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The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review
The Ukraine Syndrome and Europe: Between Norms and Space
--Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	SPSR-1259
Full Title:	The Ukraine Syndrome and Europe: Between Norms and Space
Short Title:	The Ukraine Syndrome and Europe: Between Norms and Space
Article Type:	Full-Length Article
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Corresponding Author's Institution:	University of Kent
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Order of Authors:	Richard Sakwa
Abstract:	<p>It is no accident that the Euromaidan revolution of 2013 was triggered by President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to postpone signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. This paper traces the connection between a certain type of Ukrainian state building, here labelled as monist, and the larger context of European institution building based on the EU, which from the pan-European perspective is also monist. These two monist projects, which fail systemically to allow for alternatives and pluralistic diversity, feed off and mutually reinforce each other. By contrast, projects for the constitutional incorporation of pluralistic diversity in Ukraine offer the perspective of national reconciliation, and this would be facilitated by the advancement of some sort of greater European pluralism that would obviate the need to choose between alternative integration projects. The Ukraine syndrome is part of the broader failure in the post-Cold War years to create an inclusive European political order.</p>
Keywords:	Monism; pluralism; Ukraine; European Union; nationalism; norms; spatiality; syndrome
Funding Information:	

The Ukraine Syndrome and Europe: Between Norms and Space

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Abstract: It is no accident that the Euromaidan revolution from November 2013 was triggered by President Viktor Yanukovich's decision to postpone signing the Association Agreement with the European Union. This paper traces the connection between a certain type of Ukrainian state building, here labelled as monist, and the larger context of European institution building based on the EU, which from the pan-European perspective is also monist. These two monist projects, which fail systemically to allow for alternatives and pluralistic diversity, feed off and mutually reinforce each other. Neither in structural terms can imagine alternatives existing outside of themselves. Both are deeply plural internally, but claim certain hegemonic privileges. By contrast, projects for the constitutional incorporation of pluralistic diversity in Ukraine offer the perspective of national reconciliation, and this would be facilitated by the advancement of some sort of greater European pluralism that would obviate the need to choose between alternative integration projects. The Ukraine syndrome is part of the broader failure in the post-Cold War years to create an inclusive European political order.

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The Ukraine Syndrome and Europe: Between Norms and Space

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Introduction: The Ukraine Syndrome

The crisis of state building and national development in Ukraine has deep roots and complex interactions, but ultimately it reflects the tension between two contrasting models of post-communist consolidation. The first is the monist model, which focuses on the priority development of a culturally distinctive and politically assertive form of Ukrainian nationalism. The monist approach cannot be reduced to the integral nationalism of earlier periods, but it nevertheless draws on the power of the idea that there is some sort of coherent and autonomous essence to the Ukrainian nation that needs to be rediscovered and given hegemonic articulation in the contemporary polity. This is a type of restorative nationalism, seeking to correct perceived earlier distortions of the Ukrainian national idea. Ukraine is not unique in advancing this sort of nationalism, and it fits into classic patterns of post-colonial development. In post-communist Ukraine this monist model was relatively capacious, beginning with the generous offer of citizenship to all those living in Ukraine at the time of independence. Nevertheless, there is an exclusionary and didactic dynamic at work, seeking to establish an identity that would distinguish it from Russia, famously articulated by Leonid Kuchma (2003) in his book *Ukraine is Not Russia*. This trend was intensified in response to developmental and political failures. The Euromaidan revolution in 2014 further radicalised the monist element, and as a result of internal conflict and war

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4 is now presented by the current leadership as the only authentic form of Ukrainian
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6 development.
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9 On the other side, a more pluralistic understanding of the challenges facing the
10 country draws on postcolonial theory to suggest that the emergence of a hybrid and
11 heterogeneous nation is something to be celebrated and given constitutional form in terms
12 of linguistic and territorial diversity. The pluralist view is derived from the pattern of
13 Ukrainian state and national development over the centuries, which in the twentieth century
14 gave rise to a high degree of territorial contingency. Ukraine is far from the only country
15 combining a multiplicity of national identities, but it is one of the few that has so
16 persistently refused to give constitutional expression to this diversity. Toleration is not the
17 same as the transformative incorporation of diversity at the level of the state. Given the
18 unstable and typically disastrous history of previous attempts at creating an independent
19 Ukraine, concern about territorial integrity and national coherence is understandable, but
20 as a result tensions are generated that undermine the intended goal. This is all the more
21 paradoxical since opinion surveys almost universally agree that despite ‘any linguistic,
22 political, or cultural differences, the vast majority of Ukrainians consider Ukraine their
23 motherland’ (Fomina 2014, 7). Before the crisis this also applied to Crimea and the Donbas.
24 Thus the fundamental challenge is not the existential one of survival, but how best to
25 incorporate diversity.
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50 Although the monist project contains profoundly pluralistic characteristics, the
51 problem lies at the level of the political integration of difference. The struggle is not over
52 whether Ukraine should exist as an independent state, but what sort of state it should be –
53 and most crucially, who has the right to decide. The pluralist cause is not helped by the
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4 typically segmented way in which its claims have been presented, privileging one group at
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6 the expense of others while typically failing to generate an enunciated commitment to those
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8 cultural and other features that make Ukraine unique. Consociationalism on the Lijphart
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10 model is based on segmented autonomy, and hence in conditions of the perceived fragility
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12 of Ukrainian statehood was rejected in favour of a unitary model (for the debates on post-
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14 communist Ukrainian state building, see Kuzio, D'Anieri and Kravchuk (eds) 1999; Kuzio
15
16 and D'Anieri (eds) 2002). Even more damaging, representations of pluralism (including
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18 appeals for federalism) became associated with the ambitions of an external power, Russia,
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20 and thus delegitimated in the eyes of the monists. Domestic concerns about state integrity
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22 and national coherence were exacerbated by the competitive international environment.
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29 The failure to achieve a broader pan-European political settlement after the Cold
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31 War reinforced the Ukraine syndrome of restorative state building. Lacking in the recent
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33 period has been an open and generous debate about ways of ensuring territorial integrity
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35 and linguistic diversity while ensuring the adequate development of the Ukrainian language
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37 and culture to sustain the Ukrainian state building endeavour. Instead, the history of post-
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39 independence Ukraine has been characterised by unresolved and often suppressed
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41 questions of national coherence and state integration that in the end undermined both.
