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Constructing the Historical Past, Shaping Contemporary Politics

The Role of Historical Discourses for the Construction of National Identity and Formulation of
Foreign Policy in Ukraine

Kurzzusammenfassung

Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit den aktuellen Geschichtsdiskursen in der Ukraine, ihren Einfluss auf den Nationsbildungsprozess sowie auf die ukrainische Politik, insbesondere auf die Außenpolitik. Basierend auf der Theorie des Konstruktivismus nach Hobsbawm werden aktuelle, wissenschaftliche und öffentliche Diskurse zu verschiedenen Perioden und Ereignissen und ihr Einfluss auf die ukrainische Nationalidentität analysiert. Dabei lässt sich feststellen, dass es sich kein einheitliches geschichtliches Gedächtnis in der Ukraine entwickelt hat. Die Folge war, dass sich auch keine einheitliche nationale Identität in der Ukraine gebildet hat. Die Unterschiede in den geschichtlichen Narrativen werden auch politisch unterschiedlich ausgelegt und beeinflussen die Politik, sowie außenpolitischen Beziehungen des Landes. Im politischen Diskurs lässt sich dabei ein pro-westliches und ein pro-russisches Narrativ feststellen. Ein Vergleich der ukrainischen Präsidentschaften seit 1991, macht die Instrumentalisierung unterschiedlicher geschichtlicher Narrative deutlich und zeigt, dass diese mit der Außenpolitik des Landes korreliert. Darüber hinaus, kann man beobachten, dass geschichtliche Diskurse auch ungewollte Auswirkungen auf die Außenpolitik des Landes haben können. Besonders relevant sind hierbei die Beziehungen der Ukraine zu Russland sowie Polen.

Abstract

This thesis analyses the importance of the interpretation of historical narratives for nation-building in Ukraine and its impact on foreign policy. Building on the constructivist approach of Eric Hobsbawm and Miroslav Hroch, it focuses on the narratives of different “key moments” in Ukraine’s history that are interpreted to define Ukraine’s national identity and serve as legitimation for its foreign policy. As the analysis of the discourses shows, different narratives exist in Ukraine, created different national identities. In politics, mainly two different narratives are used to legitimize the presidents: a pro-Western nationalist narrative and a rather pro-Russian narrative. By comparing the presidencies of Ukraine since 1991, parallels between the dominant historical narrative and the country’s foreign policy approach can be observed. This is particularly the case in the relations with Russia and Poland. In the case of Poland, it can furthermore be noticed that discourse of historical events can unintentionally influence relations with countries.

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Introduction

Ukraine's foreign policy is currently dominated by the strategic approach of European and Atlantic integration, turning away from Russia, which has played for a long time the major role as international partner for the young country that became independent in 1991. These different approaches in foreign policy certainly follow different strategic interests. But what serves as legitimation for "national interest" and how is it influenced by the perception of national history? This thesis aspires to analyse the influence of different historical discourses on the building of national identity in contemporary Ukraine and how this identity, in its turn, interacts with the country's foreign policy. Since foreign policy is based on the perception of the own nation and its distinction to "the other", ideas and concepts of national identity and nationalism play an important role in influencing foreign policy. Nationalism can be based on different ideologies and these ideologies can have innumerable variations and have a dialectic relationship to its foreign policy that can change over time (Prizel 1998, 33). However, the process of forming a national identity can produce different, sometimes contradictory results and is influenced by various factors. It is the question of the distinction from other nations that asserts a uniqueness, often connected with a sense of superiority to a nation, which is important for national identity. To be able to make this distinction, contact with other nations is inevitable. This contact can mean single events like battles or hundreds of years of contact with "the other" which form national identity of a nation (Prizel 1998, 16-17). In that sense, historiography is one of the most important factors that can influence national identity (Korostelina 2013, 307) and consequently its foreign policy. As Nordberg argued, in case of Ukraine, national identity can explain, for example, its relations to the Commonwealth of Independent states (CIS) in its trade, nuclear or energy policy (Nordberg 1997, 611). Self-identification is especially crucial in the case of Ukraine in its relations with Russia (Kappeler 2014, 111). Therefore, national narratives matter in the sense that they allow national movements to justify their struggle for independence. This kind of justifying narrative seems especially important for countries which were for a long time controlled by a foreign country, as it is the case in Ukraine. Many scholars studying on the topic of Ukraine are of the opinion that the interpretation of history is not only an expression of scientific views, but a justification for political viewpoints of their respective leaders. Ukrainian history and particularly its distinction from Russian history is a prominent example of this justification (Subtelny 2011, 20).

This thesis aims to identify the role of historiography and historical narratives for Ukraine's national identity in a first step and in a second step its influence on foreign policy. It is an

interdisciplinary piece of research that combines approaches of history and political science.

Although, the question of how history of Ukraine was constructed and how it influenced national identity has attracted much attention of scholars in the recent years, it remains an understudied issue. Particularly a comparative analysis of historical discourses used during various Ukrainian presidencies and their influence on foreign policy does not exist. This thesis will therefore not only describe the different discourses of history, but also aims to analyse their instrumentalization in foreign policy. Since national identity is based on the distinction to the foreign “other”, it is the imagined or real difference to “the other” that shapes its national foreign policy. On the other hand, foreign policy can also be a means of creating a national identity (like in the case of Austria’s neutrality). Foreign policy and national identity appear therefore to have a dialectical relationship.

What makes the question of national identity in Ukraine so special is its establishment as “a-historic” or “non-historical” nation. Ukraine society apparently failed in developing a common Ukrainian identity. The absence of an indigenous identity and elite, resulted in the failure of identifying the differences to other nations (Prizel 1998, 301-303).

“Ukraine’s national identity differs fundamentally from that of either Poland or Russia. Both of these neighbours and former colonial masters were endowed with a conscious political elite, a distinct language, and a clear collective memory of nationhood. These elements, which enabled them to take their right to statehood for granted, were absent in Ukraine.” (Prizel 1998, 301)

The hypothesis postulated in this thesis is that dominant national discourses create national identity in Ukraine and influence foreign relations with other countries. Summarized, the central question of this thesis is:

How are historical discourses of Ukraine reflected in its foreign relations?

The twostep approach of this thesis can be expressed in two sub-questions: “How are historical discourses influencing the national identity of Ukraine?”, and “How is Ukrainian national identity reflected in its foreign policy?” This subdivision of the research question illustrates the need for an interdisciplinary approach consisting of history and political science.

It is noteworthy that nation-building is complicated and often very long process. The challenge to build a Ukrainian nation from the Soviet Republic in 1991 was of course not only restricted to the question of historical discourses. Language, cultural, religious, ethnical and at the very

beginning of the existence of the state of Ukraine, the definition of its territorial boundaries were important. Moreover, the state institutions had to be built and the economic crisis to be overcome. Looking at the economic data from the 1990s, it is safe to say that the economic reform failed dramatically resulting in a deep depression until 2000 (Fritz 2007, 137). All these issues are of course relevant factors for political decision making and most of them intermingled with the question of a national historical narrative; however, to include all these nation-building factors would go far beyond the scope of this thesis.

Corresponding to the interdisciplinary approach of this thesis, it is divided into three chapters. The first chapter will describe the theoretical background, that underpins the main hypothesis of this thesis. It describes the theoretical approach from the perspective of constructivism as defined by the British historian Eric Hobsbawm and Miroslav Hroch. The first chapter will furthermore provide the methodological approach.

