poorest part of the population; great importance was given to deep structural reforms involving tax collection and administration. Two major agreements were signed: The

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area agreement (with the EU) and the Free Trade Agreement with China, both expected to boost trade integration further contributing to the country's growth. Finally, the government has launched the Georgia CoInvestment Fund, a $6 billion private equity fund that will invest in tourism, agriculture, logistics, energy, infrastructure, and manufacturing. These reformist efforts in the economic field have earned Georgia the reputation of “Star reformer” as well as high marks from the World Bank, further attracting foreign investment.

Georgia is a representative democratic parliamentary republic, having a President as head of state (currently Salome Zourabichvili) with mostly symbolical powers, and a Prime Minister as head of government (currently Giorgi Gakharia). The legislative power lies within the Parliament, composed of 150 members elected following a mixed system: 73 elected with first-past-the-post system to represent single member constituencies, and 77 elected using a proportional system.

Such mixed system is believed to favor the ruling “Georgian Dream Party” headed by the former PM Bidzina Ivanishvili (Georgia's richest man), since the single-mandate constituency system favors already powerful parties, making it difficult for new smaller ones to win seats, thus somehow “silencing” opposition. Protests started in June 2019, asking for the introduction of a fully proportional electoral system instead of the existing semi-proportional one, and eventually calmed at the end of the month after Ivanishvili had promised to change the electoral system; however, after the Georgian Dream Party failed to keep such promise, protest sparked throughout the country once again, resulting in violent clashes between civilians and police. Nowadays under President Salome Zourabichvili tensions with Russia are still evident due to the two unresolved conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In contrast, significant steps have been taken towards a deeper integration within the European framework.

## II.II Independent Ukraine

Prior to the collapse of the USSR Ukraine was among the wealthiest Republics of the Union, thus commonly believed to be one of the most likely to develop into a well-functioning State backed by a strong economy in the aftermath of its independence: unlike Georgia, Ukraine had, apart from its tourist sector (mostly operating in Crimea), a large and developed industry and a considerably important primary sector of the economy (earning it the name of "Europe's barn").

After its independence, President Leonid Kravchuk started focusing on the process of "State building" aimed at developing stable State Structures that would have ensured a good governance and avoided possible civil wars, common in many of the newly independent ex-Soviet Republics (such as the one between Zviadists and supporters of Shevarnadze leading to the 1991-1992 Georgian coup d'état).

The government started orienting its foreign policy towards the West, departing from its being a "Eurasian" country and aiming at becoming a "European" nation. Such an alignment reflected itself within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), perceived by Ukraine as a "residual" organization resulting from its Soviet past, while instead seen by Russia as a mean with which to further assert its influence on the former Soviet Republics and maintain a certain degree of integration among them.

In the process of "cultural emancipation" from the USSR (now Russia), Ukrainian citizenship was extended to all people living on the territory of the now independent Ukraine, despite of their ethnicity or language spoken; such policy (as it will be analyzed in the next chapter of this work) consequently brought serious problems from the Russian-speaking minority, as in the following decades their Moscow-oriented sentiments started growing,

eventually leading to a civil war.

The wide nuclear arsenal Ukraine had inherited from its Soviet past was cause of tension for both Russia and the USA; this, along with the anti-nuclear sentiment widely shared among Ukrainians following the 1986 Chernobyl disaster, resulted in the 1994 US-Russia-Ukraine Trilateral Statement, establishing a progressive Ukrainian nuclear disarmament in exchange for American financial help and Russian security guarantees. The agreement signed the beginning of positive Ukraine-American relations, decisive in the outcome of both the Orange Revolution and the 2014 Revolution.

The presidential elections of 1994 saw the victory of Leonid Kuchma and revealed a sharp contrast between the two parts of the countries, as Kuchma was voted predominantly in the industrialized and Russophone eastern part of the country, while former president Kravchuk gained the majority of its votes from the Ukrainian-speaking western regions.

Despite his eastern Ukrainian electoral basin, President Kuchma (1994-2005) partly followed the previous pro-Western policies and started an ambitious series of reforms aimed at radically changing the economic and social structure of the State: introducing a national currency, regulating the market, signing a new constitution, promoting a cultural revival through the restoration of churches and the freeing of media and academic institutes among the many. Such policies brought a cultural revival and some economic achievements; however, the high expectations of economic success were soon crushed: as for most other former Soviet Republics, the heavy dependency on Moscow established throughout the XX century made the Ukrainian economy particularly vulnerable and subject to Russia's price swings (in particular with regards to energy sources); the fast and uncontrolled process of privatization promoted by the State led to the rise of the Oligarchs (common to all former Soviet Republics, as discussed before

in the case of Georgia), further deteriorating the economy and promoting corruption throughout all levels of society. The worsening of the economic situation led to a sharp increase in poverty and a consequent rise in organized crime and social tensions, resulting in a change in Kuchma's governance towards more autocratic policies.

Meanwhile the government tried balancing its orientation towards Europe with stable Russia-Ukraine relations: the three treaties signed in 1997 settled the dispute over the Black Sea Fleet and the port of Sevastopol, partitioning the fleet between Russia ( 81.7% of it) and Ukraine (18.3%) and allowing Russia to use the port of Sevastopol for 20 years (until 2017) in exchange for debt forgiveness and gas resources provided to Ukraine.

The "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation" of 1997 recognized the "the inviolability of existing borders, and respect for territorial integrity and mutual commitment not to use its territory to harm the security of each other.[7]"

Such treaties promoted stable relations between the two countries until their interruption in 2014 following the Crimean Crisis.

The turn of the century saw Ukraine's first commitments to join both NATO and the European Union, as well as a steady economic growth which contributed to the establishment of a responsible civil society more engaged into the country's politics. The democratic (and to a lesser extent European-oriented) sentiment largely diffused in Western Ukraine, where the new middle class had developed the most, greatly clashed against the centralized societal model of downward action (from State to society – a system residual of the USSR) promoted by Kuchma in his last years and politician Viktor Yanukovych; for this reason the 2004 presidential election, resulting in the victory of Russian-backed Yanukovych, came to be widely contested as

[7]Wikipedia, Russian–Ukrainian Friendship Treaty.

being marred by voter intimidation, corruption and electoral fraud.

Supporters of Yanukovych's opponent Viktor Yushchenko carried out a series of protests throughout the country that came to be known as the "*Orange Revolution*", demanding the repetition of the run-off between Yanukovych and Yushchenko. After two months of protests, Ukraine's Supreme Court ordered a re-vote which saw the victory of Western-oriented Yushchenko, who in January 2005 became the third President of Ukraine.

The European Union's support of the Orange Revolution further promoted the growth of those pro-European sentiments among the Ukrainian population which would have subsequently led to the 2014 Revolution.

Despite the huge support gained during the Orange Revolution, Yushchenko didn't succeed in implementing the policies needed to bring the promised change; instead, his presidency was characterized by a rapid economic decline and several dismissals of many of his former revolutionary allies due to claims of corruption.

In 2005, along with Georgia's President Saakhashvili, Yushchenko signed the Borjomi Declaration, founding the "Community of Democratic choice", an intergovernmental organization having the task of promoting democracy in several former Soviet Republics.

The disappointment generated by Yushchenko's presidency led in 2010 to the election of Viktor Yanukovych, previous "antagonist" during the Orange Revolution. The new government started a policy drawing the country once again closer to Moscow: it extended Russia's lease of Sevastopol's port (originally lasting until 2017) up to 2042 in exchange for energy resources and it withdrew its NATO application. Such actions generated popular discontent, particularly in the western part of the country, which later increased, leading to the *2014 Revolution.*

*Euromaidan*

The 2014 Ukrainian Revolution known as "Euromaidan" (it will later be

understood why) had its roots in the growing democratization of Western Ukraine unmatched by the quasi-autocratic Russian-oriented regime of Yanukovych: as the previous Orange Revolution had shown just ten years before, the slow modernization of the country favored by the cultural revival and economic revival promoted by President Kuchma's policies led to the strengthening of a middle class that started rejecting Soviet-style governance, and instead looked towards Europe. The support received by the EU during Yushchenko's rise to power further stimulated European sentiments which, by 2013, were already widely shared by the majority of Western Ukraine. Such sentiments were in stark contrast with the policies adopted by Yanukovych, perceived as an attempt to return under Russia's sphere of influence, resulting in an increase in social tensions and a general distrust in the government.

Tensions worsened when on November 21, 2013, under Russia's pressure, President Yanukovych decided to suspend talks on the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU that had the task of further integrating Ukraine within the European system, beginning the process that might eventually have led to the European Union membership. Protesters gathered in Kiev's Maidan Nezalezhnosti (Independence Square – from where the Revolution takes its name) demanding for the government to resume agreement talks with the EU. As Yanukovych officially abandoned the agreement and started pursuing an even more Moscow-oriented policy, protests demanding for his resignation spread throughout the country and soon started becoming violent, leading in the following months to riots and clashes between civilians and police which culminated on February 20$^{th}$ to the killing of dozens of protesters. As international pressure continued growing and internal political forces radicalizing, Yanukovych ultimately fled the country before being impeached; in the meantime, several imprisoned Opposition leaders were liberated and deputy Oleksandr

Turchynov was appointed acting president.

While the Orange Revolution never carried any “foreign sentiment”, but rather started as a protest against a rigged election and finished by further strengthening civil society's influence on politics and consolidating the rule of law, the Ukrainian Revolution clearly manifested the European sympathy developed during the previous decade and now shared by a large sector of the population (at least in Western Ukraine): protesters were waving flags of the European Union and holding public speeches from stages about Ukraine's “European soul” (here explained the name “Euromaidan”).

This was due to the large involvement of school and university students, who, being mostly born after the dissolution of the USSR, didn't have any Russian sentiment, but rather perceived the European Union as the “actor” able to help Ukraine on its path to democratization and modernization.

However, such feelings weren't shared by all parts of the country, as the Russian-oriented (some might say Russophone) eastern regions of Ukraine scared by a possible “Europeanization” of the country soon started a counter-revolution in favor of Moscow, leading to a Russian military intervention in the country (which will be analyzed in the next chapter). In March Crimea officially joined Russia after a referendum widely contested in the West; guerrilla soon spread to the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk (together known as the “Donbass”), where a war broke out between the Ukrainian army and Russian-backed separatist forces. Russia's intervention in Ukraine was followed by a series of western sanctions which greatly crippled the economy of both Russia and eastern Ukraine.