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43 These tensions were internationalised, provoking the gravest European security crisis of
44
45 recent times. This, in short, is the 'Ukraine syndrome'.
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51 The tension between monist and pluralist interpretations of Ukrainian national
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53 identity is at the heart of the Ukraine syndrome, and has been a characteristic feature of
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55 national development in the modern era. The syndrome was intensified in the post-Cold
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57 War years as Ukraine gained the status of an independent and sovereign state and was
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4 forced to devise an autochthonous model of state and nation building. The tension between
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6 the monist and pluralist models was exacerbated by the unresolved character of European
7
8 international politics. In the quarter century of the cold peace between 1989 and 2014 none
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10 of the fundamental issues of European security or of continental identity were resolved,
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12 provoking the breakdown of 2014. The Ukraine syndrome was internationalised, while
13
14 international conflict was internalised (Sakwa 2016a).
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19 The Ukraine crisis was one of the gravest challenges to world peace of our age, yet
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21 it is remarkable how little theoretical analysis there has been about what led us into this
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23 abyss. Even more remarkable is the near total absence of a substantive language to describe
24
25 the processes that generated the Ukraine syndrome. This has been accompanied by the
26
27 general coarsening of public discourse on the causes, nature and consequences of the
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29 Ukraine syndrome, which itself is only a symptom of the broader failures of the post-Cold
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31 War era. This paper is informed by the enormously rich and diverse literature on Ukrainian
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33 state and national building since 1991, but its purpose is not to rehearse the arguments or
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35 review the material, but to offer an interpretive framework that can help make sense of how
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37 domestic and international factors combined to create the Ukraine syndrome.
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45 **Crisis in the borderlands: between norms and space**

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50 The European Union is often portrayed as a post-modern entity committed to a post-
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52 Westphalian agenda of universal values, accompanied by commitment to a set of normative
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4 principles (Cooper 2003).¹ These norms are the basis for the EU's conditionality in dealing
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6 with external actors and its neighbours. Enlargement has pushed the EU into uncharted
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8 territory, in both symbolic and political terms (Zielonka 2008). At the same time,
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10 competing representations of Europe are part of the contentious debates over national
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12 identity in the countries that find themselves in the new 'borderlands' (White and
13
14 Feklyunina 2014).
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19 The tension between spatiality and normativity is particularly stark when it comes
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21 to the six Eastern Partnership (EaP) states – Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia,
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23 Azerbaijan and Georgia. Here Russia's historical gravitational pull is enhanced by the
24
25 increasingly intense logic of competition with the EU. The EU remains an ambitious
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27 transformative agent in what are increasingly contested neighbourhoods. It is this which
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29 brought the EU into confrontation with Russia. The EU devoted enormous effort to devise
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31 'neighbourhood' policies that would prevent the outer limits of EU territory hardening into
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33 new lines of division. When presenting the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in
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35 Brussels on 5-6 December 2002, the president of the European Commission at the time,
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37 Romano Prodi (2002), stressed that 'I want to see a "ring of friends" surrounding the Union
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39 and its closest European neighbours, from Morocco to Russia and the Black Sea'. The ENP
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41 sought to mediate between the ins and outs as part of the EU's permanent negotiation of
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43 boundaries and interactions with neighbours (Rumelli 2004; Whitman and Wolff 2010).
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48 With the 'big bang' accession of a number of post-communist countries in 2004 and 2007,
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51 most of which had been part of the Soviet bloc or even of the Soviet Union itself, the
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58 ¹ Some of the ideas in this section draw from my 'External Actors in EU-Russia Relations: Between
59 Norms and Space', Special Report produced by LSE IDEAS and the 'Dahrendorf Forum - Debating
60 Europe' on the future of EU-Russia relations in the context of the Ukraine crisis.
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4 character of this ‘negotiation’ changed. It became less of an interactive process (to the
5 degree that it ever was), and became increasingly didactic (Prozorov 2016). The EaP was
6 sponsored by some of Russia’s most resolute critics in Poland and Sweden (Copsey and
7 Pomorska 2014). The EaP was toned down by the more conciliatory member states and the
8 Brussels bureaucracy, but the programme, however poorly funded and under-resourced,
9 represented a normative challenge that increasingly assumed a delineated spatial form.
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19 The expansionary dynamic through accession has now slowed, but the impulse for
20 integration through Association Agreements and the accompanying Deep and
21 Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) remains strong. There is no *finalité* in either
22 spatial or normative terms, although there are numerous practical obstacles. One of these
23 is that the EU is no longer expanding into non-contested territory but is running into an
24 alternative gravity field, primarily the one generated by Russia. It was the contest between
25 alternative integration projects that came to a head in 2013 and sparked off the chain of
26 events that provoked the Euromaidan revolution and the flight of the incumbent president,
27 Viktor Yanukoych (Dragneva and Wolczuk 2015). Ukrainian governments had long been
28 challenged by competing foreign policy orientations, a forced choice that interacted with
29 domestic regimes to exacerbate the tension between monist and pluralist representations of
30 Ukrainian identity (on the problematic of forced choices, see Korosteleva 2015). Despite
31 claims to represent a post-sovereigntist normative order, spatiality is deeply embedded in
32 the EU’s practical engagement with its neighbours. Although envisaged as a way of
33 obviating geopolitical contestation, the contradiction between normative assertions and
34 spatial advance became apparent when entering the ‘shared neighbourhood’.
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4 Relations with Russia soured and an increasingly overt struggle for influence
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6 intensified in what became a contested neighbourhood, the traditional borderlands between
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8 the two major zones of Europe in the *intermarium* between the Baltic and Black seas
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10 (DeBardeleben 2008). For the EU, this meant that pragmatism threatened to undermine its
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12 normative idealism as hard choices had to be made when dealing with a new type of
13
14 recalcitrant regime. Hitherto it had been mostly plain sailing for the EU, extending its
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16 influence to regions that welcomed the EU as the path to political and economic
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18 modernisation. The complexities of the Balkans were a foretaste of the problems to come,
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20 but it was in the new Eastern Europe that the EU for the first time came up against a rival
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22 hegemonic enterprise. The result was disastrous. Russia's traditional mode of engagement
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24 with the EU as a mix of conflict and cooperation gradually gave way to a more antagonistic
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26 relationship in which the alleged struggle between norms was central (for a critical view,
27
28 see Casier 2013). For the EU, this provoked intense soul-searching over issues of Europe's
29
30 self-identity and purpose. If the EU could not be the bringer of peace, then it would be little
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32 different from the rest of the Atlantic community of which it considered itself the leading
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34 civilian and normative part. In both Russia and the EU the confrontation thus assumed
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36 almost existential proportions.