The second chapter will analyse the historical discourses competing in Ukrainian national identity. It will then analyse different discourses of Ukrainian history taking starting from the national narrative of Hrushevskiy and the work following his approach. Then, it will give an overview of Soviet historiography on Ukraine, before focusing on the discourses in independent Ukraine, which were much influenced by the former narratives. Furthermore, it is vital to take into account the influence of Ukrainian Diaspora and Western works on Ukrainian history. Since this thesis analyses the political instrumentalization of historical discourses, it is moreover essential to distinguish between academic history and official narratives, which often have a political agenda. The work focuses on specific events and periods in Ukrainian history, which have important influence on Ukrainian nation-building after its independence. After giving a general overview of historical discourses in and outside Ukraine, it will therefore concentrate on the following periods in greater detail. Firstly, it will deal with the Kievan Rus', since it serves on the one hand as the basis of a thousand-year old historical Ukrainian continuum, while its common heritage with Russia is disputed. In the second subchapter, the role Cossacks will be considered, since they are often seen as one of the most important periods for nation-building and national self-identification, however were not exclusively Ukrainian are examined. Then, the periods in which the territory of contemporary Ukraine was split between the Russian Tsarist Empire and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This period is often used on the one hand to explain the different more Western European character of today's Ukraine, while serves on the other hand as basis for an anti-Russian narrative in which Tsarist Russia starts russification and the suppression of Ukrainian culture. In the following subchapter, the split between the

“Western” Austrian-Hungarian part of Ukraine and the Russian part of Ukraine is analysed, which also often serves as explanation for the local differences in Ukraine itself and for the generally asserted Western orientation of independent Ukraine. The subsequent subchapters deal with discourses regarding the short period of Ukrainian independence and the turbulent years of revolution as well as the formation of nationalist groups and their role during the Second World War, which remains one of the main historical periods which are until today differently interpreted. One further subchapter is dedicated to the discourses on Stalinism in Ukraine and *Holodomor*, the tragic famine in Ukraine which is characterized by official Ukrainian narrative as genocide and serves as one of the founding myths of independent Ukraine. The last subchapter is dealing with historical narratives and examines the discourses on Soviet Ukraine after the Second World War. The analysis of these discourses is conducted by taking into account their repercussions in nation-building processes in Ukraine after 1991 and particularly with a view on foreign policy implications the country.

The third chapter aims to find out, how the dominant discourse is used in politics of the different governments, since Ukraine's independence and examines its influence on Ukraine's foreign policy. In order to analyse historical discourses, it will focus on debated events in the discourses mainly of the twentieth century, but will also take into account diverging discourses of Ukrainian history starting from the Kievan Rus. The effect of historical discourses on Ukraine's relations with other countries are then further analysed in the third part of this work. To measure the impact of official discourses, the chapter is divided into five subchapters, each dealing with the historical policies of the five presidents and their administration as well as their foreign policy approach. Differences between the official historical narratives and the different foreign policy approaches between the presidents are underlined by the reciprocal influence of both areas. Apart from the examination of parallels, this thesis will try to find concrete examples where different historical discourses have influence on foreign policy and vice versa. Since relations with some countries are more historically and ideologically charged than others, this work will examine especially the relations with Russia and “Western Europe”, which basically means the European Union and Poland. In its conclusion, this thesis will then try to combine the results of the second and the third chapter to assess the mutual impact of historical discourse and Ukrainian foreign policy.

Chapter 1: Theoretical framework

This thesis will analyse various versions of national ideology and will aim to demonstrate how these ideologies are used to legitimize foreign policy. In order to analyse the question of national identity, the terms nation and nationalism have to be defined. Therefore, the theoretical background of the present research will be built on the theory of constructivism. Contrary to the classical realist theories, constructivism suggests that relations between states are historically and socially constructed, rather than purely based on interests and power. History is a powerful tool to for constructing these relations. Many polities rely, for example, on a mythology to authorize their action. Foreign policy is one means of confirm the mythology of the elite that uses it. As Mark von Hagen (1995, 664) observed, political leaders of Ukraine, in trying to legitimize their power, pressured academic history to create an own Ukrainian history.

Prizel identified five different types of state mythology with different ideological background to legitimize foreign policy. For some states, this mythology is the own political system and its institutions that represent universal values, for example the values of enlightenment. This is the case in the United States or Great Britain. Consequently, foreign policy of this type is based on “legalistic and endowed with a sense of mission.” (Prizel 1998, 20). A typical example of this type of foreign policy is the idealism of US-President Woodrow Wilson. Also, UK’s foreign policy in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was based on the rule of law in its colonies and what was called the “white man’s burden” to cultivate the world. This was ideologically founded in the belief of superiority of British institutions. The second version of nationalist ideology is defined by culture. France’s self-perception is not based on its institutions or ethnicity, but on a common French culture that provides the strong centralized state with legitimacy. Another form of nationalism can be seen in the former colonies of Africa. National identity is a result of resistance against the colonial powers and an intermediary group that built the elite of the newly independent states. This can also be observed in India (Prizel 1998, 20-21). Moreover, in the case of Ukraine, some scholars argue that the country was a kind of colony for Russia. In an Article of Petro Vol’vach in 1993, the author suggests that all contemporary problems of Ukraine can be traced back to the rule of the Russian and later Soviet Empire. He argues that the long “enslavement” of Ukrainians under Russian rule is the reason for the lack of national identity in independent Ukraine. He presents the Russian “enslavement” as a connected series of events starting from the sixteenth century until late twentieth century, accusing Russia of being inheritably expansionist (Marples 2007, 2-3).

The fourth type of nationalist identity can be derived from religious legitimacy. Historically, Tsarist Russia but also the Habsburg empire can be characterized as this type. A contemporary example is Iran. A fifth type of nationalism is ideologically based on resentment from foreign domination. This can be seen in various South American countries where the indigenous or African heritage is emphasized. Similarly, in Eastern European countries, resenting the marginalization as “periphery” of Europe is the basis for the ideological framework of national identity. It is built on the idea that a genuine nation has to shake of foreign domination. Eastern European nationalism is therefore based on ideology of ancestry, kinship of blood and a common language with a mythical link between blood and soil that stresses romanticized historical myths. This idea is dominated by the rejection of “the other”. The real and perceived pressure from other nations resulted in a foreign policy the legitimized the elite in goals that go beyond the purely economic and security interest. For Johann Gottfried von Herder, the nineteenth century father of ethno-nationalism, this blood and soil idea of nationalism excluded for example the Jewish population from the idea of national identity in Eastern Europe (Prizel 1998, 24-33).