Today, under President Volodymyr Zelensky, the country is still affected by several problems, such as widespread corruption and a strong deterioration of the economy resulting from the ongoing civil war. As the government tries to move closer to Europe, many issues must be dealt with for Ukraine to start being considered a possible future EU member.

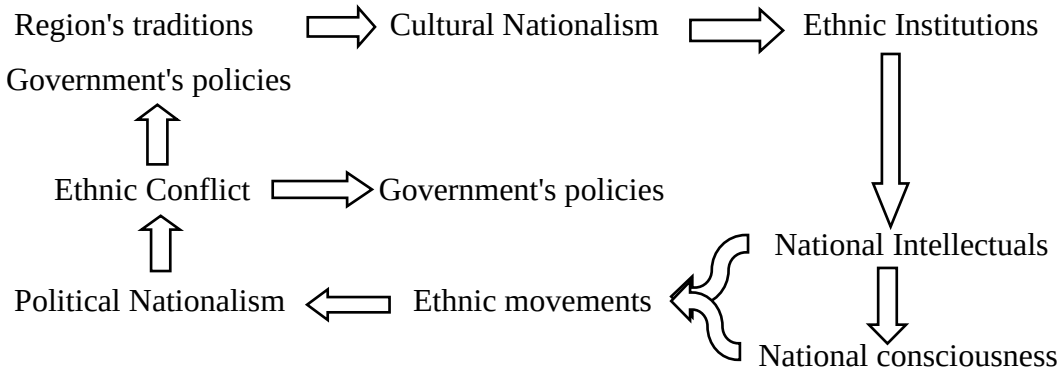
# III

## III.I Nationalism in the USSR - A Theoretical framework

Nationalism in the USSR started assuming its most radical form in the late 80's and early 90's: as Communism began losing its “charm” on people and Moscow its power on the periphery, Union Republics and smaller administrative units started seeking for various degrees of increased autonomy, from a higher status with the Union to a complete independence. Such process caused conflict both on a large scale, between individual Union Republics and Moscow, and on a smaller scale, within each Union Republic between the central government of the Republic and the smaller administrative units present in the Republic (Georgia's double fight: first against Moscow for its independence, and later against Abkhazia and South Ossetia, respectively an Autonomous Republic and an Autonomous Oblast within Georgia), consequently leading to several episodes of ethnic conflict throughout the former USSR.

Despite manifesting itself relatively late, Nationalism developed throughout the XX century by coexisting with Socialism, both influencing one another, both being essential one for the other. In order to better understand the events following 1991 we should first draw a theoretical framework within which to work: Gorenburg divides nationalism into *political nationalism* and *cultural nationalism;* the former can be defined as “demand for a declaration of national sovereignty and recognition of the right to national self-determination, including secession”, while the latter can be defined as “support for a titular official language and culture, the expansion of its teaching in schools, and the introduction of a greater or lesser degree of requirements and incentives to learn the titular language by members of a non-titular nation”. Gorenburg consequently argues that Political

Nationalism is a product of Cultural Nationalism, “translating” itself into Political Nationalism through a series of steps. Borrowing a theoretical scheme from Shcherbak, and partially modifying it, we might draw the following graph illustrating the peculiar path of nationalism in the USSR republics and its subsequent development in the newly independent Republics:




In Soviet times, the traditions and history of a region were “handled” by the central government's policies (Moscow), which promoted and legitimized their development, leading to the rise of Cultural Nationalism; such rise pushed for the institutionalization of culture, therefore, the creation of “ethnic institutions” (universities, cultural institutions, academic institutions etc.) from which to further spread the culture and traditions of the region.

Developing ethnic institutions required both funds and consent from the Kremlin, which depended on the population's level in the ethnic hierarchy of the USSR, reflected by the region's status within the administrative hierarchy of the Union. Ethnic institutions produced national intellectuals, which thanks to their works (books, lectures, art, films etc.) spread the region's culture to the common people, creating national consciousness.

Once the sense of national belonging had spread throughout the population, ethnic movements (created by those same intellectuals) started enjoying a wide support among society, thus resulting in the rise of Political Nationalism.

The more intellectuals present in the region the better "developed" and spread the national consciousness, thus the higher chances of the region seeking a certain degree of independence.

As national intellectuals developed from ethnic institutions, a well-established set of ethnic institutions was therefore fundamental to the spread of nationalist ideals, as stated by Gorenburg: "institutions can play a key role in determining the depth of the sense of common identity[8]".

Therefore regions in the higher levels of the administrative structure, having better chances of developing ethnic institutions, had a stronger national consciousness, and consequently a more powerful political nationalism able to claim independence in the eve of the dissolution of the USSR.

*Official administrative hierarchy in the USSR.*

| | |
|---|---|
| Union Republic | (ex. Georgia) |
| Autonomous Republic (ASSR) | (ex. Abkhazia) |
| Autonomous Oblast' (AO) | (ex. South Ossetia) |
| National Autonomous District (NAD) | |

This might explain the different strength in nationalist movements between Abkhazia (an Autonomous Republic) and South Ossetia (and Autonomous Oblast) in post-91 Georgia (we will deal with this topic in the next chapter).

Political nationalism often triggered ethnic conflicts within the region, especially following the fall of the USSR, when the ethnic majority initiating the process of State-building threatened the ethnic minorities in turn seeking to obtain a certain degree of independence.

The result of ethnic conflict was a change in government's policies (this time by the executive of the new independent country), which either radicalized,

[8]D. Gorenburg, Nationalism for the Masses: Popular Support for Nationalism in Russia's Ethnic Republics, Harvard University, 2001.

further promoting a vicious cycle inevitably leading to more conflict, or became more “accommodating” and open to dialogue, seeking to promote each different culture within the country without undermining any of them, resulting in the end of ethnic tensions.

To sum up: the strength of a region's political nationalism depended on how widespread its national consciousness was, which in turn depended on the level that the government in Moscow allowed the region's culture to flourish and spread.

*The process and degree of cultural emancipation of each future independent country was thus initiated and directed by Moscow itself.*

## III.II Local nationalist policies in the USSR

Chapter one of this work analyzed the history and traditions of Ukraine and Georgia, while Chapter two focused on their political, economic and social developments following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The work will continue in the following way:

This second part of Chapter three will analyze Moscow's policies for the development of local nationalism throughout the Union during the XX century, with a focus on Georgia and Ukraine. This second section together with Ch. one will enable us to understand how developed ethnic institutions (and consequently political nationalism) in the two Republics were prior to the fall of the Union.

The third part of Chapter three will shortly deal with the process of national identity formation in independent Ukraine and Georgia, with a focus on the

role of intellectuals. This section together with Ch. two will enable us to understand the current degree of cultural emancipation in the two countries. Chapter four will continue with an analysis of the ethnic conflicts arising as a result of political nationalism in Georgia and Ukraine after the collapse of the USSR, while Chapter five will show the results of a brief survey conducted on a small sample of Georgians and Ukrainian, aimed at giving an idea of people's perception of the topics discussed in the previous chapters.

Being a unitary state, Tsarist Russia never promoted autonomy for the different regions of the Empire, but instead gave control of them to governors coming from St. Petersburg having little knowledge of their history and traditions; this contributed to the alienation of the local populations, which soon sought for other forms of governance able to better represent them. With the outbreak of the civil war in 1917, several parts of the Empire declared themselves independent; however, they soon realized of not being able to protect their borders from the Whites, and sought help from other factions taking part in the war. As the Bolsheviks declared the right of self-determination to be one of the founding pillars of their ideology, they soon obtained consent among the different populations and were able to defeat the Tsarist army, which instead maintained their belief in a united Russia. In 1922, the creation of the USSR as a union of equal nations and republics based on the ethnicity of the living populations signed the birth of an *ethnic federation*. Having realized the important role played in the country by the ethnic factor, Bolsheviks decided to promote the social, economic and cultural development of the different ethnic groups within the Union, allowing for the development of a local cultural nationalism that would merge with the Communist doctrine (by internalizing it) and draw the peripheries of the

USSR closer to the center, thus to avoid both political and ethnic tensions. “Creating cultures that were to be “national in form and socialist in content,” Soviet leaders in Moscow aimed to undermine regional, religious, and clan identities and, more broadly, to create what they defined as modern societies in the non-Russian regions of the USSR[9]”.

The policies of “Коренизация” (Korenizatsiya - “putting down roots”) promoted non-Russian languages and elites, and pushed for their integration “into the lower administrative-levels of the local government, bureaucracy and nomenklatura of their Soviet Republics.[10]”; ethnic institutions were created and cultural events encouraged. This is the phase in which an “ethnic hierarchy” was established, by assigning different administrative statuses to the regions of the Union, thus allowing for different levels of cultural development. Early Stalin's rule particularly promoted the flourishing of Georgian culture: allowing for a higher number of representatives from the Republic to serve in Moscow's party, and providing more funds and benefits for its development; this led to tensions between ethnic Georgians and minority groups present in the Republic (as we will see next chapter).

However, by the second part of the 1930's Nationalism had started getting out of Moscow's control, with several ethnic groups manifesting anti-Russian sentiments and showing aspirations for independence; Stalin's reply was a stop in the government's policies promoting local nationalism, and a purge of several populations which further increased after the second World War, when several ethnic groups were marked as “traitors” for having allegedly collaborated with the Nazis. Among such persecuted populations were the Cossacks, vital part of Ukraine's cultural identity (as seen in the first chapter of this work), who were subject to mass deportations.

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[9] Z. Wojnowski, The Soviet people: national and supranational identities in the USSR after 1945, 2014.

[10] Wikipedia, Korenizatsiya.

Soon some ethnic groups were deemed more loyal than others, further consolidating the ethnic hierarchy which shouldn't have existed in a “Union of equal nations and Republics”.