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45 The clash between norms and spatiality was predictably at its starkest over Ukraine.
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47 No other external actor has more poisoned relations between Russia and the EU. The
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49 Orange revolution of autumn 2004 saw Russia and the EU for the first time line up behind
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51 opposing camps. The administration of Viktor Yushchenko in the end fell prey to the elite
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53 conflicts that have so bedevilled Ukrainian politics since independence, tempting both
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55 Russia and the EU to align with shifting internal factions. The result was the two gas shut-
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4 offs in 2006 and 2009, which inflicted irreparable damage on the Russian-EU energy
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6 relationship, irrespective of who was right in the conflicts themselves. Russia would have
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8 been well advised to stay its hand and ride out the turmoil, rather than adding a damaging
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10 quotient of unpredictability and coercion. In Ukraine, as elsewhere, energy dependency
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12 interacted with the struggle over energy rents in domestic politics (Balmaceda 2008, 2013:
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14 93-153).
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19 The EU and Ukraine had been negotiating some sort of Association Agreement
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21 since 2007, but as the time approached for Ukraine to sign the document at the third Eastern
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23 Partnership summit scheduled to meet in Vilnius 28-29 November 2013, the logic of binary
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25 choice became predominant. Yanukovich had finally won the presidency in February
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27 2010, and he soon sought revenge against his long-term rival and idol of the Orange
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29 revolution, Yulia Tymoshenko. In 2011 she was jailed after an abusive and politically-
30
31 motivated trial. By now Russia had intensified its own integration project, in the form of
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33 what on 1 January 2015 formally became the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). This
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35 provoked a dangerous ‘clash of integrations’ in what was becoming a direct confrontation
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37 over space, garlanded on both sides in the language of norms. When Yanukovich on 21
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39 November 2013 announced that he would postpone signing the AA, crowds gathered in
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41 the Maidan, and following an inept and violent police intervention on 30 November, the
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43 ‘Euromaidan’ revolution was in full swing.
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51 Although provoked by contingent factors, notably the inept and ill-timed repressive
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53 measures of 30 November, the ‘revolution of dignity’ reflected popular frustration over the
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55 long-term impasse in Ukrainian national development and the constraints imposed by
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57 failure to create a benign pan-European security and developmental environment. For
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4 many, Russia is the guilty party, pressurising Ukraine to make a choice in favour of
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6 Eurasian integration and then intervening at the moment of the country's greatest
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8 vulnerability (Wilson 2014). Others argue that the West is responsible, having failed to
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10 create the inclusive security order that had been promised at the end of the Cold War, and
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12 instead only intensified the institutional and ideational foundations of the 'old West', a
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14 process that would inevitably sooner or later provoke a reaction from Russia (Mearsheimer
15
16 2014). The latter view suggests that 'Russian aggression' was not a function of the
17
18 country's domestic order but structurally contingent on the contradictions of the
19
20 international system. My argument is rather more specific. Liberal pluralism was not given
21
22 adequate political form within Ukraine, and at the European level the EU emerged as a
23
24 hegemonic project unable to relate effectively with the pluralistic state system on the
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26 continent that was the inevitably concomitant of the failure to create a greater West or a
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28 greater Europe.
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36 The European dimension to the Ukraine syndrome is thus crucial (for stimulating
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38 essays on what went wrong in EU-Russian relations in the context of Ukraine, see Magri
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40 (ed.) 2015; see also Haukkala 2015; and Nitoiu 2014). It was no accident that the
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42 revolutionary breakdown of February 2014 was provoked by plans to move towards
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44 'Europe'. The clash of integrations assumed a severely spatial aspect but it was also a
45
46 competition between alternative models of political community. This is accompanied by
47
48 an 'information war' focused on contesting normative claims. The EU has thrived in the
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50 post-Cold War environment, and hence it defends the framework of international law and
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52 European security created in the 1990s. By contrast, Russia has from the first felt excluded
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54 and rejected as a founding member of the new order. It proved impossible to find a
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4 capacious enough version of the ‘greater West’ in which Russia would have had space to
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6 develop as an equal, and instead only an expanded version of the old West was on offer.
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9 Russia was reduced to the status of a country that had to prove its credentials to be allowed
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11 in. Russia was a ‘transitional’ state, but in the Russian perception ‘transitionality’ did not
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13 mean subalternity. This is why Putin rejected the very notion of ‘transition’ from the very
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15 first days of his presidency, and even more the implicit notion of Russia as a supplicant.
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18 The gulf widened between the enormous transformative challenges facing the country and
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20 its self-perception as a great power by right and historical achievement. It is out of these
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22 incommensurate narratives of both time and space that the Ukraine crisis emerged.
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28 **Monism and pluralism**

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33 Monism does not mean the absence of internal pluralism but instead refers to the overall
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35 conception of an entity and its ability to engage with others on the basis of equality rather
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37 than hierarchy. By that definition, the EU as a whole is also ultimately a monist project.
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39 Although intensely pluralistic internally, the EU is monist to the degree that it cannot
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41 envisage an alternative to itself on the European continent. Accession countries have to
42
43 absorb the *acquis* in a unilateral manner, and now ‘integration’ countries along its
44
45 periphery are called on to adapt to EU norms if they wish to take advantage of its enormous
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47 market and cultural power. There is a monist dynamic at the very heart of the ‘wider
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49 Europe’ project, the vision of an expanding economic and security community based in
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51 Brussels. This took more delineated forms with the creation of the ENP, and even more so
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53 with the launch of EaP in May 2009.