Constructivism has become one of the most common theoretical concepts to analyse post-Soviet nationalism and identities (Arnold 2014, 484). This thesis will also analyse the constructivist idea of national identity and Ukraine’s foreign relations based on the works of Eric J. Hobsbawm and Miroslav Hroch. The theory is based on the assumption that the world we perceive is not fixed but conditional. For the historian Hobsbawm, nationalism is characterized by a historical-genealogical definition. A nation is not something that exists per se, but an invention, which is constructed retrospectively to legitimize power. Constructed myths and “invented traditions” define the constitutive elements of a nation. He also emphasizes the distinction between state and nation. It is the state that creates a nation to legitimize its existence. If you separate the idea of nation from the state, its content becomes vague. If nation and state are not congruent, national aspirations will threaten the state (Eser 2011, 60-67). Hobsbawm regards a nation not as an unchanging entity, but only suitable for a particular historical period, defined by a certain territory (Hobsbawm 1990, 9). For that reason, a nation must be created if not already existent for a period and a state. This ideological creation to legitimize a government has not to come exclusively from above. A popular nationalist sentiment, especially among a potential nation’s middle class, is essential to successfully build a nation (Hobsbawm 1990, 92). Building on Anderson’s idea of an “imagined community”, Hobsbawm developed the idea of “protonationalism”, which defines a collective sense of identification, based on national myths and imagined traditions. As a historian, Hobsbawm

identified history as the source for nationalist ideologies that can be invented if not suitable for the ideology of a nation. The created myths are important to define a group of people as a nation and to set oneself apart from “the other” as something different (or better). Hobsbawm’s own anti-nationalist view was often criticized. Miroslav Hroch argued that Hobsbawm, in rejecting nationalist ideology, remains ideologically a traditional internationalist (Stich 2011, 29-40; Hobsbawm 1990, 46). Hroch, claimed that he provided a more balanced idea of nation. He provided a model of three phases of nation-building. Phase A characterizes the emergence of a nation, dominated by the intelligentsia which collects information on history, language and customs of a “non-dominant” ethnic group. This intelligentsia builds the foundation of the new national group. The transition to phase B is characterized by the realization that the concept of a nation as identification of an ethnic group shows deficits. In phase B political agitation tries to compensate this deficit. The social basis for the nation is expanded to the lower and sometimes higher social classes. When national identity has gained enough support phase C starts. National elites emerge and peasants and workers are integrated into the national community. At the end of the third phase a national idea has reached the characteristics of a “normal nation” and could aspire autonomy or national sovereignty. Hroch stresses the role of historical conditions that might go back until medieval times, which enable a nation to emerge. For Hroch, the historical prelude cannot be reduced to the mere invention of myths and customs. A nation is the product of a long and complicated historical development (Eser 2011, 60-67). However, as Wilson (2000, 39) argues, in the context of Ukraine that even a nation which has a mythologised past, is still a nation. And Hobsbawm adds that only few nations underwent the classical process of “nation-building” (Hobsbawm 1990, 42) In his view there are three criteria that allowed people to define themselves as a nation: a historic association with a current state, the existence of a long-standing cultural elite and a “capacity for conquest” (Hobsbawm 1990, 37-38).

This thesis will discuss the importance of historical narratives for nation-building in Ukraine. It will therefore focus on the narratives of different “key moments” in Ukraine’s history that are interpreted to define Ukraine’s national identity and serve as legitimation for its foreign policy. What makes the analysis of Ukraine’s national identity so unique, is the fact that its national independence was not reached through a movement that underwent the different phases of Hroch, but that the country was rather pushed into independence, as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union. When becoming independent in 1991, the national identity of Ukraine had to be reinvented. As most authors agree, the country’s independence was a surprise and came rather unexpected as already the title Wilsons book “Ukraine. Unexpected Nation” (2000)

suggests (Yekelchuk 2007, 193). When trying to find a national identity, historiographers were facing the challenge to identify a coherent national history. Today's perception of Ukraine's history discourses is often that of a zero-sum game, where one historic narrative has to prevail over the others (Korostelina 2013, 313). Prizel observed a certain continuity in Ukrainian elites, despite the domination of foreign powers over history, and sees that the absence of a national identity in the permanent subordination under different powers. He considers different historical experiences, which are often even contradictory, as cause for a national identity that led to a "murky development" of a foreign policy agenda, defending a poorly defined "national interest" (Prizel 1998, 340). Since, every individual has a different historic memory and perception of national history, a society's "collective memory" has therefore inevitably various, often even contradictory aspects. For one collective memory, a dominant discourse must prevail (Prizel 1998, 14). As Hobsbawm stated, the dominant interpretation legitimizes the state as a nation, which is important for its relations in the international sphere. For Ukrainian society, history also plays an important role for its self-perception. However, as argued above, there is no common concept of its history, but several competing identities. In Ukraine, like in Belarus, a collective memory and therefore a national idea remained fragmented. Due to the process of nationalization of its own history, after the independence in 1991, the theory of constructivism seems therefore appropriate for this thesis. Although terms like historical discourse, deconstruction and "imaged communities" were introduced comparatively late into Ukraine historiography (Portnov 2011, 30), constructivism has become increasingly popular among many Ukrainian historians themselves. Jaroslav Hrytsak, Oksana Zabuzhko, Georgiy Kasianov and Mykola Riabchuk, are working with the concepts of Hroch, Hobsbawm, Geller and Anderson (Portnov 2011, 32).

As Yekelchuk (2016) suggests in his work on Russian-Ukrainian Relations in the Soviet historical imagination, nations are always imagined through their specific cultural and social practices of their societies. Ukraine's different interpretations of traumatic historical events are not only different but provoke even conflict: victimization, threatening entities (Poland, Russia), *Holodomor*, National-Socialism and the question of collaboration with the forces of the Third Reich are interpreted so differently (Korostelina 2013, 299) that a common memory could not evolve. Additionally, Eastern European nationalism was strongly influenced by the Soviet era. While states between Russia and Germany had a feeling of inferiority to the West before the Second World War, there was a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis the USSR after the War until the breakdown of the Soviet Union. From the end of the Cold War the feeling of inferiority to the West re-emerged. The end of the communist systems required a redefinition of national identity

in particular for the states that were established from Soviet republics (Prizel 1998, 28). Opposing interpretations and narratives of history might lead therefore to a different foreign policy behaviour.

To analyse historical narratives, it is necessary to understand that historical information is passed on via language. This can have either an oral or written form. Discourse analysis is seen as anti-essentialist perspective on different matters such as language, identity or society. It assumes that texts do not describe the reality but rather construct an interpretation of reality. Every use of language is therefore not a neutral act, but implies an opinion (Park 2008, 393-395). This does not imply the denial of empirical facts, but the existence of a metaphysical truth. Historical discourse analysis can therefore be described as a poststructuralist approach to reading and writing history. Its aim is not to make new findings but to expose history as such, by questioning the historian's role as an objective reconstructionist of history. It is therefore a form of critical social analysis, whose roots can be found in the works of Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida. The historical discourse analysis will not focus on the linguistic aspects. The historian stands not outside the discourse but gives (implicitly) his opinion through his interpretation of the truth. Consequently, every assumption that is made has to be challenged, to uncover the process of writing history. Foucault's approach works against the assumption that sees the past in terms of the present and a finalism that describes past events as the genesis of the present. The historical discourse approach provides a set of methodologies that can vary depending on the specific analytical method (Park 2008, 393-395). In this thesis, the method of close reading will be applied to secondary literature such as historiographies or research articles on historical discourses to analyse the debated narratives of moments and periods in Ukrainian history that seem decisive for its national identity. To analyse the effects on Ukraine's foreign policy however, also primary literature such as surveys, official documents, statements and speeches by politicians will be taken into account.