Ethnic purges were followed by a policy of Russification: Russian culture started being glorified and Russian peasants encouraged to settle in other ethnic regions, whereas before the central government refused both policies, as that might have caused tensions between Russians and the other ethnic minorities of the Union. The settlement of ethnic Russians greatly denaturalized the identity of several parts of the Union, such as the regions of Eastern Ukraine previously inhabited by Cossacks, increasing tensions between the different ethnic groups in each Republic (such policies will lead to conflict between western and eastern Ukraine, ultimately culminating, as will see in the next chapter, in a civil war).

As the most prominent members of local intelligentsias were persecuted while Russian figures were given top positions in every sphere of society, soon Communism started being associated with Russian culture (the exact opposite result of the one wanted by Lenin in the 1920's), alienating local populations and paving the way to discontent, which would have grown in the later decades.

Stalin's death and the subsequent process of De-Stalinization initiated by Krushchëv halted the strong Russian nationalism marking post-war years and signed instead the beginning of tolerant policies towards non-Russian populations: ethnic minorities were allowed to return to their historical lands from which they had previously been banished, Russian “colonization” of other Republics stopped, and peaceful coexistence between different ethnic groups was promoted. Being Kruschëv particularly “close” to Ukraine (he had previously served as Leader of the Ukrainian Communist Party, as stated in Ch. One of this work), his rule was to the Republic what early Stalin's rule had been to Georgia: Ukraine started playing a more relevant role, with a

steady rise in the number of its intellectuals and politicians acquiring fame throughout the USSR.

Krushchëv's Thaw contributed to the development of the "Sixtiers": a generation of Ukrainian intelligentsia laying the foundations for the Republic's cultural revival. Meanwhile Georgia's benefits previously enjoyed under Stalin ceased to exist, for many politicians in Moscow interpreted the anti-Stalinist "guidelines" given them as anti-Georgian, discriminating Georgian traditions and people much to the benefit of the several ethnic minorities present within the Republic (Abkhazians and South Ossetians in particular), which in contrast were widely encouraged to develop their own culture.

Under Brezhnev a policy of compromise was implemented: local intellectuals and politicians were given wide freedoms and control of the local institutions in exchange for loyalty to Moscow.

Brezhnev's Era constituted the apex of ethnic institutional development; however, such development had a dual effect: on one side, the promotion of local elites drew the peripheries of the Union closer to the center, legitimizing Moscow's rule and stabilizing the country, on the other, such intellectuals developed a political and national consciousness which often led to opposition towards the Soviet State.

This ambiguous dualism created dilemmas for the local populations, which found themselves influenced by both unitary and disruptive forces.

In response to such identity tensions, Brezhnev promoted the identification of the USSR with the "Советский Народ" (Sovietskij narod - Soviet people), a supranational community resulted from Socialism and devoid of any ethnic connotation, thus embracing all people. The USSR addressed the issues arising from its being a multi-ethnic country by "instituzionalizing multinationality through the codification of nationhood and nationality as

social categories separate and distinct from citizenship and statehood.[11]". By using the term "Гражданство" (Grajdanstvo – citizenship) one would indicate the status of Soviet citizen, common to all people of the Union, while by using the word "Национальность" (national'nost - "nationality") one would indicate a person's ethnicity, not depending on the Republic of residence but rather given by ancestry.

Every inhabitant of the Soviet Union had both a citizenship (Soviet) and a nationality (Latvian, Armenian, Belarusian etc.), the first one was given by the state, while the second one could be chosen by the individual at the age of sixteen from one of the parents' nationalities. As most individuals chose their nationality based on blood ancestry rather than actual "cultural practices", soon Republics such as Ukraine, characterized by high rates of intermarriages and emigration, started losing their cultural identity, as many people identified themselves as "Ukrainian" despite having never lived in the Republic and having Russian as mother tongue. The notion of "nationality" thus slowly started being deprived of its meaning, as most people (and the USSR itself, at least theoretically) relied on the status of Soviet citizen; such weakening of the concept of "nationality" greatly impeded the future process of Nation-building of several former Republics, as in the wake of their independence these Republics decided to grant citizenship to all people identifying themselves as nationals or living in the country, thus accepting individuals who were often more attached to Moscow than to the newly independent country. Ukraine will face such problem in its eastern regions, where the Russophone majority will maintain its loyalty towards Russia rather than integrating into the new country.

In the meantime, the downgrading of nationality made possible a consequent slow policy of cultural assimilation, aimed at the Russification of the Union:

[11]C. Wanner, Burden of Dreams: History and Identity in Post-Soviet Ukraine, 1998.

studying in local languages in schools and institutions was restricted, and the use of the Russian language was generally encouraged throughout all spheres of society.

Ethnic groups in a higher level of the administrative hierarchy could more easily “preserve” their culture and language (due to the stronger ethnic institutions allowed them); however, Union Republics (the higher status in the administrative structure) with Slavic and Orthodox traditions weren't able to resist Russification as effectively as others, since their “cultural affinity” with Russia and their high degree of urbanization didn't constitute that sharp contrast needed to oppose to the imposition of a foreign culture. As a result, Ukraine and Belarus underwent assimilation more easily than Georgia, which instead relied on a considerably different culture able to stabilize its “identity”.

Despite this, popular discontent and anti-Russian sentiments spread throughout all Union Republics, laying the foundations for the future independence movements.

The liberal policies of Gorbachëv, aimed at increasing the Republic's autonomy with the intention of decreasing ethnic tensions, further promoted the emancipation of the different regions of the country. Consequently, as soon as Moscow's power began to waver, local intelligentsias born from those ethnic institutions promoted by Moscow itself during the previous decades began to demand for greater autonomy, ultimately resulting in the collapse of the USSR.

## III.III National identity formation in the post-USSR Era

Shortly before the dissolution of the USSR the several populations inhabiting the Union had developed their national identity in different degrees, with some Republics being consequently able to detach from Moscow more easily than others. Such contrast had its roots in a variety of reasons, among which could be found:

1) Economic development: regions more economically developed had a higher urbanization and living standards, resulting in a higher literacy rate which made Russification more easily achievable (a Latvian university student constantly attending lectures in Russian was more influenced by Moscow's assimilation policies than a Kyrgyz shepherd having little if no contact with people outside of his nomadic community).
2) Cultural background: populations bearing a cultural affinity with Russia had higher chances of being incorporated by its policy of cultural dominance and seeing their traditions and language being downgraded to a mere variation of the Russian ones (Ukrainian language had for centuries being considered a dialect of Russian mostly spoken by peasants, as most Ukrainian writers and intellectuals, such as Gogol' or Bulgakov, used Russian).
3) Society's homogeneity: homogeneous societies had a more stable base on which to consolidate a national identity, compared to heterogeneous ones in which minorities often opposed to the process of nation-building fearing their exclusion from it (the Republic of Armenia in which over 93% of its population was ethnic Armenian could establish its national identity more easily compared to Ukraine, in which its Russophone eastern regions strongly opposed to the use of the Ukrainian language).

4) Status in the official administrative hierarchy: as explained in the previous section, regions having a higher status (such as Union Republics) in the administrative hierarchy of the USSR were able to develop stronger ethnic institutions, resulting in a bigger spread of nationalism among the population.
5) Geographic location: territories closer to Europe were more subject to western influence, and therefore more prone to a critical analysis of the Soviet regime (Estonia or Western Ukraine, having the highest number of smuggled western magazines and trips taken abroad, could draw parallels with nearby countries more easily than the relatively isolated Turkmenistan).

All these factors mixed together in a wide variety of combinations gave rise to a different level of national consciousness for each Republic, greatly influencing its nation-building policies in the aftermath of its independence.

*Modern Georgian identity*

Already during Gorbachëv's Perestroika Georgia had slowly started rediscovering its culture and traditions, with intellectuals having the possibility of re-interpreting their country's history undergoing a less harsh Regime's censorship. However, after the country's independence (some might argue even before) the quest for identity started assuming ethnic traits (as it will be seen in the next chapter), increasing tensions between the country's majority and its several minorities, as the former began to accuse the latter of hindering Georgia's cultural emancipation by maintaining close relations with Russia and being unwilling to integrate in the newly independent country, while the latter started perceiving the former as wishing to impose its traditions and culture on the whole country, thus undermining the identity of the several Georgian's ethnic minorities.

The civil war resulting from such ethnic strife had a dual effect: on one side it greatly undermined Georgia's establishment of a stable and unitary state from the very beginning of its independence, leading to society's disenchantment with the new country, on the other it greatly encouraged a critical analysis of the Georgian identity by both intellectuals and politicians, who tried to re-shape the concept of "Georgian" from the already consolidated "ethnic Georgian" to one that could embrace the several realities within the country.

Such identity formation was simultaneously expressed with the mottos of "*Desovietization*" and "*Return to Europe*"; in fact, differently from Ukraine's initial ambivalent approach towards its Soviet past and Russia, independent Georgia had from the very beginning clearly distanced itself from Moscow and stated its intention to fully integrate into the European framework (Zurab Zhvania, the late Georgian prime minister and former speaker of the Georgian parliament, declared on his country's accession to the Council of Europe in February 1999, "I am Georgian, therefore I am European"[12]). The difference between the Ukrainian approach and the Georgian one can be explained by their history: while Ukraine, been considered a quasi-part of Russia (for a variety of reasons discussed in the previous paragraph – religion, language etc), was largely integrated into the Soviet system, Georgia perceived itself and was perceived as a colony, conquered during the Caucasian War (discussed in the first chapter of this work) and somehow inferior to the Slavic Republics (due to the ethnic hierarchy discussed in the previous section); for this reason it was quiet logical for Georgia in the aftermath of its independence to seek for its self-realization outside of the Post-Soviet space, in a context in which its will for modernization could be better achieved: the European Union.

[12]K. Kakachia, Georgia: identity, foreign policy and the politics of a "Euro-Atlantic orientation", NOREF, 2013.

The idea of a European Georgia (apart from the cases of Abkhazia and South Ossetia) was also widely justified by intellectuals, who interpreted the country's Soviet past as a breakaway from the European context of which Georgia had always been a part, given its history and many cultural traits (religion being the main point of such discourse) differentiating Georgia from its Caucasian neighbors and instead drawing it closer to Europe.