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4 At the same time, the EU is increasingly embedded in the Atlantic security system
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6 (confirmed by the Lisbon Treaty), which is also an all-encompassing that gained a
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8 hegemonic status in Europe after the demise of the Warsaw Pact. By contrast, since at least
9
10 the mid-2000s Russia has been advancing the idea of a ‘greater Europe’ (*bol’shaya*
11
12 *Evropa*), drawing on Gorbachev’s concept of a Common European Home, comprised of
13
14 several autonomous entities, including above all the EU, Russia and Turkey, but united on
15
16 a common vision of a deepening European pan-continental political, economic and security
17
18 community. This community would finally be able to create a free trade area from Lisbon
19
20 to Vladivostok, accompanied by visa-free travel and intensified cultural, educational and
21
22 investment ties. This is a pluralist vision of a multipolar Europe driven by its refusal to
23
24 accept the normative priority of a single entity or model. Russia’s espousal of pluralism at
25
26 the international level is in sharp contrast to monist political practices at home, whereas
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28 the EU’s domestic pluralism is balanced by foreign policy monism.
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36 The double dynamic of Ukrainian and European monism combined with
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38 devastating effect, provoking a new division of Europe. Ukraine’s ‘European choice’ drew
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40 its energy from the monist practices of EU foreign policy engagement, reinforcing
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42 domestic monism. Equally, Ukraine’s monist impulses threaten to reinforce the monism of
43
44 EU foreign engagement in Europe, above all when it comes to relations with Russia.
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46 Indeed, the contradictions of EU foreign engagement have only intensified since 2014,
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48 where a range of pragmatic relations with the countries ‘in-between’, above all the other
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50 members of the EaP, was determined primarily by their standing in the EU-Russian
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52 conflict. Thus Ukraine’s monism, which has always been largely generated by repudiation
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54 of the political and institutional aspects of engagement with Russia, has been generalised
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4 to Europe as a whole. To that degree, the Ukraine syndrome has become the nemesis of the
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6 aspirations for a ‘Europe whole and free’, as enunciated in the Charter of Paris for a New
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8 Europe of November 1990 (Charter 1990). Instead, Europe is as divided as it was before
9
10 1989, if not more so. The crisis since 2014 is effectively a struggle for systemic and
11
12 institutional pluralism at the continental and national levels.
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16 The struggle between monism and pluralism is also apparent at the epistemological
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18 level, shaping the way that the crisis is understood and handled. In essence, the whole sub-
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20 discipline of democratisation studies and its associated transitology literature is monist, in
21
22 the sense that it is associated with a deeply embedded teleology. Although most of the
23
24 literature is well aware that the road to democracy is a bumpy one, with many side turns
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26 and obstacles, the desired direction of travel frames the discussion. When it comes to
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28 Ukraine, the temporal teleology of transition is accompanied by the spatial dimension of
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30 its version of the ‘return to Europe’.
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36 The most eloquent expression of the Western monist line comes from Timothy
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38 Snyder, professor of history at Yale University. In his contribution to a special section on
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40 Ukraine in *Slavic Review* he notes that ‘It is not so often that a true revolution takes place
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42 in Europe, mobilizing more than a million, provoking counter-revolution and mass killing’
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44 (Snyder 2015: 695). He places the recent Ukrainian events in the *longue durée* of the
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46 twentieth century movement towards decolonisation and disintegration provoked by World
47
48 War I, with the great multinational empires disintegrating at that war’s end. The Soviet
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50 Union proved to be only a temporary *rassemblement* of the bulk of the territories of the
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52 former Russian Empire, which he argues was a type of colonisation. The disintegration of
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4 the USSR put an end to this recolonisation period, and now Ukraine tried to join Europe in
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6 the form of the EU.
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9 In Snyder's thinking, there is a stark contrast between the EU as a force of
10 integration, and Russia as a force of disintegration, seeking to tear Europe apart. Russia's
11 strategy in Ukraine was only an element in its broader goal to destroy the EU as part of its
12 aim of creating an 'alternative global order' (Snyder 2015: 706). In this interpretation, what
13 may be considered to be Russia's legitimate interests are given short shrift, and Russia
14 emerges as a demonic force of destruction and destabilisation. The analysis removes
15 complexity and contradiction from Russia's behaviour, and instead a single impulse is
16 deemed to predominate. This is a classic orientalist reading of a country, where its interests
17 are not only denied but delegitimated by imposing on it the syndrome of cultural inferiority.
18 No less problematic is Snyder's assumption that the Russo-Ukrainian relationship is a
19 colonial one, an issue to which I shall return below. Certainly, Russia's relationship with
20 the EU has seriously deteriorated in recent years, for rational if regrettable reasons, but
21 official policy has never come close to suggesting that its destruction is Russia's explicit
22 goal. Of course, if European unity is forged through opposition to Russia, then Russia will
23 inevitably seek to weaken that unity by intensifying bilateral links and supporting
24 movements that are critical of anti-Russian positions. All this is simply a reflection of the
25 profound impasse in which European politics finds itself.
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50 Equally, Snyder's heroic account of the Maidan revolution glosses over its
51 contradictions, and neglects facts about the killings and onset of civil conflict that run
52 counter to his model. Above all, Snyder has absorbed the monist model of Ukraine, as a
53 single actor with a single purpose. This is reflected in the rhetoric that Russia's intervention
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4 in Ukrainian affairs in 2014 has forged a new Ukrainian identity, and thus unwittingly
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6 fostered the outcome that it sought to avert. In practice, there was and is no unitary
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8 Ukrainian identity, and although regional divisions may have changed their form, they
9
10 remain an important structuring factor in Ukrainian politics, just as do class divisions
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12 between the small oligarch class and the mass of citizens who are sinking ever deeper into
13
14 penury. Ukraine's 'European aspirations' were always a political project, and the term
15
16 itself is no more than a political slogan intended to deny and denigrate alternatives.
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21 Snyder's interpretation falls short on both empirical and theoretical grounds. As
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23 Maria Todorova notes in her response to the article, Snyder produced 'a simple, not to say
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25 simplistic argument, wrapped up in an obfuscating scholarly garb'. In her view, he failed
26
27 to meet the fundamental criteria of what a public intellectual should strive to achieve:
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29 'What is ironic here is that here this public intellectual does not follow the usual way one
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31 is supposed to reach the public, namely, unwrapping a complex argument and translating
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33 it in a way the public can grasp it while at the same time retaining the complexity and
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35 providing a moral compass' (Todorova 2015: 709). She condemns his presentation of 'a
36
37 monolithic, almost anthropomorphic Ukraine, without any internal diversity' (Todorova
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39 2015: 713-14). It is precisely this monist vision of a monolithic Ukraine accompanied by
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41 monolithic representations of Europe and post-communist change that that have
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43 contributed to the crisis of our times.