The aim of the thesis is not to discuss historical events in depth, but rather give an overview of their various interpretations by different writers from Ukraine, of the Diaspora or foreign authors. In the analysis of the influence of history on national identity, it will rely on works by Ukrainian authors as well as Western scholars for example Kappeler, Kasyanov, Korostelina, Kuzio, Prizel, Yekelchuk and Wilson, or authors like Marples or Subtelny. Also, the works of Zenon Kohut or Jaroslav Hrytsak, an influential Western Ukrainian historian, but also Mykola Riabchuk who contributed with his works approaches that try to analyse the historical discourses in

Ukraine. Moreover, the works of Janmaat and his analysis of Ukrainian history textbooks are an important source for this thesis.

Chapter 2: Historical Discourses and their Impact on Ukrainian National Identity

This chapter analyses in its first part different historiographic approaches on Ukraine and how they changed over time, taking into account the influence of Ukrainian Diaspora, and the differences between academic and official history. It will then turn to the concept of nation building and describe the effects, historical narratives have on national identity, before examining specific periods in greater detail.

An own Ukrainian historiography started in the early nineteenth century which began to stress the idea of an own Ukrainian history. Dmitrii Bantysh-Kamenskii (1822) and Mykola Markevych (1842-43) produced the first works on Ukraine dealing with the Zaporozhian Cossacks in Ukrainian history. Furthermore, the work *Istoriia Rusov* (1846) is considered to be one of the first books dealing with Ukraine as own country deriving from Kievan Rus' and not as mere regions of Poland or Russia. The real start of Ukrainian national historical narrative, however, is associated with the Mykhailo Hrushevskyy, Ukrainian politician and historian, who is seen as the first author to seriously challenge the Russian narrative of Ukrainian history (Magocsi 2010, 19-21). His work can be considered as the start of the first phase of national Ukrainian history. The second started during the 1980s and lasts until now (Kasyanov 2009, 7). However, Ukrainian history played during Soviet Union, but also in Post-Soviet states an important role to form an identity as well as for indoctrination. In Soviet Union, Russia and Ukraine officially had a common history and memory (Kappeler 2014, 212). To achieve a common history, official Soviet historiography attempted to delete the "useless" history in a process that Hrytsak calls "Amnesia" (Hrytsak 2011, 405). Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian history should become one common Soviet history. Consequently, all historical figures that could be relevant for a Ukrainian national identity were removed from historical memory. A policy which is described by Hrytsak as eventual russification of history (Hrytsak 2011, 405). Although Soviet historiography still allowed for an own Ukrainian narrative, it was seen only as a temporary phenomenon, while in the long run all Slav people would merge into the "*homo sovieticus*" (Kuzio 2007, 303). The history taught in Ukrainian schools was the history of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, which was embedded in the context of the general Soviet history.

The second phase of Ukrainian historical nationalization started already before its independence in 1986, when political activists started to increasingly challenge the official Soviet history. This unfolded particularly in historical periods that were taboo for the Soviet history, for example Stalinism. Revision of historical events became popular in public debates and can be regarded as the Soviet attempt to give Socialism a “human face”, but ended in a movement of democratic forces, seeking to give Ukraine its own historical and cultural identity. One week after Ukraine’s sovereignty, the communist leadership in Kiev, in further seeking independence from Moscow, approved a programme for developing national history research and teaching (Kasyanov 2010, 37). Only the weakening of state control in the course of Gorbachev’s reform programme, allowed for a revitalization of a Ukrainian historical narrative. A survey of 1991 showed that former central figures of Soviet history like Lenin, Stalin or Skrypnyk were slowly replaced by national Ukrainian heroes like Bandera, Mazepa or Hrushevskiy (Hrytsak 2011, 406).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the foundation of the newly independent states of the former Soviet Republics, official history experienced a nationalization which meant a separation from previously shared and common history (Kasyanov 2010, 37). New Ukrainian historical discourses started to become apparent. During the early 1990s also Western scholars started to publish works on Ukrainian history. Among the most prominent works is probably Andrew Wilson’s “The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation”, or the work of Andreas Kappeler: *Die Ukraine: Prozesse der Nationsbildung*. Pyrah also observed a new tendency to have more political science related works on Ukrainian history than purely historical (Pyrah 2014, 139). The Soviet term of “class” was replaced by “nation” as basic category for history. In the early 1990s a debate about national history and nation-building divided Ukrainian historians into two groups, which Portnov (2011, 30-31) describes as the primordialists and modernists. The former was a group of historians like Jaroslav Isajevych or Jaroslav Dashkevych, which saw the early formation of a Ukrainian nation already in medieval times, emphasizing the continuity during different stages of its history. They referred to the independence of Ukraine as “rebirth” of the nation. The “modernists” scrutinized the old historiographic traditions and tried to deconstruct the concept of Ukrainian nation. They emphasized the difference between pre-modern history and the modern nation-state, which included all social groups and not only an intellectual elite. Some historians like Lysjak-Rudnyc’kyj spoke of a “rift” in Ukrainian history and of two “national rebirths” which were following the disruptions of the Union of Lublin 1569 and the liquidation of the Cossacks in the eighteenth century. Some authors were considered between the two groups. Their approach was more oriented on “Western” historiography, trying to find the “idea

of Ukraine". It was Kasyanov, who proposed the term "nation-building" to replace ideological connoted terms like "national rebirth". Constructivist ideas and terminology were assumed, while for many historians the Marxist component of their work remained influential in their work. However, for many historians, constructivism offered new approaches and the possibility to address old research problems. Paul Robert Magocsi, interpreted Ukrainian history until the first World War as a history of constant conflict of different structures of cultures, social groups or national identities, which had a destructive as well as creative influence on it. John Paul Himka worked on different varieties of nation-building, for example for Galicia, which could have, according to him, ended up in being assimilated by Poland, integrated into the common Russian idea, form an own Galician nation, or a part of the Ukrainian nation (Portnov 2011, 30-33).

For a reassessment of Ukrainian national history, the Soviet period was examined, particularly the famine of 1932-33 in Ukrainian history called *Holodomor*, the role of the Ukrainian nationalist movements like UPA and the Second World War were important for a nationalized historical narrative. Prominent historical figures were rehabilitated such as Mykahailo Hrushevskyyi, who became himself an academic hero, as pre-revolutionary intellectual paving the way for a nationalized Ukrainian history (Hrushevskyyi is today depicted on the 50 Hryvni note) (Kasyanov 2010, 37-38; Kasyanov 2009, 14). The construction of a European identity and the country as a nation with "European character" was one of the main features of the emerging national Ukrainian historiography (Kasyanov 2009, 19).