The two mottos of “Desovietization” and “Return to Europe” further gained more resonance with the Rose Revolution, and contributed to the country's adoption of several traits which drew it closer to Europe: today, Georgia is one of the few stable democracies among the former Soviet Republics.

Despite Georgia's several achievements, the two frozen conflicts within the country hinder its development, as ethnic tensions erode common identity and radicalize people, undermining the foundations of a stable state.

*Modern Ukrainian identity*

The dissolution of the USSR came so unexpectedly that by the time of its independence Ukraine still hadn't developed a commonly shared vision of its national identity: as intellectuals and politicians had solely focused on achieving independence for the country without clearly conceptualizing what Ukraine was, soon the absence of a new ideology paved the way for the re-establishment of old Soviet ideologies. Such inheritance of Soviet traditions greatly hindered the country's process of cultural emancipation, for they stopped society and intellectuals from critically analyzing their past under the USSR and consequently constructively reshaping Ukrainian identity, leaving the nation into an ambivalent limbo typical of many former communist societies, with a part of the population willing to radically erase its Soviet past and rediscover pre-USSR traditions, and the other perceiving such “tabula rasa” as a great impoverishment of Ukraine's identity.

The absence of a commonly shared vision of Ukraine's future and the consequent repetition of Soviet practices was further encouraged by the policies of all Ukrainian presidents preceding the 2014 Revolution: Kravchuk's inability to provide specific ideals towards which to direct the country, Kuchma's ambivalent policy of drawing the country closer to Europe while at the same time maintaining autocratic traits and close connections with Moscow, Yushchenko's failure to modernize the country and affirm its European identity, and ultimately, Yanukovych's attempt to Russianize Ukraine by assigning top governmental positions to Russophones from the Donbass region. Such policies impeded the correct development of democracy and the creation of a unitary state identity, leading people to seek for integration on the regional level rather than on the state level, thus further accentuating those ethnic tensions between the eastern and the western part of the country which would have ultimately lead to a civil war.

Meanwhile, the dissolution of the USSR constituted a major turning point for intellectuals, as they no longer had to be limited by the censorship characterizing the Soviet Era. The literature circles in Kyiv and Lviv grown out of Gorbachëv's “Гласность” (Glasnost' – transparency) in the late 80's laid the foundations for the country's cultural rebirth in the aftermath of its independence. Soon intellectuals directed their attention towards the West, and began to contaminate their works with cultural trends coming from Europe and the US: several writers such as Volodymyr Dibrova used post-modernism to deconstruct the Soviet ideological apparatus tacitly accepted by most of the Ukrainian society, while others promoted literary events and circles based on European ones. However, the work of intellectuals remained within the cultured spheres of society, as the government never actively took any policies to promote the country's cultural rebirth.

The situation changed with the 2014 Revolution, both for intellectuals and society as a all: as on one side Euromaidan increased tensions between

Eastern and Western Ukraine ultimately culminating in an ethnic conflict, on the other it finally removed society from the political and cultural apathy which had characterized most of its previous two decades. A large part of the country had now actively chosen to direct itself towards Europe and democracy, pushing for the change that the government hadn't achieved until then. This lead to a critical analysis of themes which had until then being ignored by the majority of people: Ukraine's relations with Europe, the perception of its Soviet past and its connection to Russia,  and its struggle with democracy and identity were now topics discussed in all spheres of society, finally paving the way to constructive debate. The cultural upheaval was further promoted by a change in governmental policies, as the political leaders following Euromaidan, fearing Russia's expansionism in Eastern Ukraine, started promoting the development of Ukrainian culture, founding pillar of a stable and unitary state now needed more than ever.

-Protesters in Tbilisi carrying Georgian, Ukrainian, European Union and NATO flags, June 2019.

# IV

## IV.I Ethnic conflict in Georgia

The dissolution of the USSR was followed by a general "search" for identity all throughout the former Soviet Republics able to serve as pillar on which to base the legitimacy of the new independent countries.

In Georgia such identity crisis led to the emergence of two popular beliefs which quickly became widely shared by the majority of the ethnic-Georgian population (known as "Kartvelian", and roughly constituting 85% of the total population):

- The need for "ethnic purification": aimed at removing all those immigrants of different ethnicity emigrated from nearby Republics to Georgia during its prosperous Soviet times, and perceived by ethnic Georgians as an "impediment" to the country's complete independence from Russia.
- The Georgian Orthodox Church being the sole religion of Georgia:

As the national church played a vital role throughout history in uniting Georgians against aggression from foreign invaders (such as Persians or Turks), it was now perceived to be one of the main elements on which to base the country's identity.

The rise of Georgian ethnic nationalism was further nourished by the introduction of *democracy*, which brought forward two new potential features for conflict absent during Soviet rule:

- the identification of the "demos", to which the new democratic government should have been responsible, carried out following ethnic pre-established discourses.
- the usage of "ready-made ethnic definitions by politicians for rallying

popular support [13] " (being popular support the basis on which democracy is founded).

All these factors combined resulted in the stigmatization of ethnic minorities by the ethnic-Georgian population, as well as the central government adoption of policies aimed at restraining the benefits previously enjoyed by ethnic minorities under the USSR. The leaders of the two titular ethnic groups of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, feeling threatened by such an ideology, quickly started to perceive Russia as the state in which (based on the principle of Ethnic federalism) to enjoy the demanded freedom.

In fact, as many sociologists and the same government of Georgia argue, ethnicity is not (at least not the sole) the reason behind the two conflicts (S. Ossetian, Abkhazian); they are also *political* conflicts, for both Abkhazia and Southern Ossetia want to protect that independence previously granted during the Soviet decades, while the government in Tbilisi seeks to preserve its territorial integrity and assert its dominance over the country.

Both conflicts are thus multi-faceted and have their roots in a variety of factors among which "ethnicity" is one (perhaps the main) but not the only: in fact, as most historians agree, Abkhazians and Southern Ossetians have peacefully coexisted throughout the centuries with the other ethnic groups inhabiting the region, thus engaging in complex ethnocultural interactions (sources show that intermarriages where frequent and alliances between the different kingdoms were common practice).

The causes leading to such tensions must therefore be searched in the policies adopted towards the entire Caucasus region after its incorporation into the Russian Empire (Caucasian War 1817-1864), first by the Russian Tsars and subsequently by the Communist Party, during the late 19th and early 20th

[13]Coppieters, B., Nodia, G., & Anchabadze, Y. (Eds.). (1998). Georgians and Abkhazians: the search for a peace settlement (Sonderveröffentlichung / BIOst, Okt. 1998). Köln: Bundesinstitut für ostwissenschaftliche und internationale Studien.

centuries.

To better understand the complex nature of the two conflicts, each of them should then be analyzed singularly, paying a particular attention to the Abkhazian case by studying in depth how each of the two actors (Georgia, Abkhazia) perceives itself and the other, and eventually dispelling those historical myths which constitute (at least for the common people of the region) one of the main pillars with which to feed ethnic hatred.

*The Abkhazian-Georgian Conflict*

Despite the different opinions among historians with regards to their progenitors, Abkhazians are widely acknowledged to be one of the most ancient autochthonous tribes of the Caucasus, already described in the works of Greek and Roman historians such as Pliny the Elder as forming a well-established community with its own culture and societal structure and language.

Such historical evidence already debunks a first myth often promoted by some Georgian nationalists:

1) Abkhazians settled in the Caucasus long after other "ethnic Georgian" tribes. = False.

The Abkhazian language is part of the north-western "*Abkhazo-Adyghean*" group of the Ibero-Caucasian language family, while most of the languages spoken in Georgia, among which Georgian, are part of the southern "*Kartvelian*" group of the same language family; however, such an ethnocultural affinity with other parts of the Caucasus region did not stop Abkhazians from influencing and being influenced by the nearby Kartvelian populations present in the region ( Karts, Egrians and Svans among others, being considered the ancestors of ethnic Georgians), leading to an overall peaceful cohabitation between the different peoples inhabiting such territories. Thus, a second belief widely shared by today's Abkhazians is

proved to be wrong:

2) Abkhazians were originally the sole inhabitants of Abkhazia. = False.

In 778 the Kingdom of Abkhazia was created, comprising the entire territory of Western Georgia and inhabited by both Abkhazians (being the *minority*) and Georgian tribes (being the *majority*).

The city of Kutaisi became the center of a first united Georgia. The unification of the Kingdom of Abkhazia and the Kingdom of Tao-Klarjeti in 1008 signed the birth of the Kingdom of Georgia (discussed in chapter 1 of this work), inside which Abkhazia continued to prosper, being able to preserved her ethnohistorical space and identity. Both Abkhazians and Georgians thus mutually contributed to the formation of (firstly) The Kingdom of Abkhazia and (secondly) The Kingdom of Georgia, influencing each other's cultures and statehood, giving birth to the “Georgian” culture and State, of which Abkhazians were an integral part. A third common belief among Abkhazians proves to be inconsistent:

3) Abkhazia was conquered by the Georgian aggressors wishing to expand their kingdom. = False.

In the following centuries the unified Georgian Kingdom accelerated the political, economic and cultural integration between the two populations, further fueled by the many wars Abkhazians and Georgians fought alongside against foreign invaders.

The arrival of the Golden Horde and the subsequent three centuries long Ottoman rule over Georgia (from the XVI century to the XVIII century) contributed to the spread of Islam throughout Abkhazia; however, the two religions now separating Georgians and Abkhazians (Orthodox Christian the former and Sunni Muslims the latter) did not shake the centuries-old stable relations between them, as Abkhazia (unlike the northwestern regions of the Causasus) had been barely influenced by the Islamic mindset and traditions

(we might compare the “ardent” faith of Muslim Abkhazians to that of Albanians, that is, eating pork ribs and drinking wine for Saturday's lunch), and Georgia always had tolerant policies towards other religions.

The expansionist aims of the Russian Empire leading to the Caucasian War (1817-1864) signed the beginning of the region's turmoil: the Russian application of the “divide et impera” principle fueled hatred between the different clans, faiths and ethnicities inhabiting the region, leading to the radicalization of religion (see ch.1). However, Abkhazians' resistance did not assume the traits of a Jihad (as did the revolt guided by Imam Shamil in the northeastern part of the Caucasus), but was instead a purely “secular” one fought alongside many Georgians and Circassians.