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53 **Ukrainian monism**

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4 Ukrainian monism, like its European equivalent, is an intensely contradictory
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6 phenomenon. The contradictions themselves generate diversity and a societal pluralism
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8 that has proved fertile soil for a creative and vibrant national culture. Thus Ukrainian
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10 monism cannot be simply reduced to the integral nationalism espoused by such leading
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12 figures in the Ukrainian national movement as Dmytro Dontsov, although Dontsov's
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14 ideology is one of the most eloquent expressions of a radical Ukrainian monism. Drawing
15
16 the bitter lessons of the failure of Ukraine to establish and defend its independence in the
17
18 years of revolution and civil war between 1917 and 1920, Dontsov in the interwar years
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20 repudiated his earlier socialism and shaped a new radical Ukrainian nationalism. At the
21
22 heart of his model of state development is a necessary separation from Russia to allow
23
24 Ukraine to thrive as an autonomous political entity, accompanied by the need to overcome
25
26 the residue of affiliation with Poland or Austria. He was ready to embrace the use of
27
28 violence to achieve his model of national goals. Although he did not join the Organisation
29
30 of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), his ideas inspired them. The rejection of Russia and the
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32 complex interactions with its neighbours is taken as the foundational act of the new
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34 Ukraine.
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43 European monism is a model of development that is unable to engage with
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45 difference on the basis of equality. In Ukraine a homologous monism was present from
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47 the beginning of post-communist state development, but has taken increasingly radicalised
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49 forms in the 2000s. The 'Orange revolution' of autumn 2004 combined the struggle against
50
51 the apparent 'theft' of the presidential election with the resurgence of Ukrainian monism.
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53 Political reform and the escape from economic dependency, corruption and stymied
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55 development were linked with a more radical rethinking of Ukrainian state and nation
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4 building (Åslund and McFaul (eds) 2006; Wilson 2006). The travails of Viktor
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6 Yushchenko's presidency provoked a degree of disillusion, allowing the loser of the 2004
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8 contest, Viktor Yanukovich to make a spectacular and surprising comeback by
9
10 conclusively winning the February 2010 presidential election. Yanukovich's years in
11
12 power were marked by a deepening of the country's developmental contradictions, with a
13
14 degradation of the rule of law, the intensification of oligarch privileges, worsening
15
16 corruption and an incoherent foreign policy. The institutionalisation of the party system
17
18 was degraded by the rampant personalism, and only few gained a structured and enduring
19
20 status (Kudelia and Kuzio 2015). The system of 'oligarch democracy' was undermined by
21
22 the greed of Yanukovich's family and associates (Matuszak 2012), alienating other
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24 oligarchs and tempting them to support the Maidan insurgency from November 2013.
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31 The breakdown of February 2014, which saw Yanukovich flee for his life and the
32
33 installation of a radical nationalist government, appeared to offer the prospect of a
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35 revolutionary breakthrough. The Maidan revolution was predicated on the belief that the
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37 escape from the previous constraints of time (backwardness, corruption, neo-Sovietism)
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39 and space (dependence on Russia, entrapment in an indeterminate *intermarium*, the
40
41 bankruptcy of a 'multivector' foreign policy) could be broken by a radical move towards
42
43 Europe accompanied by an end to the compromises in national development. The monism
44
45 of the radicalised Ukrainian nationalism sought to strip the national enterprise from the
46
47 compromises and obfuscations of the past to allow the birth of a new nation true to its
48
49 fundamental self. This entailed not only adopting a monist version of Ukrainian history,
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51 but also rejecting core aspects of the Soviet experience (enunciated with a stark consistency
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53 by Motyl, for example 2015). The 'return to Europe' theme, the foundation myth of the
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4 East European revolutions in 1989, was revived and was assumed to embody a more
5 democratic and inclusive social order. At the level of governance, the EU does indeed
6
7 advance classic liberal postulates, but as argued above, EU integration is a form of monism
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9 since it excludes alternatives to itself. Not surprisingly, the EU and radical Ukrainian
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11 nationalists found common cause on this basis, radicalising both.
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16 At the heart of the Ukraine syndrome is the political weakness of the balancing
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18 pluralist forces. Ukraine has always had a remarkably diverse and vibrant political culture
19
20 of debate and contestation, but there has been a notable gulf between this societal pluralism
21
22 and the operative political system. Oligarch power was consolidated in the 1990s at the
23
24 meta-political level, and has remained entrenched ever since. The various revolutions and
25
26 overturns since then have been both an expression of resistance to oligarch power and a
27
28 manifestation of that power (Lane 2008). The paradox of the anti-oligarch Maidan
29
30 revolution bringing to power a leading oligarch in the form of Petro Poroshenko is clear.
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32 Ukrainian monist nationalism is now allied with a segment of the oligarch class to push
33
34 through the neoliberal economic reforms demanded by the IMF, the EU and other western
35
36 institutions. As Volodymyr Ishchenko notes, ‘left wing forces were not able to gain political
37
38 hegemony as a result of the mass mobilisations’ (Ishchenko 2016, 4). He rightly stresses
39
40 the complex nature of both the Maidan and Anti-Maidan movements, but the struggle was
41
42 not simply between ‘competing nationalism or rival imperialist power’ (Ishchenko 2016,
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44 4), but also about competing visions of the future. The revolution did not obviate intra-
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46 oligarch struggles, and indeed, in conditions of state weakness the gulf between the
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48 oligarch meta-political level and the grass-roots civic activism that has burgeoned since the
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50 Maidan revolution has widened. The creation of armed battalions only adds to the
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4 inflammatory mix, creating the conditions for another revolutionary explosion. So far this
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6 has been damped down by the revolutionary regime's focus on Russia's 'aggression', and
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8 in general on the externalisation of responsibility for the country's ills, but the
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10 constitutional debate over the nature of Ukrainian statehood remains on the agenda.