Nationalization of Ukrainian history included the abolition of ideological and conception Soviet barriers (Kasyanov 2009, 9). This nationalization inevitably meant the creation of an "own" history of Ukraine. The size and geopolitical relevance of the new country also contributed to a more intense analysis of Ukrainian history. A younger generation of historians broke with the Soviet historical methodology and dealt with Western methods of historiography. This was also due to an internationalization of Ukrainian historiography. Although initially dominated by Ukrainian Diaspora in Canada and the U.S., an increasing number scientific contributions are now published in Germany, the United Kingdom or Italy. Moreover, some Ukrainian historians started to scrutinize nationalized historical narratives in Post-Soviet Ukraine (Subtelny 2011, 19-23). Especially historiography of the Diaspora and early works of Ukrainian historiography after 1991 were strongly influenced by Hrushevskyyi's work of the early twentieth century. Its mix of romanticism and positivism is often referred to as populist historiography or Hrushevskyyi school. This approach was later expanded by the statist school, stressing the role of the elites and the state in nation-building. Both schools have teleological approach of Ukrainian history, with the goal of the formation of the Ukrainian nation. History is presented as a centuries-old struggle for

national independence. Ukrainian nation is a constantly existent community which were mostly suppressed by foreign powers. A continuum starting from Kievan Rus' to modern Ukraine is drawn, including the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, to the Cossacks and the Hetmanate, the "Ukrainian revolution" in 1917 and the eventual independence in 1991, when a "thousand-year old non-historic nation" turns into a "historic" one. According to this narrative, Ukraine always constituted a transcendent nation, even when the state of Ukraine did not exist per se. This construction of nation leads to the question of ethnicity. A central feature of a national historiography is the identification of "Ukraine people". The criteria to constitute the Ukrainian nation can be culturally, linguistically or ethnically. Many nationalistic narratives claim that Ukrainian nation has an ethnic exclusivity. This excluding narrative is politically difficult to address or impose, simply because large part of Ukrainian population is not considered, or does not consider themselves as ethnic Ukrainians (Kasyanov 11-19, 2009; Marples 2007, 6-8). It is especially the Ukrainian Diaspora which has preserved this ethnically constructed nationalist mythology (Yekelchuk 2015, 122). Contrary to this approach, Mark von Hagen proposed to see Ukrainian history in the broader context of Eastern European history (Mark von Hagen 1995, 658-659). Overall it is safe to say that contributions from abroad but particularly the Ukrainian Diaspora played an important role for nation-building and the historical discourses connected with it (Golczewski 2011, 322).

In contrast to this ethnic concept of the Ukrainian nation, there is a narrative which focuses on a "civic" definition of nation. Since Ukraine is a multi-faceted country, with different ethnics (almost 20% of the Ukrainian population are not ethnic Ukrainians), languages, cultures and religions, the question of whether a multi-ethnic state can even build a nation was posed by Stephen Shulman (2006). Generally, authors divide Ukrainian population into three groups: ethnic Ukrainians, ethnic Russian and ethnic Ukrainians but russophone population (Andrej Kurkow 2017). However, as Anton Shekhovtsov argued, there is hardly any possibility to make an ethnic distinction between Ukrainians and Russians (Shekhovtsov 2017). Many Russian authors in the nineteenth century like Mikhail D. Pogodin build their pan-Slavist theory on the ethnical concept of "Great Russia", "White Russia" and "Little Russia", which in the end meant that although different at some point Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians were one people. Aleksander Jablonowski a Polish scholar of the nineteenth century concluded in his studies that Ukraine had no own population or people (Magocsi 2010, 15). Historians like Yekelchuk (2007, 6-7) follow neither an approach where Ukraine is defined by ethnic nor territorial criteria. Instead he defines Ukraine as the outcome of a national project, which can be found in Ukraine's two national predecessors during the twentieth century. One of them is the independent Ukrainian

Peoples Republic which existed from 1918 to 1920. The second one is the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic existing from 1918 until 1991. Both were outcomes of the First World War and the collapse of their respective Empires. Although both were later integrated into the Soviet Union, Ukraine was preserved within the Soviet Union. According to this approach, the national identity was shaped in the structures and events of the last three centuries, where the ethnic nationalism resulted in a multi-ethnic and civic independent state.

However, these discussions are can mostly be found in academic historiography. It is therefore important to note the difference between academic and official historical narratives, although this distinction is not always clear. While official state history is generally based on academic history, the latter itself is often politically influenced by politicized narratives. In official state historiography, national and politicised narratives prevailed. When the elites of the new state established itself in 1991 nationalized history begun to play an important part in legitimizing the state and its elite. A normative form of history, supported by state institutions took shape, but was partly challenged by other historians. To identify the government's attempt of defining a unified official historical narrative for Ukraine, it is helpful to look at official history textbooks used in the country. The use of history in school is a powerful tool to influence the collective narrative of history. It is an effective way of nation-building and to improve national unity (Janmaat 2007, 307).

While the official historical narrative was nationalized in Ukraine, other historians from Ukrainian diaspora started to increase their influence in the country. Although mostly similar to domestic historians, their work enjoyed a higher status as more authentic history (Kasyanov 2010, 38). A first version of nationalized history was published by the Canadian Professor Orest Subtelny. His book: *Ukraine: A History* became a substitute for school and higher education textbooks in Ukraine due to his rather balanced view in contrast to Soviet history textbooks based on archival study. This was answered by the state institutions by several publications of which the book *History of Ukraine: A new Vision* became the most prominent. It was the collective work of the Institute of Ukraine History and the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine.

Which role had historiography in nation building? It is important to note that national identity is the result of several factors. As Molchanov (2002) has examined it is the "combination of external roles and expectations and internal motives of behaviour, dispositions, and self-perceptions" (Molchanov 2002, 280) that contribute to the idea of a nation. Ukrainian nation-building process started for some authors too late to build a nation state. Contrary to most other Post-Soviet states, Ukraine did therefore not manage to develop a collective and dominant

national identity (Brudny 2011, 813). As Riabchuk (2012, 439-440) wrote, it is Ukraine's position between the semi-oriental Russian Empire and Western Europe that makes discussion on a common narrative so interesting. In comparison with other post-communist countries he argues that countries with a history in Western realm (like Estonia, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia or Slovenia) successfully managed the transition from communism to Western democracies, while countries in the East like in Central Asia struggled with the transition. Countries like Ukraine could therefore be located as between this two poles. It has developed on the one hand a strong anti-Soviet, pro-European identity in many parts of the country, while having simultaneously developed a Soviet national identity. For many observers like Paul Goble (2016, 37-43) the crisis in Eastern Ukraine since 2014 had proved that national identity of the country is much stronger developed than most people had expected, even in the Russian-speaking parts of the country.

In Shulman's article (2007), based on surveys he argues that nation-building does not need an ethnical homogenous state, however, according to the author a distinction has to be made between national identity and national unity. This means that citizens who have a strong national identity, can still have negative feelings towards another ethnical or regional group in this state. In 2006, national identity was comparatively strong in all areas, but government policies could have played a role in alienating citizens, thereby weakening national identity (Shulman 2007, 247-262). Language is in this case not necessarily the political marker, since many Ukrainians are using both languages depending on the social situation and there is no exact geographical division of languages (Portnov 2017). Consequently, the several different identities developed, with often great regional differences. Already the support for Ukrainian independence had different reasons in various regions. For example, even though the Russian speaking Donetsk region voted overwhelmingly for Ukrainian independence (83.9%), the support for Ukrainian national identity and symbols remained weak, since their motivation for supporting independence were rather economic reasons than political identification. The following collapse of the economic system in the 1990s additionally promoted again a Soviet nostalgia in Eastern Ukraine (Brudny 2003, 825).

Also, the role of religion should be taken into account in the processes of forming a national identity. In an article (1986, 353) Harvey Goldblatt, a professor for medieval Slavic literature, argues that a supranational Slavic Orthodox heritage played a vital role for the pan-Slavist movement, but also local religious differences are linked to nineteenth century nationalism. Religion is still a very strong factor for identity. For some historical narratives that see generally a division in the country, Christian religion constitutes the binding element of Ukraine

(Korostelina 2013, 297). Surveys show that 80% of Ukrainians say that they belong to Christianity and perceive themselves as only Ukrainian, regardless of their adherence to the Orthodox Churches of Kyiv or Moscow Patriarchates (Bogdan 2016).