Despite the fierce resistance of the Caucasian peoples (the longest war of colonization in modern history – 47 years), Tsarist Russia finally managed to conquer the whole Caucasus through forced treaties and episodes of ethnic cleansing (The Circassian genocide led to a loss of around 93% of the Circassian nation); most of the surviving Abkhazians linguistically related to Circassians emigrated to the Ottoman Empire, and many others were exiled to Siberia or far eastern provinces of the Empire following the many revolts carried out (together with Georgians) against the autocratic Tsarist rule throughout the second half of the XIX century.

The decline in the original population of Abkhazia was counterbalanced by the high number of Russian peasants settling in the region, impoverishing the region's cultural autonomy.

Therefore, another fallacy shared among many Anti-Georgian Abkhazians:

4) Abkhazia (unlike Georgia) joined Russia voluntarily, and under its rule it enjoyed freedom and protection from the Georgian and Turkish threats. = False.

The identification of Abkhazia with a defined and separate entity only

returned in 1917, when the disintegration of Tsarist Russia fueled nationalist sentiments throughout the Empire; although by this time, following the ethnic cleansing and mass emigrations caused by the Caucasian war, ethnic Abkhazians only made up 21.4% of Abkhazia's population, while Georgians totaled 42.1%. of it.

In February of 1918 Abkhazia joined voluntarily the Transcaucasian Federal Republic, to later of that same year become part of the Georgian Democratic Republic (with the dissolution of the former).

Abkhazia's joining of a new independent Georgia was perceived as the natural continuation of that historical State of which they were both part throughout the centuries. An agreement was signed by the Government of the Georgian Democratic Republic and the democratically elected Abkhazian People's Council on the 8th of June 1918, granting Abkhazia self-government (within Georgia) and military aid in case of foreign aggression. One of the most common beliefs shared by Abkhazians is thus untrue:

5) Abkhazia has been unjustly occupied by the Georgian Mensheviks in 1918. = False.

However, mistakes committed by both Georgian and Abkhazian political forces were rapidly taken advantage of by the Bolsheviks, which in 1921 used the country's growing instability to assert their dominance over it.

The establishment of the Georgian SSR, of which Abkhazia became part with the title of “Autonomous SSR” in 1931, signed the beginning of a bloody era marked by repressions and cruelty for both Abkhazians and Georgians: as on one side it is true that Stalin's policies favored ethnic Georgians over Abkhazians, (providing the former with better job opportunities, highest salaries, and important political roles within the Party while contemporaneously restricting the use of the Abkhazian language, giving Abkhazian peasants less fertile lands and accepting fewer Abkhazian

students into universities, etc.), on the other it should be bore in mind that Georgians were affected by the same authoritarian policies and feared the same persecutions.

Soon Abkhazians started cultivating the idea that Georgia's “colonial ambitions” where the main factor hindering the development of Abkhazian culture, and found in the creation of an independent republic the only possible solution to all their problems.

The growing tensions between Georgians and Abkhazians were well accepted by Moscow, for they had a double advantage: Abkhazians' hate towards Georgians distracted them from the real agent behind their misfortunes, that is, Moscow, while Georgia's non-compliance with the Central Party's guidelines could easily be stopped with threats of letting Abkhazian nationalists establish their independent republic.

Starting from Kruschëv's Era Abkhazia began to develop a rich economy, mostly based on the big inflows of tourists enjoying their holidays in the “Russian Riviera”; at the meantime, Georgians were now suffering the same discrimination previously reserved to Abkhazians, further fueling hatred between the two. Abkhazians started seeking revenge for the previous Georgian cultural domination promoted by Stalin, leading to a growing support in favor of Abkhazian nationalism, causing several revolts throughout the following decades.

Ethnic hatred between Georgians and Abkhazians erupted as soon as a power vacuum enabled it to do so, that is, shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the consequent proclamation of an independent Georgia in 1991: Abkhazia had previously in 1989 asked for the creation of an independent Abkhazian Soviet Republic (as it was before the 1931 Union Treaty), this ended up in a minor armed conflict between Abkhazian civilians and Georgians living in the area, as both Abkhazia and Georgia weren't able to

sustain a war; consequently, in 1992 the Abkhazian government proclaimed the independence of the region from the now independent republic of Georgia, resulting in a Georgian invasion of Abkhazia and the subsequent beginning of the *Abkhaz-Georgian war.* The first part of the conflict lasted two years (1992-1993) and saw Abkhazia, backed (unofficially) by Russia and by the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus (a militarized political organization aiming at the reaching various degrees of integration between the different titular nations within Northern Caucasus), triumph over Georgia and establish a de facto independent nation not internationally recognized. Ethnic cleansing was carried out by both sides, with over 250.000 Georgian refugees forced to leave Abkhazia.

After several cases of minor clashes, conflict erupted again in the August of 2008, when a Russian-Abkhazian coalition forced the Georgians out of the Kodori Gorge, the last remaining part of the region still under Georgian control. After the short Russo-Georgian war (started in August 2008 and lasted 5 days) Russia officially recognized both South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states. In response, Georgia left the Commonwealth of Independent States (the same action will be taken by Ukraine in 2014) and imposed a sea blockade of Abkhazia, isolating the region economically.

At present days Georgia is not willing to recognize Abkhazia's independence, but it's ready to grant the region a higher level of autonomy within the country; Abkhazia in response refuses to conduct any negotiation until Georgia recognizes its full independence. Abkhazia's search of complete independence on the basis of historical and ethnic motives is fallacious, for its boundaries changed throughout the centuries with great frequency (until being finally set almost arbitrarily in 1921 with the creation of the Abkhazian SSR by Moscow's politicians having little if no knowledge of the region), making “Abkhazia” nothing but a name with which to designate a region or

a country in which Abkhazians always constituted a minority. Simultaneously, Georgia's initial attempt to deprive Abkhazia of its historical degree of autonomy is unjustified and unproductive, given the fact that Georgia's brightest periods were characterized by a strict cooperation with Abkhazia, in which the latter was an autonomous region within the former.

Poor political decisions taken by both actors throughout 90's and 00's led to the radicalization of both the Abkhazian and Georgian popular opinion, greatly increasing the distance between the two countries. With both actors unable to reach a common agreement, the prospects of a resolution in the near future seem scarce, turning the bloody war into a frozen conflict disruptive for both Abkhazia and Georgia.

*The Georgian-Ossetian Conflict*

While most Georgians (except radical nationalists) recognize Abkhazia's right to some territorial autonomy on the basis of the historical existence of the Abkhazian Kingdom and people, who fought side by side with Georgians against the many foreign oppressors, very few are willing to grant the same privileges to South Ossetians: South Ossetia's history is in fact widely debated by both Georgians and South Ossetians, with the latter arguing that they descended from Scynthian and Alan tribes arrived from Persia (Ossetian language is an Indo-European language closely related to Farsi) as long as two thousand years ago and settled in both North and South Ossetia, and the former claiming that Ossetians' ancestors only settled in North Ossetia to later from the 17$^{th}$ to the 19$^{th}$ century migrate to South Ossetia, historically Georgian.

Georgia thus perceives South Ossetians as “guests” or “newcomers”, while South Ossetians are eager to recall the many battles fought throughout the centuries together with Abkhazians and Georgians in defense of their

territories from external aggressors.

The foundation of a first independent Georgian Republic in 1918 and the inclusion of South Ossetia in it was seen by South Ossetians as unreasonable, for historically Ossetia (both North and South) had always been one and indivisible; for this reason on the 8th of June 1920 South Ossetia declared its independence as a Soviet Republic. In response, Georgia sent its army into the region, committing what Ossetians today perceive as a genocide.

With the Red Army regaining control of Georgia, the "South Ossetian Autonomous Oblast" within the Georgian SSR was created (1922), having as its capital the old city of Tskhinvali, which according to Georgia was a city almost completely inhabited by ethnic Georgians.

In the following decades Georgians and South Ossetians kept better relations than the ones between Abkhazians and Georgians, with many Ossetians living in other areas of Georgia (Abkhazians almost exclusively lived in Abkhazia) and a high rate of intermarriages.

The situation worsened in 1989, when the rising Georgian nationalism scaring both Abkhazians and Ossetians pushed them to create parties which aimed at achieving independence for the two regions; among such organizations, the "Adamon Nykhas" (Popular Shrine) Ossetian popular front played a major role in requesting the creation of an autonomous South Ossetian Soviet Republic, declined by both Moscow and Tbilisi. In 1991 the region proclaimed its will to separate from Georgia and unify with its northern counterpart (now part of the Russian Federation); this declaration led to the *South Ossetian War* (1991-1992), a conflict between Georgia and the separatist region (unofficially backed by Russia) ending with a Russian ceasefire and South Ossetia becoming a de facto independent state. After years of turmoil, with the Russo-Georgian War of 2008 Russian "peacekeeping forces" helped both the Abkhazian and South Ossetian

military forces to completely gain control over their territories, officially recognizing the country of South Ossetia (along with Abkhazia, as said before).

Unlike Abkhazia, characterized by a developed economy and many resources, South Ossetia's economy mostly relies on black market sales (with Georgia ironically being the main source of demand) and foreign assistance; for this reason the region is of much less interest to Russia.

The 1989 census stated that out of the 98,000 people living in the region almost 67% was Ossetian; after the war, the ethnic composition of South Ossetia has drastically changed, with a great number of South Ossetians (living both in Georgia proper and in South Ossetia) moving to Russian North Ossetia.

Similarly to the situation in Abkhazia, the region doesn't seem to have found an agreement with Georgia, and apart from Russian support, it currently finds itself isolated both politically and economically due to another of the frozen conflicts destroying the Caucasus.