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14 The monism of the EU is challenged by various alternative spatial imaginaries,
15
16 notably the idea of 'greater Europe', as well as by the emergence of various greater
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18 Eurasian and Asian projects. The weakness of these pluralistic spatial configurations is that
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20 they lack a sustained ideational component, although the idea of a peaceful and multipolar
21
22 world order at their heart represents the foundations on which some sort of alternative order
23
24 could be developed. This raises the fundamental question of the forms of Ukrainian
25
26 political pluralism. In historical terms, the Russophone 'Malorussian' ('Little Russian')
27
28 tradition is sometimes posited as the alternative to hegemonic Russian projects and the
29
30 Ukrainian national movement, as well the more amorphous pan-Slavic and pan-Orthodox
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32 concepts (Kiryukhin 2015). In the post-Soviet era this was articulated as the idea of two
33
34 Ukraines, one pro-European and oriented towards modernisation, while the other was
35
36 nostalgic for the Soviet era and traditionalist in its political orientations (Ryabczuk 1992,
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38 a view that he later revised. See Fomina 2014). This stark contrast between development
39
40 and stagnation was one of the leitmotifs framing the Euromaidan revolution.
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48 At its root is a peculiarly Ukrainian inflection of postcolonial theory arguing that
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50 the continuing predominance of Russian language and culture reflects Ukraine's broader
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52 postcolonial condition (Sakwa 2015a). Mykola Riabchuk (2002: 48) describes the
53
54 Ukrainian Creole as one 'that belongs primarily to the descendants of Russian settlers as
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56 well as to those indigenes who had eventually assimilated into the dominant (Russophone)
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4 culture'. He advocates the gradual but consistent and determined Ukrainianisation. This
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6 would be a state-led programme to rectify the deformations of the past to enhance the status
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8 of the Ukrainian language and culture. In his view, 'The Ukrainian state will remain
9
10 dysfunctional as long as it remains Creole, that is, neither Ukrainian nor Russian but, rather,
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12 Soviet'. By contrast with this monist view, the pluralists would argue that the very
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14 proximity of the two cultures means that they have grown together and both are legitimate
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16 inheritors of the modern Ukrainian state.
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21 Pluralists would argue that the very idea of 'indigenes' and 'settlers' are reified
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23 concepts, and instead argue that nation building in post-communist Ukraine should
24
25 recognise the diversity of paths that its constituent peoples have taken to join the modern
26
27 state, and thus the ethnonym 'Ukrainian' should be primarily civic. This is the view of
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29 Mikhail Pogrebinsky, a scholar at the Kiev Centre of Political Research and Conflict
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31 Studies, who argues that 'The idea of Russians in Ukraine being a national minority similar
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33 to, for instance, Hungarians in Romania or Slovakia, Swedes in Finland, or even Russians
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35 in Estonia, is in fact profoundly fallacious', and he condemns western policies derived from
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37 this false premise: 'According to that idea, the Ukrainians, with the moral support of the
38
39 West, are trying to free themselves from the centuries-old Russian colonial oppression,
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41 while Moscow resists it in every way, and as soon as it "lets Ukraine go", European values
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43 will triumph in Ukraine' (Pogrebinskiy 2015: 91). Ukraine from this perspective is a state
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45 of all its peoples, and not the property of so-called 'indigenes'. This unresolved
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47 contradiction is at the heart of contemporary struggles.
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54 A further contradiction lies in the many manifestations of a pluralistic culture and
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56 society in Ukraine and the weakness of its coherent political representation. Kuchma and
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4 Yanukovych exploited the various cleavages, but failed programmatically to enunciate this
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6 putative political pluralism. Kuchma was a notoriously pragmatic president, in the worst
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8 sense of the word, and his foreign policy of ‘multivectorism’ lacked a sustained conceptual
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10 or strategic framework. This was a type of ‘weathervane’ multivectorism, which sought to
11
12 exploit the opportunities and contradictions of geopolitical contestation between Russia
13
14 and the Atlantic community. As for Yanukovych, his alleged ‘pro-Russian’ character was
15
16 at most situational. Like other oligarchs and his presidential predecessors, he sought to take
17
18 advantage of the opportunities opened up by the failure to create a pan-European
19
20 community. It is noteworthy that his last foreign visit as president was to China, where
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22 some multi-billion dollars projects, notably in agriculture, were in prospect. Equally, his
23
24 cynical exploitation of domestic cleavages and tensions can hardly be labelled pluralistic.
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26 They were the internal equivalents of foreign policy multivectorism, the opportunistic
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28 exploitation of diversity and difference rather than its consistent political expression. This
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30 was a doubly destructive multivectorism in which domestic cleavages were
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32 internationalised, and foreign policy dilemmas internalised.

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41 A more substantive political pluralism would give voice to the syncretic (although
42
43 not essentially artificial) character of the Ukrainian state – comprised of diverse territories
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45 and historical experiences and languages. Rather than fearing diversity in favour of a
46
47 monist articulation of Ukrainian identity, the pluralistic vision would embrace the many
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49 elements that constitute contemporary Ukraine. This inherent political pluralism had
50
51 widespread acceptance in pre-Maidan Ukraine. Even the most recalcitrant regions, notably
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53 the Donbass and Crimea, recognised their Ukrainian identity, as long as there was space
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55 for the articulation of difference. The Maidan revolution ruptured this pluralistic
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4 dimension, and provoked various forms of counter-mobilisation. This pluralism naturally
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6 had an external dimension. This was not opportunistic ‘weathervane’ multivectorism, but
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8 recognised the incipient multipolarity on the European continent to create a more grounded
9
10 form of engagement with the various centres of power. In the event, this (literally)
11
12 grounded or spatial form of multivectorism in Ukraine (unlike in Belarus and Kazakhstan)
13
14 proved still-born, in part because all sides recognised that Ukraine was a frontline state,
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16 and that compromises here could lead to enduring geopolitical disadvantage. The failure to
17
18 establish some sort of overarching European mode of reconciliation on a continental scale
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20 proved fatal for Ukraine. European monism proved destructive of Ukrainian pluralism.
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25 26 **Europe as Utopia**

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28 The Ukraine crisis fundamentally damaged the development of both the EU and Russia,
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30 and rendered what was already a deteriorating relationship into a conflictual one. Ukraine
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32 has become the nemesis of a certain vision of a pluralistic Europe, intensifying monism in
33
34 both the EU and Ukraine. The continent is once again being split by an iron curtain, this
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36 time stretching from Narva on the Baltic to Mariupol on the Sea of Azov (Sakwa 2015b,
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38 2016b). The EU’s reputation is on the line, having invested so much of its political capital
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40 into the uncertain project of Ukraine’s successful transformation into a dynamic and
41
42 competitive capitalist democracy. The militant exclusive language of the Maidan in the
43
44 name of Europe represented a repudiation of the fundamental values of the Europe to which
45
46 the movement aspired. The EU effectively endorsed the monism of the more radical part
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48 of the Maidan revolution, while the Atlantic community as a whole for obvious structural
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50 reasons favoured Russia’s security exclusion from Ukrainian space. The point is not that
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52 the EU may have been ill-advised to support Ukraine’s democratic transformation – on the
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4 contrary, this is the very essence of the EU's policy towards its neighbours – but that this
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6 has taken place in the absence of an effective larger regional mode of reconciliation with
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8 other integration projects and state concerns. The EU's monist conception of itself as the
9
10 only legitimate developmental actor in the European continent provoked deleterious and
11
12 negative consequences.