For Kasyanov (2010, 39) important phases of Ukrainian history were particularly the periods of the Second World war and with it the Ukrainian national movements OUN and UPA, the Soviet period and other important events which represent historical myths like the Cossacks or *Holodomor*. Additionally, the founding myth of Kievan Rus' seems especially important when defining today's relations with Russia or Belarus. Furthermore, the common history with Poland and the division of the country between the Austrian-Hungarian and the Russian Empire are formative periods, which influence today's Ukraine debate. Lastly, the founding of independent Ukraine itself and its revolutions are subject to historical interpretation and in some parts fiercely debated. The following chapters will therefore outline some historical periods which seem to play an important role in historical narratives and for nation-building. These are partly periods which either underline the differences to distinguish between Ukraine and its neighbours, particularly Russia, or legitimize the existence of an own Ukrainian ethnicity or state.

2.1. Kievan Rus'

Although the medieval Eastern Slavic political body of Kievan Rus' provides little secured evidence for historical research, different historical narratives have evolved over time, interpreting the meaning and importance for contemporary countries. An ancient myth like Kievan Rus', which allows a nation to trace back its existence to medieval times or even earlier, is common in national historical narratives. Ukrainian historiography is no exception (Kappeler 2014, 112). For many authors Kievan Rus' is the founding myth of the Ukrainian nation and the base for a narrative that draws a thousand-year-old continuity from the Rus' to independent Ukraine. However, not only the idea of this continuity is questioned by academic history, it is the fact that Ukraine, Russia and Belarus use it as their founding myth. Soviet historians, for example, emphasized the old-Russian character of Ukraine which was portrayed as the beginning of a continuum that ended up in the unity of Soviet Union (Portnov 2011, 29-30). After independence, when Ukraine's historical discourses started to experience a nationalization, Ukraine's historical narrative which was presented as a thousand-year continuum of struggle for independence, became popular. It was following the work of Mykhailo Hrushevskyi (see above), who saw Kievan Rus' as exclusively Ukrainian state. While the Soviet narrative condemned his

approach, it was recovered by the historical politics of the Ukrainian state and implemented by the Education Ministry and several other agencies and cultural institutions. This historical approach was reflected in school textbooks and university programmes, written by historians, who were used to follow Soviet political orders. This nationalized historical narrative is not only contested by Russia, but also by many historians, who claim that Kievan Rus' is at least partly Russian heritage (Kasyanov 2010, 38; Kappeler 2014, 113; Yekelchuk 2016, 10).

This question has therefore influenced relations with Russia until today. Russian President Putin declared in 2013 that although Ukraine is now an independent state, one should not forget the common roots and history of Russians and Ukrainians of Kievan Rus' which makes both one people. Contrary to this narrative, the Ukrainian writer and journalist Mykola Riabchuk claims that the Kievan Rus' is an exclusive Ukrainian heritage and stresses the influence on the development of Ukrainian until today. (Kappeler 2014, 113). For, Riabchuk it is the myth of a thousand-year old Russian state, which has been uncritically accepted in academia and media. According to him, this myth is rooted in the seventeenth century and was "invented" by Peter the Great's empire establishing a link between the Muscovy State and the Kievan Rus', to replace the Golden Horde legacy. This invention served, as legitimization for territorial claims in Ukraine also vis-à-vis the Polish-Lithuanian State, while delegitimized the existence of Ukrainians and Belarusians as own people. They were rather subsumed under the proclaimed Eastern Slavs, or Orthodox Christianity identity. Ukraine, after reaching its independence, had therefore to emancipate itself from this East Slavonic construction and to create an own identity (Riabchuk 2012, 441). For historians like Wilson (2000, 19), Kievan Rus' has at least partly a basis of unity of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, while he disagrees with the argument that it was a type of proto-Ukrainian state. Although it could be possible for him that the population of the Kievan Rus' were one single people, he stresses the assumption that embryonic differences with the territories of the Rus' developed further after the fall of it. While, the idea of one Rus' was on according to Wilson only partly developed, "that of two (or more) Ruses was hardly developed at all and is largely a projection of later historians." (Wilson 2000, 19). Its role for Ukrainian identity is however substantial. A vast majority of Ukrainians see the historical roots of Ukraine in the Kievan Rus', although the interpretation of the meaning for today's Ukraine are different (Korostelina 2013, 296; 304-305).

2.2. Cossacks

One further element of Ukrainian history which appears to be vital for its nation-building process is the Cossacks period. For Yekelchuk (2015, 121) the Cossacks are even the most successful example of newly established national symbols in independent Ukraine, replacing the Soviet ones. For many Ukrainian historians, they played an important role in the “Ukrainian Revolution” in the seventeenth century, which led to a form of “Ukrainian Cossack state” in 1648. While being important for Ukrainian national history, the degree of “Ukrainian” elements in this Cossack state remains however disputed, since the Cossacks cannot be equated with ethnic Ukrainians (Wilson 2000, 59). Although many Ukrainian nineteenth century intellectuals made use of Cossacks symbols, most historians see barely links between Cossack Ukraine and modern Ukraine. Kohut (1986, 561-564) however argues that the construction of modern Ukraine is only possible if the political unit called “Little Russia” is taken into account, which is for Kohut a synonym for the Cossacks Hetmanate. In his view, the terms “Ukraina”, “Little Russia”, or “Cossacks” all referred to the same political entity.

Already in 1990, democratic forces in the Ukrainian part of Soviet Union tried to establish an own Ukrainian history connected to the Cossacks. People gathered at the summer festival of Cossack glory on the island of Gortitsa and the monument war in Western Ukraine (Kasyanov 2010, 37). While the Cossacks themselves are not exclusively Ukrainian (there were also Cossacks on Russian territory), it is the establishment of the independent political body, which is essential for current historical discourses. Nationalist interpretations claim that the “democratic” system of the Cossacks reflect the need for a stronger Western European than Russian orientation of modern Ukraine, while pro-Russian interpretation sees the Cossacks as anarchic tribes which were Europeanized and cultivated by the Russians. The historical narrative of Hetman Mazepa, whose historical role is probably most disputed between Russian and Ukrainian-minded historians, but also among journalists and politicians (and even the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine) is particularly disputed. Hetman’s Mazepa’s change of sides from the Russian Tsar to the Swedish King Charles XII made him a traitor in the eyes of many Russians (but also Ukrainians) until today, while for Ukrainian nationalists, he is admired as a hero, who tried to liberate Ukraine from the Russians with the help of the Swedish King (Kappeler 2014, 112-113). Therefore, the commemorative events on the battle of Poltava 1709, where the Swedish fought with the help of Mazepa against the troops of the Russian Tsar Peter I, have a strong symbolic meaning.