## IV.II Ethnic conflict in Ukraine

In the aftermath of Ukraine's independence the absence of a common vision regarding its identity and future aims led (as seen in the previous chapter) to the establishment of inherited Soviet discourses and practices, which, together with the cultural affinity between Ukraine and Russia and the former's economic dependency on the latter, greatly hindered the emancipation of the country and impeded the creation of a strong unitary state, much to the advantage of local and ethnic realities. Despite such awakening of regional identities (and of the cleavages between them) the first decade of independent Ukraine was characterized by stable relations between the Eastern and Western parts of the country, as the absence of a strong process of "Ukrainisation" promoted by the government and the general population's apathy towards nation-building processes didn't threaten the Russian minority inhabiting Eastern Ukraine.

The situation changed with the Orange Revolution of 2004, when people took to the streets to protest against the rigged presidential election seeing the victory of Yanukovych. For the first time since their independence Ukrainians had actively decided to distance themselves from practices typical of autocratic regimes, choosing democracy instead; this first major step taken since its independence signed the birth of modern tensions between the two parts of the country, as Western Ukraine wished to pursue European values, while Eastern Ukraine largely remained loyal to Russia.

The presidency of Yanukovych started in 2010 further heightened ethnic tensions within the country: being himself a Russophone Ukrainian from the Donetsk Oblast, Yanukovych assigned top and middle governmental positions to members of the ethnic Russian minority, replacing the indigenous elite of several Oblasts with figures loyal to him but largely perceived as "strangers" in Western Ukraine (such policy had previously

been adopted by Stalin in 1945, in an attempt to replace the local elite allegedly loyal to the Nazis with individuals loyal to Moscow, and gave rise to a civil war that lasted for 15 years); such “colonization”, followed by Yanukovych's authoritarian and Russian-oriented governance, led the western part of the country to start perceiving Eastern Ukrainians as a threat to the democratic values arisen from the Orange Revolution.

However, despite the undemocratic traits assumed by Yanukovich and his Donbass allies, the call for “democracy” was a principle that could have been shared by all Ukrainians, because devoid (at least officially) of cultural traits. Real ethnic conflict erupted in 2014 when the Euromaidan broke out as a result of Yanukovych's plan to distance itself from the European Union further increasing ties with Russia: now the majority of the country protested in favor of a *European* Ukraine, greatly opposed by Eastern Ukrainians, which instead oriented themselves towards Russia; the cultural differences between the two parts of the country finally became apparent, ultimately culminating into an ethnic conflict first rising in the Crimean peninsula, and later extending to the Donbass region.

*The annexation of Crimea by the R.F. and the War in the Donbass*

Crimea was conquered by the Russian Empire in 1783, after having been under first the Crimean Khanate (one of the many states resulting from the dissolution of the Golden Horde), and later the Ottoman Empire; however, despite its initial large Tatar-Muslim population, under Tsarist control the region was subject to vast migrations which greatly altered its demographics, with new ethnic groups such as Germans or Russians inhabiting the peninsula. In 1921 the Crimean Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was founded, having the intention of “representing” the Tatar titular ethnic group; nevertheless, Stalin's post-WWII Russification process (previously discussed

in Ch.3) saw the deportation of a large part of the original Tatar population from the region, due to accusations of collaboration with the Nazi regime, and the consequent conversion of Crimea into an oblast of the Russian SSR in 1945.

Krushchëv's "*Transfer of Crimea"* of 1954, with which Crimea was given as an oblast to Ukrainian SSR, was among the most controversial decisions taken by a Soviet leader: officially seen as a "Noble Act on the part of the Russian People" to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the Pereyaslav Treaty (with which the Cossack Hetmanate had become part of the Russian Empire), such decision was in fact a strategic one; the two main reasons behind the act were:

1) The need to gain the support of the Ukrainian Elite in Krushchëv's rise to power shortly after Stalin's death.
2) The need to further "Russianize" Ukraine in order to distance it from a possible "European" menace: after Stalin's purge of the large Tatar population inhabiting the region Crimea became predominantly Russian; thanks to the transfer, almost a million Russians would have joined the already large Russian minority in Ukraine.

As a result of the Transfer, the ethnic composition of Crimea changed once again, with Ukrainian citizens migrating into the region (especially after its economic boom in the 60's resulting from mass tourism) and forming a Ukrainian minority within the Russian minority of the Republic.

With Ukraine's independence in 1991 (supported by the majority of Crimean voters) the peninsula was given the status of "Autonomous Republic" within independent Ukraine, and it was provided with a parliament and a large degree of freedom.

Despite Crimea's initial support for Ukraine's independence, as soon as the country's hopes of wealth and stability began to vanish the peninsula started

seeking for more autonomy, with several movements advocating for secession already by 1994; this lead Kiev's government to greatly limit Crimea's autonomy and establish direct political rule in an attempt to regain control of the region. Such policies, along with a series of economic concessions given to the region, eradicated separatist movements in the following two years.

Tensions arose once again in 2014, when the European-oriented protests carried out in Western Ukraine and the subsequent impeachment of Yanukovych (who had his electoral basin in Crimea) scared the Russophone population of Crimea, who immediately started a counter-revolution opposing to the will of drawing closer to Europe shared by the majority of the country: pro-Russian militias gained control of strategic positions and buildings in Crimea's capital, Simferopol, dissolving the parliament and installing a pro-Russian government; meanwhile Russia moved troops into the region under the claim of "protecting Russian citizens and military assets in Crimea". On the 16th of March a referendum concerning the status of Crimea saw the majority of the region's population in favor of joining Russia as a federal subject (importantly, the Tatar population returning to the peninsula after the dissolution of the USSR predominantly voted in favor of independence, thinking that an independent Crimea might have led to more freedom for themselves); despite accusations of electoral fraud and the unwillingness of most western countries to recognize the validity of the referendum, Russia accepted the result, officially incorporating Crimea into the federation on 18 March, 2014.

As ethnic tensions spread throughout Eastern Ukraine, a month later pro-Russian separatist forces in the oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk (forming together the so-called "Donbass region") reproduced the events that had taken place in Crimea, seizing government buildings and holding referendums with which to declare themselves independent from Ukraine;

soon Russia moved troops into the two oblasts, further increasing tensions with the USA and the EU.

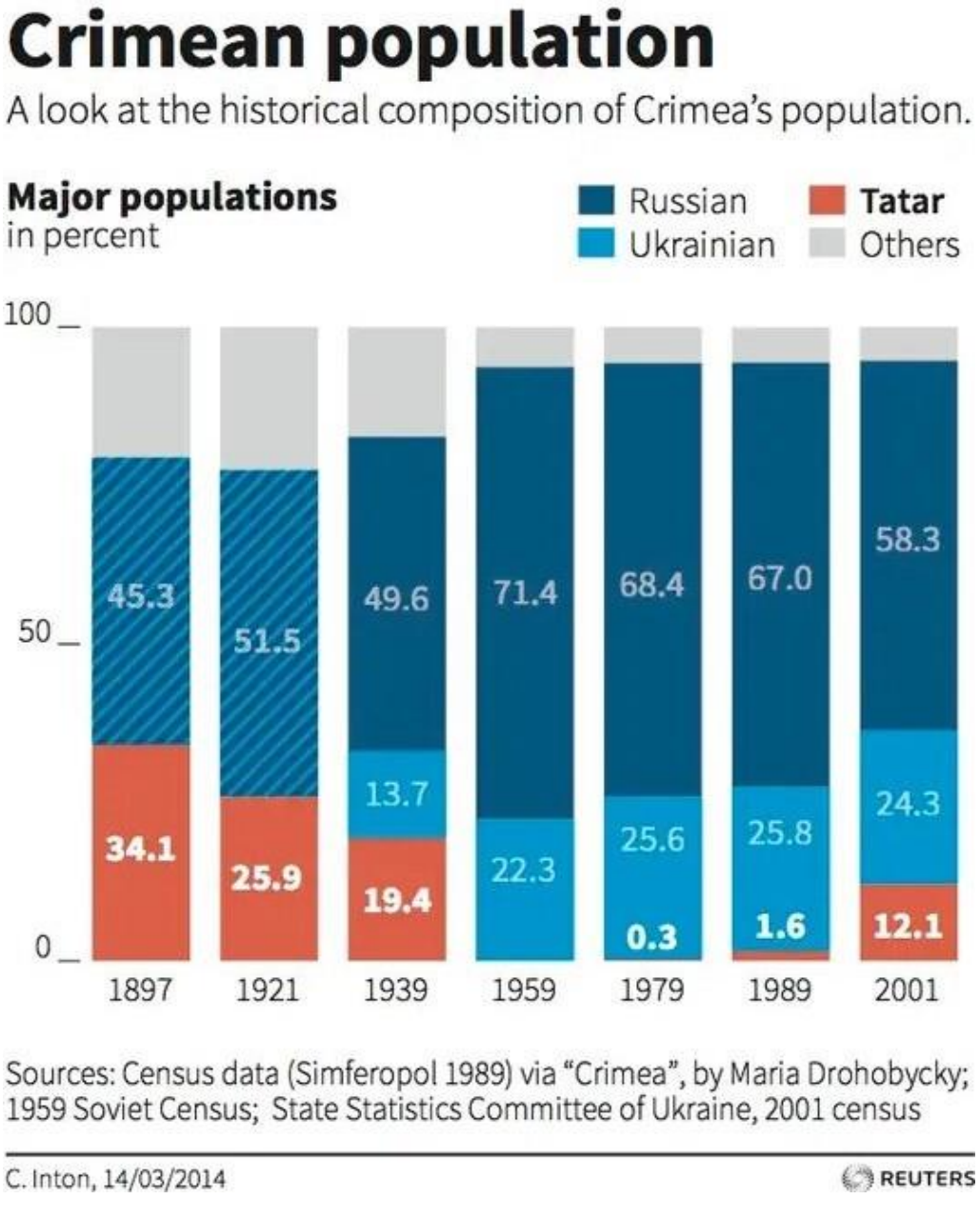
Despite the several diplomatic efforts to stabilize the region, the following years were characterized by several clashes between the Ukrainian army and the Eastern Ukrainian separatist; as the conflict expanded, and so did Russia's involvement in it, a harsh series of sanctions were imposed on Russia, greatly crippling its economy and deteriorating its relations with the West.