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16 By representing 'Europe' as Ukraine's future, the collapse of time and space was
17
18 complete. The abstract ideal of 'Europe' had long been posited as the future of the EU's
19
20 neighbours, with the spatial reality becoming a temporal ideal (Judt 2010). Already in
21
22 Mikheil Saakashvili's Georgia this ideal had become radicalised and lost its
23
24 transformational quality. Instead of seeking to combine the post-modern with the
25
26 normative transcendence of the logic of spatial conflict, 'Europe' became the ideology of
27
28 a militant liberation creed dressed up in the language of anti-colonial liberation, and thus
29
30 became the opposite of itself. The Maidan revolution in Ukraine took this a step further,
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32 with Europe becoming the focus of a new national identity in opposition to what was
33
34 constructed as neo-Soviet backwardness, corruption and national constriction. Traditional
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36 contestation over religion and class had by no means lost their traction, but now the over-
37
38 riding conflict was formulated as some sort of postcolonial struggle for national
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40 emancipation.
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48 The narrative of a young Ukraine being born out of the debris of the old and the
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50 corrupt predominated, with the notion of 'young reformers' being deployed, as it had been
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52 earlier in Russia under Boris Yeltsin. According to this discourse, Ukraine was now paying
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54 the price for its failure to conduct radical reforms earlier. The war was not only against
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56 Russian influence, but also against Ukraine's own past of maladministration and
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4 corruption. The whole propaganda machine of liberal internationalism was mobilised to
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6 shape a discursive framework that was reminiscent of the glad days of the early post-Soviet
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8 period. Ukraine was represented as a laggard now catching up with its western neighbours.
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10 As Tony Wood notes, ‘We have been here many times before: the imaginary clash between
11
12 past and future incarnations of a given country is an especially well-worn trope, in which
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14 each of the terms is orbited by its cluster of ideologically charged signifiers – dreary /
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16 corrupt / bureaucratic / oligarchic / Communist / Baathist vs. vibrant / modern /
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18 entrepreneurial / democratic, et cetera’ (Wood 2015: 122). In Ukraine, this ideologically
19
20 charged dualism is compounded by the geopolitical subtext, with Russia representing the
21
22 old and corrupt, and Europe all that is new and progressive.
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29 This was the pervasive motif of the Maidan revolution, which itself was provoked
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31 by Yanukovich’s decision to postpone signing the AA agreement with the EU. A thousand
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33 op eds in the *Washington Post* and articles in the *New York Review of Books* have
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35 propounded this simplified version of reality. Often this has taken the form of a civilisation
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37 discourse reminiscent of Samuel Huntington’s disquisitions on the subject, but now with
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39 the added edge of a deeply orientalist denigration of Russia and its works. Wood provides
40
41 a devastating critique of such simplifications:
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46 These binary oppositions are obviously facile, and based on some embarrassingly
47
48 wrongheaded assumptions: for instance, the idea that the EU could be said to stand
49
50 for democracy, or that a government headed by one of Ukraine’s richest men could
51
52 mark a rupture with the oligarchic past. Yet there is another, more unsettling
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54 contradiction at work here. In today’s conflict, Russia is held to stand for the ‘old’,
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56 corrupt, oligarchic order. But Putinism itself is ultimately the product of a post-
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58 Soviet country’s subjection to shock therapy and war – in other words, of precisely
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60 the combination of circumstances that are now supposed to bring about a ‘new’
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62 Ukraine (Wood 2015: 123).
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4 The monist inflection of the Maidan struggle for dignity represented a shift in discourse
5 and practices from the position of an anti-revolution – challenging the ontological basis of
6 the previous conduct of politics, towards a counter-revolution – a struggle for advantage
7 within the binary logic of the old system (Sakwa 2001). The Maidan ‘combined just social
8 grievances against the corrupt Yanukovych rule together with European illusions and anti-
9 Russian nationalism’ (Ishchenko 2016, 8). It soon ‘escalated to levels of violence that are
10 unprecedented in contemporary Ukrainian history’ (Ishchenko 2016, 7). The violence was
11 used to overthrow the Yanukovych regime and allowed strongly nationalistic forces ‘to
12 seize full control over the post-revolutionary Maidan regime’ (Hahn 2016). As always, the
13 means becomes the end.
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29 Ironically, the novelty and renewal promised by the Maidan revolution was taken
30 from the oldest playbook of European history. The concept of ‘Europe’ became the proxy
31 for the absence of a substantive ideology of emancipation. In this respect the ‘end of
32 history’ thesis has some traction, in that traditional socialist liberation rhetoric was
33 exhausted, although nationalist discourses were back with a vengeance. In the process, the
34 meaning of Europe became radically subverted. Instead of transcending the constraints of
35 time and space, the nationalist project concretised EU normativity in opposition to what
36 was defined as the imperial hegemon while idealising it as the path out of the harsh actually
37 existing conditions. From a post-modern project, the EU became subsumed into a harshly
38 modernist struggle for national self-affirmation. Equally, in global terms the EU effectively
39 became part of the Atlanticist geopolitical construct, which itself could not be more rooted
40 in modern (and pre-modern) conceptualisations of the defence of space.
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4 The Ukraine crisis catalysed processes that had long been in the making. It was
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6 symptomatic of the larger failure to establish both the institutions and processes that could
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8 have fostered trust and genuine interdependence between Russia and the EU. This is a
9
10 classic case of failed region building (cf. Slobodchikoff 2014). Instead, on a whole series
11
12 of issues, ranging from the energy relationship to neighbourhood policies, a pattern of
13
14 antagonistic dependency emerged. These were relationships that both Russia and the EU
15
16 needed but which did not lead to the creation of some sort of partnership community. The
17
18 Ukraine syndrome of the blocked political articulation of alternatives applied to Europe as
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20 a whole, where language and discourse systematically marginalised challenges to the order
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22 that patently tended towards the amplification of division and conflict. The suppression of
23
24 genuine dialogue only intensified the scapegoating mechanism, in both Ukraine and
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26 Europe, as the contradiction between stymied articulation and marginalised narratives grew
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28 increasingly wide.