In early generations history textbooks, the Cossacks are depicted, by using a typical Soviet terminology, as premodern manifestation of Ukrainian statehood, but at the same time described as people enriching themselves, while exploiting the lower classes of peasants. In the textbooks of the early 2000s, the authors criticize the developments in the Cossack's society in somewhat milder way, focusing on the desperate situation of peasants (Janmaat 2005, 25-26). What should be noted here, is that the peasantry, in most national Ukrainian narratives, symbolizes the "real" and "pure" Ukrainians, connected to their land and suppressed by foreigners. The identification of Ukrainian peasantry with ethnic Ukrainians as such can be found in historical textbooks dealing with the periods from the Cossacks to the Soviet Union (Janmaat 2007, 313-314). The downfall of the Cossack state in 1775 through Tsar Catharina II also plays an important part in Ukrainian historiography, as a symbol the total subordination under the Russians and the beginning of the displacement of Ukrainian as a public language. As observed in school textbooks, the official historiography of the 1990s and the early 2000s portrays this period as unjust oppression, to exploit Ukraine. While earlier textbooks identify only Russians and Poles as the exploiters of Ukrainian peasantry, later versions include the role of Ukrainian nobility in the suppression of "innocent" peasantry (Janmaat 2007, 313).

2.3. Poland and Tsarist Russia

For a long period from the fourteenth to the twentieth century, Ukrainian territory has existed as between two "foreign" powers. Russia and Poland were dominant in different parts of the territory of the modern Ukrainian state, influencing it in culture and religion. The importance of this division and the different development, for the national identity of the country is highly evaluated by many historians. As Wilson argues: "Ukraine's entire history could be written in terms of its oscillation between the two sides [...]" (Wilson 2000, 40). The importance for Ukrainian identity lies, according to Wilson, in the fact that Polish rule had allowed different European influences like Renaissance, Reformation, Counter-Reformation or Enlightenment to have considerable impact on the territory of Ukraine. It is argued that this made the lands therefore significantly different to Russia and prevented a complete assimilation in the nineteenth or twentieth century meanwhile creating, the foundations for a modern Ukrainian nation, with a distinct local culture and the emerging term of "Ukraine" (Wilson 2000, 70). The era of Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth was considered, particularly by early Polish authors, as influential for Ukrainian culture in terms of religious and national tolerance (Magocsi 2010, 17). This Polish influence serves as the basis for a Ukrainian identity particularly in Western Ukraine,

which emphasizes the differences to Russia (Korostelina 2016, 294). Contrary to this interpretation, Poland is described in another narrative, as an entity as threatening for Ukraine as Russia (Korostelina 2016, 299). Other historians however, emphasize the importance of local communities as basis for identification of that time. Population on Ukrainian territory before the twentieth century rather identified themselves with their local community and their “spiritual” connection to their soil, than with higher ethnic or cultural identities. The typical “Ukrainian” of this period is often depicted as peasant, who refuses to move away from his fertile soil to the cities (Yekelchuk 2007, 55-56). As Janmaat (2005, 20-29) has worked out, also early generations of history textbooks focusing on history after 1800 describe the Ukrainian nation as a class of landless peasants, dominated and exploited by foreign nobles. The books often stress the centuries enduring domination by foreign regimes and their ambition to suppress the Ukrainian language and culture. In their view Poland, Russia and Austria were only aiming at exploiting Ukraine, portraying every influence they had as solely negative.

Much of the historical narratives of Polish-Ukrainian relations are based on the nineteenth century nationalist movements, who interpreted historical events further back in the past. The historical narrative on the Polish-Ukrainian history before the twentieth century, which has the most influence on the relations between the countries today is the uprising of Bohdan Khmelitskyi against the Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth in the seventeenth century. In the historical narrative of the Soviet Union, the period of Polish-Lithuanian presence on Ukrainian territory was generally regarded as national and religious oppression (Kappeler 2014, 212). The role of “the foreign” in Ukrainian SSR was typically attributed to Crimean Tartars and Poland (Portnov 2011, 30). Following this narrative, some historians argued that Russia as an Empire (first under the Tsar and later as a Soviet Empire) has freed Ukraine from foreign suppression and united the three brotherly peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. This would consequently mean that it is only natural that these three people live in on common political space (Subtelny 2011, 20). A look at Ukrainian history textbooks reveals the official picture since 1991 of Tsarist Russia describing some positive developments in Tsarist Russia, like the abolition of serfdom under Tsar Alexander II in 1861. However, most of the measures implemented by Russians in Ukraine are described as ineffective and only implemented to serve other interests than the Ukrainians (Janmaat 2007, 316-317). This is a common narrative that has prevailed until today.

2.4. Russian Empire and Austro-Hungarian Empire

The Russian Empire started to stretch its influence into the territory which constitutes today's Ukraine in the seventeenth century. From 1654 parts of Ukraine were under the protection of the Russian Tsar. Over the centuries of Russian domination in Eastern parts of Ukraine, the Russians did not only influence Ukraine but also vice versa. After all the Ukrainians represented the second largest ethnic group in the Russian Empire (Kappeler 2014, 110). Austrian rule in Western parts of Ukraine, on the other hand, allowed for the development of a strong local nationalism in Galicia, which defined an own identity vis-à-vis the Poles and other ethnic groups (Wilson 2000, 117). A historiography emphasizing the Western (Austrian or Galician) elements of Ukraine have prevailed in the country and abroad with the exception of Soviet Ukraine. They stress the fact that Ukrainians under Austrian-Hungarian rule profited from the imperial concessions which strengthened the development of a Ukrainian national identity (Snyder 2003, 129). As some authors argue, the division between the Austrian-Hungarian Empire and the Russian Empire fostered even the development of different interpretations of the "Ukrainian idea", according to the loyalty of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire in Galicia or the Russian Empire in Dnipro-Ukraine (Portnov 2011, 34).

For the Western Ukrainian historian Mykola Riabchuk, Russian domination in the Eastern Parts of Ukraine are portrayed as forceful assimilation of Ukrainians, which, however, was not successful since Ukraine and Russian language and culture were not the same and the Ukrainian church remained open to Western influence (Riabchuk 2012, 441). Nationalist authors like Petro Vol'vach see the Tsarist (and later the Soviet) domination as the reason for current economic and social problems, referring to these periods in history as "colonial enslavement" (Marples 2007, 2-3).

Although the experience under the Russian Tsars is often portrayed worse than under the Habsburg Emperors, the fact that both sides of the country preserved their uniting cultural characteristics is important for a national Ukraine narrative. In 1906, Hrushevskyi expressed the fear that a divided Ukraine might go separate ways, calling it two nationalities with one ethnographic base (Wilson 2000, 118). Ukrainian history textbooks of the 1990s emphasize the importance of Ukrainian language as a marker and binding force between ethnic Ukrainians in the Habsburg and the Tsarist part of Ukraine. Implicitly, it stresses the fact that Ukrainians have kept their cultural traits despite division and foreign domination, while communicating that all

present Ukrainian territory is home to ethnic Ukrainians (Janmaat 2005, 28). The division of Ukraine is the basis for a common narrative that sees an ideological division in today's Ukraine. The decisive factor is not the difference between Russian and Ukrainian language, but the historical differences between Eastern and Western Ukraine, which allowed for different values and geopolitical priorities and is reflected in today's political division of the country (Korostelina 2013, 297-298).