Today the situation in the Donbass doesn't seem to have improved: while president Zelensky is willing to terminate a conflict lasting for 6 years already and bring the two pro-Russian oblasts back under Kyiv's control, consensus on how to reintegrate the Donbass region into Ukraine and on what status its two oblasts should be given still hasn't been reached, as many fear that such move may destabilize the country and hinder its path towards Europe, much to the advantage of Russia. Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine are therefore creating tensions within Ukrainian society.

Contrary to the Donbass, which Russia has little interest in having and no historical claims to, the case of Crimea seems much more unlikely to be solved, given Russia's unwillingness to return it back to Ukraine, and Ukraine's opposition to the recognition of Russia's sovereignty over the peninsula. According to a poll carried out in 2019, more than 60% of Russians believe that Crimea should be part of Russia (while only 39% believe the same for Chechenya and 41% for Daghestan, both currently part of Russia).

Thus, the war in Eastern Ukraine might likely turn into a frozen conflict, as with regards to the Donbass no internal agreement hasn't been found, (within Ukrainian society and political leaders), while for Crimea no external agreement between Russia and Ukraine seems possible to be ever reached. While both regions are important to Ukraine (Crimea for the port of Sevastopol and its tourist sector, while the Donbass for its important share of

industries), their removal from it could finally solve the East-West dichotomy which had troubled the country throughout its modern history, finally directing the majority of Ukraine towards that process of modernization and Europeanization which the Western regions have greatly sought from the Orange Revolution of 2004.




-Linguistic division in Ukraine according to a 2008 census.


-Territories involved in the Ukrainian civil war (2014 – ).

# Conclusion

This work has tried giving an overview of cultural identity's development in Georgia and Ukraine throughout the XX and XXI century: on one side there is Georgia, a country which has always had a strong and distinct identity, though in conflict with the several ethnic minorities within it; on the other Ukraine, whose cultural affinity with Russia made its cultural emancipation harder to achieve, especially given its consistent Russian ethnic minority in the East. As analyzed in the previous chapters, the two countries' ancient history (or at least the modern interpretation of it) and recent events seem to direct them towards Europe; however, considerable ethnic minorities in both countries don't share the intention of further emancipating themselves from their Soviet past, but instead look at Russia as the country under which to cultivate their identity. The ethnic tensions and subsequent conflicts arising from this East-West dichotomy erode the stability and unity of both countries, hindering their future development and leaving them in an annihilating limbo: as long as the frozen conflicts within Ukraine and Georgia will continue to exist, the two countries won't be able to move either towards Russia nor towards Europe, for Russia's support of separatist groups radicalizes the countries' anti-Russian sentiment, resulting in harsher governments' positions towards Russian-backed ethnic minorities which in turn further increase tensions within the countries. This vicious cycle is much to the disadvantage of all actors, since the EU will continue having conflict at its borders, Georgia and Ukraine will be devastated and paralyzed by their civil wars, and Russia will suffer due to Western sanctions and its deteriorating relations with major world powers (EU and USA).

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# Emancipazione culturale e formazione identitaria in Georgia e Ucraina nel XX e XXI secolo

L'articolo 49 del Trattato di Maastricht sull'Unione Europea sancisce che alcuni paesi, tra i quali molte ex repubbliche sovietiche, potrebbero in futuro, in virtù di quella che viene definita la "prospettiva europea", entrare a far parte dell'Unione. In questo contesto uno studio sul futuro dell'Unione dovrebbe includere l'analisi di questi stati quali potenziali fonti di conflitto sia interno all'Unione, tra i fautori del loro ingresso e coloro che sono invece contrari, sia tra l'Unione e la Russia nella misura in cui quest'ultima considerasse questo passo una inaccettabile riduzione della propria sfera di influenza.

In questo studio analizzo due stati, la Georgia e l'Ucraina, che per collocazione geografica, composizione etnica, trascorsi storici e reazioni alla dissoluzione dell'Unione Sovietica costituiscono due casi rappresentativi di possibili sviluppi sociali, politici ed economici delle ex repubbliche sovietiche e, in ultima analisi, di un possibile successo o fallimento del loro processo di integrazione nell'Unione Europea.

## Storia

La storia della Georgia evidenzia il ruolo del cristianesimo, diventato religione di stato nel IV secolo d.C., nel determinare l'identità nazionale di una popolazione circondata da paesi di religione islamica. Una contrapposizione durata nei secoli che si è concretizzata in lunghi periodi di conflitto che non hanno tuttavia

impedito al paese di raggiungere alla fine del XII secolo una notevole estensione territoriale e il benessere economico. L'arrivo dei Mongoli e della peste nera, segnano l'inizio di un declino inarrestabile e con esso l'incapacità del paese di fronteggiare la minaccia da parte dei paesi confinanti. Consapevole di questa debolezza re Eraclio III nel 1783 chiede l'annessione alla Russia che ne fa una sua provincia. Le politiche adottate dalla Russia nei confronti della nuova provincia costituiscono le basi per la storia futura della Georgia: il processo di incorporazione dell'aristocrazia georgiana nella nobiltà russa e la politica di russificazione del territorio comportano da una parte la perdita di figure di riferimento nella popolazione e dall'altra la nascita di movimenti di opposizione all'invasione russa. La mancanza di figure di spicco nelle quali tali movimenti possono identificarsi favorisce l'ascesa di figure spirituali che, impostesi come leader, cambiano la natura della rivolta che da politica assume i contorni di un confronto tra islam e cristianità che perdura fino ai nostri giorni (Cecenia e Daghestan). Caduto lo zar il processo di affermazione della etnia georgiana promosso da Stalin e la conseguente assimilazione delle minoranze, unita alle deportazioni di massa pongono in serio pericolo le minoranze armena e abkhaza i cui timori di assimilazione etnica si concretizzano nelle tensioni responsabili della successiva guerra in sud-Ossezia e Abkhazia. La successiva abolizione dei privilegi concessi da Stalin ad opera di Kruschev viene percepita dai georgiani come una minaccia all'identità culturale e produce fermenti nazionalistici che con Gorbaciov sfociano nell'obiettivo di uno stato etnico georgiano.

Come in Georgia anche in Ucraina il periodo di prosperità iniziato alla fine del X secolo, dovuto essenzialmente agli scambi culturali e commerciali con Bisanzio, viene interrotto dall'arrivo dei Mongoli. In questo caso si verifica anche la divisione del territorio in due regioni: la regione nord-orientale più vicina alla Mongolia e maggiormente soggetta alla dominazione mongola, la regione meridionale, corrispondente all'odierna ucraina, che grazie alla sua posizione geografica continua a mantenere legami con l'occidente e, seppure in misura minore rispetto al passato, a svilupparsi. Cacciati i Mongoli, dopo un periodo di occupazione da parte dei polacchi, sconfitti grazie all'intervento dei cosacchi che fondono l'Etmanato cosacco, l'Ucraina per scongiurare la minaccia polacca sempre presente, si unisce alla Russia ottenendo da questa protezione in cambio della fedeltà allo Zar e conservando uno status autonomo. Questa situazione dura fino al 1991. Durante questo periodo un processo di assimilazione dell'elite cosacca all'aristocrazia russa, simile a quello verificatosi in Georgia, priva l'Ucraina della nobiltà, trasformandola così in un'area marginale. E' solo con il romanticismo che, grazie all'opera di alcuni intellettuali, si assiste ad una rinascita culturale incentrata sulla riscoperta delle tradizioni. La reazione dello zar a quella che si presenta come una potenziale minaccia non si fa attendere e prende le forme di una politica fondata su tre basi: espansione della religione ortodossa al posto di quella cattolica, restrizioni sull'attività degli intellettuali, russificazione della popolazione. Restrizioni che non limitano tuttavia l'attività degli intellettuali ucraini che vivono nell'impero austro-ungarico. Successivamente alla caduta dello zar l'Ucraina gode di un

periodo di relativa libertà durante il quale il progetto di un comunismo ucraino porta alla diffusione dell'ideologia comunista veicolata attraverso il recupero della cultura ucraina. A partire dalla Guerra Fredda l'Ucraina, ormai unita sotto l'Unione Sovietica vive alterne vicende collegate essenzialmente alla volontà dei leader russi al governo da Stalin a Kruschev a Breznev a Gorbaciov che, alternativamente favoriscono o reprimono gli intellettuali e con essi la spinta alla rivalutazione delle tradizioni. Alla caduta dell'URSS il 90% della popolazione vota per l'indipendenza.

Georgia indipendente

I primi anni della Georgia indipendente sono caratterizzati da una importante presenza nello stato delle organizzazioni criminali. Il loro collegamento con i centri di potere risale a Stalin, un bandito georgiano che una volta divenuto presidente dell'URSS affida le posizioni più importanti dell'apparato statale a coloro che avevano collaborato con lui durante gli anni precedenti. La situazione continua sotto Breznev che accetta di buon grado i servigi della mafia georgiana in cambio della concessione di protezione e privilegi. Il potere delle organizzazioni criminali continua anche nella Georgia indipendente quando Ioseliani, esponente di spicco della mafia diventa consigliere di Shevardnaze divenuto presidente. L'incapacità di Shevardnaze di risolvere il problema della corruzione che a sua volta influisce pesantemente sulla crescita economica e la crescita della consapevolezza politica da parte della popolazione sono alla base della "Rivoluzione delle

rose" nel 2003 in seguito alla quale Shevardnaze rassegna le dimissioni. Oggi la Georgia, grazie alle importanti riforme strutturali iniziate nel 2010 ha un'economia in costante crescita, ma dal punto di vista politico si confronta ancora con il problema irrisolto dell'Abkhazia e dell'Ossezia meridionale, mentre passi significativi sono stati presi per una maggiore avvicinamento all'Europa.