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36 The crisis affects not only the geographical borderlands between the EU and Russia,
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38 but also the broader understanding of the contemporary European order. Temporal and
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40 spatial configurations have come into conflict. The monism of the EU encompasses both
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42 dimensions. In terms of space, engagement with non-EU countries has been monological
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44 and didactic. The engagement and learning has been entirely one way, with Europe's
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46 neighbours having to engage with the EU on the latter's terms. The logic of European
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48 integration and the wider Europe agenda is hostile to difference, and instead assumes a
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50 uniform process of conditionality and enlargement, however differentiated the actual
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52 integration mechanisms. This uniformity is the price to pay to take advantage of what the
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54 EU has to offer, above all an enormous market and a set of regulatory, political and human
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4 rights norms that offer the prospect for dynamic liberal capitalist development. It does not
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6 always work out that way, but that at least is the promise. The EU engages in a deeply
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8 transformative relationship with its neighbours, and the price to pay is acceptance of the
9
10 subaltern relationship of pupil to the EU's teacher.
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14 The relationship is qualitatively different from that between Hegel's Master and
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16 Slave, yet the inevitable hierarchy was too much for Russia to swallow, provoking the
17
18 severe deterioration of the relationship. Critics argue that Russia's refusal to engage in the
19
20 transformative process provoked the breakdown, whereas 'understanders' suggest that the
21
22 question was one of autonomy, both in terms of political sovereignty and of historical
23
24 experience. The member states may have resolved a range of historical problems within
25
26 the format of the EU, but these solutions could not automatically be applied to a country
27
28 as vast and complex as Russia – which had to find its own way to solve the problems of its
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30 history. In the end, incompatible understandings of the challenges posed by contemporary
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32 temporality shifted onto the plane of spatial confrontation in the borderlands.
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38 The failure to establish a dialogue of difference between the actually existing
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40 components of Europe provoked the breakdown of 2014. The ascription of a certain non-
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42 Europeanness to Russia – with Europe described in the monist terms outlined above –
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44 inhibited the instantiation of a dialogical relationship in which both the European self and
45
46 the Russian other could have engaged in a mutual learning process. The argument that there
47
48 is not much that the EU could learn from Russia is valid to the degree that learning is
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50 restricted to a narrow platform of normative and institutional interactions, whereas a
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52 broader learning agenda would include the problem of how multiple entities can create a
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54 fruitful relationship on the continent. For this a pan-continental greater Europe agenda
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4 would complement the Brussels-centric wider European agenda. The beginning of any
5 learning process is acknowledgment of the need to learn. Prozorov argues that this would
6 require the EU to accept the existence of a European political space broader than the space
7 integrated (in whatever manner) by the EU, ‘a space in which the EU interacts as an
8 “international”, rather than a “domestic” actor with other European actors, which, unlike
9 the EU, are sovereign states, but no less equal to the EU in the common space of pluralistic
10 interaction’ (Prozorov 2016: 183). In his view, this would shift the basis of relations away
11 from Russia’s ‘problematic status’ in the framework of European integration towards what
12 he terms a project of ‘common European pluralism’, where the ‘logic of common European
13 pluralism seeks to maintain Europe as a space of pluralistic interaction, in which
14 commonality is ensured by the mutual recognition of legitimate difference and the
15 relaxation of the rigid delimitation of ontological identities’ (Prozorov 2016: 184). This
16 would be a common European home with many rooms but still recognisable as a single
17 community.

38 **Conclusion**

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40 Russia and Europe no longer share a common *topos* or *logos*. Kissinger (2016) notes that
41 ‘discussions [between Russia and the West] have taken place outside an agreed strategic
42 framework’. He calls for Ukraine ‘to be embedded in the structure of European and
43 international security architecture in such a way that it serves as a bridge between Russia
44 and the West, rather than as an outpost of either side’. On both sides, the internal
45 contradictions and external antagonisms were never resolved, and it was these which in the
46 end precipitated the global Ukrainian and European crisis. A contradiction, unlike an
47 antinomy, is capable of resolution, and it is in that sense that the term is applied here. The
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4 redefinition of both norms and space in pluralistic terms offers just such a resolution.
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7 However, for this to be achieved both the EU and Ukraine will have to change their
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9 strategies. The EU faces numerous internal and external crises, to the degree that its very
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11 survival is in question, yet perhaps the fundamental question that has never been adequately
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13 addressed is the vision of continental order that it could envisage that includes Russia as
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15 an equal and autonomous entity. Equally, building Ukrainian statehood on the worst monist
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17 postulate of enduring separation and conflict with Russia is hardly likely to achieve either
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19 prosperity or peace for the tortured country.
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24 The scapegoating of Russia is hardly conducive to the resolution of the internal
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26 contradictions within both the EU and Ukraine. Russia actions are argued to have to have
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28 created the conditions for the internal consolidation of Ukraine that will finally allow
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30 reforms of society and the economy (Lough and Solonenko 2016). Instead, an unholy
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32 alliance has formed between the EU and the nationalist regime in Kiev, a negative
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34 consensus that negates the liberal pluralism was once associated with European integration.
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36 The greater European project, to which the Putinite elite remains committed, is not about
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38 spheres of influence but the creation of conditions where such a dynamic can be
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40 transcended. Discussion of these issues has always carried a powerful antagonistic charge,
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42 but after 2013 assumed a toxic polarised quality that inhibits dispassionate analysis. This
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44 has now become part of the Ukraine syndrome, which allows the contradictions to become
45
46 the subject of political speculation and the debased currency of political exchange. All of
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48 Ukraine's post-communist leaders have failed to come up with strategies for the resolution
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50 of contradictions, and instead with varying degrees of incompetence have exploited them
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52 for short-term political gain. On the European level, the EU's inability to devise a mode of
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4 reconciliation with other projections of European space undermines its own normativity.
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7 The monism of Europe and Ukraine reinforce each other and further marginalises more
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9 pluralistic representations of both norms and space.
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