## Ucraina indipendente

Immediatamente dopo il raggiungimento dell'indipendenza il governo dell'Ucraina inizia un processo di ricostruzione dell'apparato statale al fine di evitare il caos che si era verificato in altre repubbliche ex sovietiche. A questo si aggiunge in processo di avvicinamento all'Europa nell'ambito del quale viene concessa la cittadinanza ucraina a tutta la popolazione, indipendentemente dall'etnia e dalla lingua. Una prima conferma della divisione del paese viene dalle elezioni di Kuchma nel 1994 che, a differenza di Kravchuk eletto dalla parte occidentale del paese, vince grazie ai voti della parte russofona. Nonostante i tentativi di Kuchma di introdurre delle riforme corruzione, povertà e tensioni sociali influiscono pesantemente sulla crescita economica. I tentativi di mantenere relazioni stabili sia con la Russia che con l'Europa continuano fino al 2004, quando in seguito alle proteste della popolazione per dei presunti brogli nelle votazioni presidenziali, scoppia quella che venne definita la "Rivoluzione arancione" in seguito alla quale viene eletto Yushenko il candidato filo-occidentale che tuttavia non riesce a

salvare il paese dal declino economico. L'insoddisfazione per l'operato di Yushenko, porta nel 2010 all'elezione del candidato filo-russo Yanukovych che inizierà un processo di avvicinamento a Mosca. Questa politica, unita alla sua incapacità di comprendere e soddisfare le aspirazioni democratiche di una classe media che prende sempre più coscienza delle proprie esigenze, porta alla Rivoluzione arancione del 2014 e alla fuga di Yanukovych. A differenza della Rivoluzione delle rose, il cui obiettivo era di rafforzare lo stato di diritto e sancire un maggiore coinvolgimento della popolazione nelle questioni politiche la Rivoluzione arancione manifesta chiaramente i sentimenti pro-Europa della parte occidentale del paese. Tale orientamento non è tuttavia condiviso dalla parte orientale o russofona che inizia una contro-rivoluzione e ottiene l'intervento di Mosca. Un'azione questa che provoca le sanzioni da parte occidentale che contribuiscono a indebolire l'economia e favorisce la diffusione della corruzione.

## Nazionalismo

Un punto di forza della politica dell'URSS alla caduta dello zar fu il riconoscimento, da questi sempre negato, del diritto di autodeterminazione. Su queste basi l'URSS nasce come una federazione su base etnica. Il governo decide di promuovere lo sviluppo economico, culturale e sociale delle popolazioni in modo da ridurre le tensioni con il centro e poter diffondere in questo modo il comunismo in popolazioni lontane dal centro e diverse tra loro. Tuttavia alla fine degli anni '80 un comunismo che ormai non offre più attrattive viene sostituito a livello ideologico con il

nazionalismo. Esso trova un terreno fertile per lo sviluppo grazie alla politica attuata dai governi dei decenni precedenti che concedevano diversi gradi di indipendenza alle repubbliche in misura direttamente proporzionale alla diffusione dello spirito nazionalistico al proprio interno. In questo contesto alla caduta dell'Unione Sovietica all'interno di stati multietnici nei quali il nazionalismo diventa un progetto politico si materializzano quelle tensioni tra etnia dominante e minoranze che sfociano nei conflitti etnici.

Formazione delle identità nazionali

La politica dell'autodeterminazione inizia a dare dei problemi a partire dal 1930 quando in alcune regioni si manifestano forti spinte indipendentistiche accompagnate da sentimenti anti-russi. Questo provoca la reazione di Stalin e, per quanto ci riguarda, la deportazione di massa dei cosacchi, popolazione simbolo dell'identità ucraina. Il processo di russificazione del paese comporta oltre alle deportazioni di massa anche l'esclusione delle altre etnie dalle posizioni di governo. In seguito a questo il comunismo inizia a essere associato alla cultura russa. Dopo la morte di Stalin Kruscev attua una politica più tollerante nei confronti delle minoranze e in particolare si comporta con l'Ucraina come Stalin aveva fatto con la Georgia, riservandole un ruolo di sempre maggior spicco all'interno dell'URSS. Questa politica continua con Breznev che concede ampia autonomia ai politici e intellettuali locali in cambio della fedeltà a Mosca. Questo produce un duplice effetto: la partecipazione delle elite alla

politica di Mosca avvicina le periferie, ma la maggiore autonomia aumenta la consapevolezza nazionale locale. Ciononostante il processo di russificazione conseguente alla distinzione imposta dal governo tra cittadinanza (sovietica per tutti) e nazionalità basata sull'etnia si fa sempre più strada soprattutto tra le popolazioni slave e ortodosse che, per affinità culturale, non hanno sostanziali differenze da addurre per ribellarsi al governo. Tuttavia mentre l'Ucraina accetta di buon grado il processo di assimilazione, altrettanto non fa la Georgia. Sentimenti anti-russi si diffondono in tutto il paese favoriti anche dalla politica liberale di Gorbaciov e dall'azione degli intellettuali locali educati nelle istituzioni "etniche" fondate dal governo stesso per favorire le autonomie e ridurre le tensioni etniche.

Identità georgiana

Dopo l'indipendenza la ricerca di un'identità nazionale assume i contorni etnici: mentre la maggioranza accusa le minoranze di impedire l'emancipazione del paese mantenendo contatti con la Russia, Abkhazi e Azeri accusano la maggioranza di minacciare le loro identità.

Questa situazione produce una profonda riflessione sul concetto di identità in una popolazione che, a differenza di quella ucraina integrata nel sistema sovietico, percepisce se stessa come una colonia conquistata durante la guerra del Caucaso e inferiore alle repubbliche slave. Per i georgiani indipendenti diventa così naturale cercare un futuro al di fuori dello spazio Sovietico.

Identità ucraina

In Ucraina l'eredità lasciata dalle tradizioni sovietiche, l'incapacità degli intellettuali di ripensare criticamente il periodo passato sotto l'URSS e le politiche equivoche ed ambivalenti dei presidenti che precedono la rivoluzione del 2014 impediscono il processo di emancipazione e la definizione di un'identità ucraina favorendo la nascita di identità a livello locale e la conseguente differenziazione tra parte occidentale e orientale del paese. Solo a partire dal 2014 il dibattito sulle relazioni con l'Europa, sul passato sotto l'URSS e sull'identità nazionale si diffonde ad ampi strati della popolazione e produce un cambiamento nella politica del governo che, sempre più spaventato dalla espansione della Russia nella parte orientale, inizia a promuovere lo sviluppo di una cultura ucraina.

Conflitto Georgia- Abkhazia

Il conflitto tra Georgia e Abkhazia si fonda essenzialmente su false narrazioni inventate da entrambe le parti riguardanti il diritto di occupazione della regione quali primi abitanti e su trascorse arbitrarie occupazioni del territorio dell'Abkhazia da parte dei georgiani che, preda di "ambizioni coloniali", avrebbero impedito lo sviluppo dell'Abkhazia. La tensione tra i due popoli aumenta con l'arrivo di Kruschev quando l'Abkhazia inizia una rapida crescita economica, mentre la Georgia inizia a soffrire la stessa discriminazione sofferta dagli abkhazi sotto Stalin. Il vuoto di

potere conseguente alla dissoluzione dell'URSS lascia spazio all'esplosione del conflitto che si sviluppa nel corso degli anni con l'intervento della Russia a favore dell'Abkhazia e alterne vicende militari. Ad oggi le posizioni dei due contendenti rimangono distanti e la radicalizzazione delle posizioni in entrambe le parti non lascia prevedere una soluzione a breve termine. La stessa cosa si può dire per il conflitto con l'Ossezia meridionale, anche questa riconosciuta e appoggiata dalla Russia.

## Il conflitto etnico in Ucraina

Nonostante il diffuso risveglio delle identità nazionali il primo decennio dell'Ucraina indipendente trascorre senza fermenti di rilievo. La rivoluzione arancione del 2004, condotta all'insegna della ribellione al regime autocratico, segna una svolta nella storia del paese e l'inizio del processo di allontanamento tra la regione orientale del paese, fedele alla Russia e quella occidentale, orientata all'Europa. L'elezione del filo-russo Yanukovych nel 2010 e la sua politica volta ad assegnare le posizioni di potere nelle varie provincie del paese a persone a lui fedeli viene percepita come un processo di colonizzazione dalla popolazione occidentale, che sente minacciati valori democratici affermatisi con la Rivoluzione arancione. Questa situazione perdura fino al 2014 quando la politica di avvicinamento all'Europa, ufficialmente perseguita nonostante tutto fino ad allora, viene interrotta da Yanukovych che, al contrario, non nasconde le sue intenzioni di riavvicinare il paese alla Russia. Le proteste e il seguente impeachment di Yanukovitch spaventano la popolazione

russofona delle Crimea che, temendo la politica di avvicinamento all'Europa, inizia una contro-rivoluzione chiedendo l'appoggio di Mosca che interviene per proteggere la popolazione. Questa situazione viene sancita da un referendum in seguito al quale la Russia incorpora la Crimea. Un mese più tardi nella regione del Donbass separatisti filo-russi si dichiarano indipendenti chiedendo l'aiuto della Russia che interviene anche questa volta provocando la reazione di USA e Europa. Il conflitto sembra al momento di difficile soluzione a causa dei forti interessi dell'Ucraina per entrambe le regioni e della volontà di Mosca di non perdere la Crimea.

## Conclusioni

In questo lavoro ho tentato di fornire alcune indicazioni sullo sviluppo dell'identità culturale in Georgia e Ucraina nel corso del XX e XXI secolo. Uno sviluppo che, in virtù del periodo storico analizzato, è stato definito relativamente al processo di acquisizione di un'identità indipendente dalla cultura sovietica. Un percorso storicamente più semplice nel caso della Georgia e più difficile, a causa di maggiori affinità culturali, nel caso dell'Ucraina.

Anche se in entrambi i casi, seppur con percorsi diversi, la storia e gli avvenimenti recenti sembrano indicare un futuro europeo, la permanenza, in un caso e nell'altro, di minoranze etniche che non intendono emanciparsi dalla Russia e i conflitti etnici che affliggono entrambi i paesi ne minano la stabilità e li pongono in

un apparentemente duraturo limbo nella misura in cui il supporto della Russia ai gruppi separatisti favorisce sentimenti anti-russi e politiche governative sempre più severe nei confronti delle popolazioni che li appoggiano che a loro volta provocano un aumento delle tensioni in un circolo vizioso che impedisce lo sviluppo economico, politico e sociale. Una situazione che porta svantaggi non solo ai due paesi, ma anche all'Europa, che continua ad avere zone di conflitto ai confini, e alla Russia che paga le conseguenze delle sanzioni economiche.