2.5. Ukrainian Revolution and state independence 1917-1920

According to Kappeler (2014, 111), the 1920s nationalism and the short period of independence, which is called the Ukrainian revolution, had a crucial influence on the present Ukrainian state. For Wilson (2000, 151), the period after the first World War until Stalinism is similarly important for Ukrainian national identity as the experience of the Soviet era. For a more nationalist narrative, the "genocide" of Ukrainians, which begun already during the Tsarist Empire, entered into a new phase, with the Bolsheviks seizing power, as Mykhailo Horan, a Ukrainian-Australian author writes. However, the 1920s left an ambiguous impression on Ukrainian narratives. On the one hand, Lenin's NEP and the phase of *korenizatsia* allowed for more economic freedom and a period of own national policies in the Soviet Republics. On the other hand, it is argued that the goal in the end was to mobilize Ukrainian for socialist purposes (Yekelchuk 2007, 100-101).

In school history textbooks, the chapters on the February revolution of 1917 and the consequent turbulent years are depicted in great detail. Textbooks agree that similarly to the Russian revolutions in 1917, Ukraine underwent a genuine national revolution. A textbook from 1995, for instance, describes the party composition of 75% Ukrainian nationalists and only 10% Bolsheviks, emphasizing the strong national and weak Bolshevik revolutionary support among Ukraine's population. However, all books agree that in the long run, the Bolshevik social messages (and their use of force) were more significant to Ukrainians, than the nationalist rhetoric. Interestingly, both early generations of textbooks condemned the Bolshevik seizing power, however mentioning the social division that negatively affected Ukrainian national consciousness (Janmaat 2005, 25-28).

In these history textbooks, the Central Rada of the independent Ukraine, is presented as the legitimate Ukrainian representation while the Bolsheviks are described as foreign power,

imposed on Ukraine. However, most of the textbooks refrain from making ethnic distinctions between Russians as Bolsheviks and Ukrainians as oppressed nation. Interestingly, most textbooks are ambivalent about the early Soviet years during the 1920s. The language policy, the reduction of illiteracy of Ukrainians and the NEP are partly presented in a positive way, whereas most books note that Russians and the Russian language remained dominant, and some see the Ukrainization policy only as tool to better indoctrinate Ukrainian population with communist ideology (Janmaat 2007, 313-319). Furthermore, the textbooks present the end of the Ukrainian Revolution as defeat due to a superior Russia and Poland and the lack of solidarity among ethnic Ukrainians (Yekelchuk 2004, 83-84).

What is particularly interesting for Polish-Ukrainian relations is the conflict between the wars, during the short period of Ukrainian independence and treatment of minorities on both sides of the borders. Ukrainian historiography focused not only on the diplomatic and political history, but also on economic, social and cultural aspects. In the borderland conflict between 1918 and 1920, historians focus on the Polish-Ukrainian war for Lviv and Eastern Galicia, which raised the question whether it could have been settled by peaceful means. The second debate concerns the alliance between the Polish politician Jozef Pilsudski and Symon Petlura, statesmen of the Ukrainian People's Republic and Pilsudski's decision to abandon the support for Petlura (in the view of Ukrainian historians) for signing the Treaty of Riga with the Soviet Union (Copsey 2009, 87).

2.6. Stalinism and *Holodomor*

The word *Holodomor* signifies the famine of 1932-1933 in Ukraine, in which millions of people (estimates vary from three ten million) died. As Kasyanov (2010, 37) argues, Ukraine strived for turning *Holodomor* into one of the founding myths of independent Ukraine. The popularity of the famine as a national narrative, comes from the fact that national identity is fed with the concept of victimization in Ukrainian historical narratives (Korostelina 2016, 297-299). Similarly, Marples (2007, 35) describes the famine as the event with the greatest significance for developing a Ukrainian nation-state. While the existence of the famine is undeniable, it is the question whether the tragedy was caused by disastrous mismanagement or was a deliberate act of genocide against Ukrainians. For many Ukrainian nationalists, *Holodomor* represents a planned genocide by the Russian Bolsheviks under Stalin to eradicate the Ukrainian peasantry and to eventually destroy the Ukrainian nation and its ability to resist Soviet communism. Others

however claim that there is no evidence for orders to commit genocide. Furthermore, it is argued that not only ethnic Ukrainians were victims of the famine. Overall, Stalin's role during *Holodomor*, but also his policy in general is disputed. While he still represents for many a strong leader that enabled Soviet Union to win the Second World War, he is for others a cruel villain. According to a survey of the Kiev International Institute of Sociology, a quarter of the Ukrainian population think of Stalin as a great leader, while 70% agree that he was a tyrant, responsible for the extermination of millions of people. A positive attitude towards Stalin tends to exist in Eastern parts of Ukraine and among elder people (Novikova 2016).

In Soviet Ukraine, debating *Holodomor* was a taboo (Kappeler 2014, 114) and the debate on it only came up in the 1980s as part of a general criticism of the Soviet past. Historians slowly tested the ground of what was acceptable to publish. The influence of Diaspora writers was important in this regard, since many of them were already publishing articles on the famine, its root causes and consequences, while it was still forbidden in Ukraine. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the political and national dimension of *Holodomor* became, within a short period of time, a prominent topic. Already during the transition period to independent Ukraine, scholars in the country enjoyed much more freedom in their research and independent writing, which often became a literate and emotional form. Numerous memoirs of survivors of this period were published. Public media was now able to address the famine. The 60th anniversary of *Holodomor* in 1993 became the first important occasion for commemoration, widely shared by newspapers and journals. Although officially a day of remembrance, some newspapers emphasized the guilt of Russia. Plenty of new interpretations were published, focusing increasingly on the question whether the famine was directed from above. However, early writings of the 1990s attributed the famine to the terror of the system, rather than to the attempt to liquidate Ukrainians as such. Some authors argue that, although the famine knew no ethnic boundaries, Ukrainians were affected most severely due to fact that Ukrainians were predominantly peasants.

Another narrative explains it as the means to force individualistic peasantry to collectivization and into submission of the Soviet system. The famine was accepted by Soviet authorities as an instrument to implement their policy. For this narrative, the famine was a blow for the Ukrainian nation, from which it had not recovered until its independence and is therefore a main reason for current problems in Ukraine. This way it became one of the founding myths of modern Ukraine. (Kasyanov 2010, 39-40; 42). Generally, it is a lack of clarity that dominates the discourse on this topic. In analysing the narratives of the famine, David Marples concludes that the event still

does not have the status in Ukrainian society it should be entitled to have. Moreover, *Holodomor* is perceived differently among scholars, particularly between Diaspora, Ukrainian and Western scholars. Additionally, public opinion often differs from these academic views. The political dimension and importance for nation-building is reflected by the fact that in Western Ukraine, which were not affected by *Holodomor* since they were not part of Soviet Union at that time, the issue is more often addressed and the genocide narrative is widely accepted. This indicates the role of an anti-Russian aspect of this narrative (Marples 2007, 39-50; 72). In the view of many Ukrainian nationalists, Stalinist policies gave generally priority to the development of Russian culture and language in Ukraine, whereas Ukrainians were suppressed. Petro Vol'vach provides in this case the example of the "genocide" of Ukrainian-speaking population of the Kuban (which is today part of the Russian Federation) from 1933 to 1939. Events like these serve as the basis for claims that independent Ukraine needs protection of its interests by the international community, for not being dissolved into Russia (Marples 2007, 4-5).

Regarding the famine of 1932/33, Ukrainian history textbooks attribute the full responsibility to Stalin and his government. They all agree that the forced collectivization was the Soviet's way of extracting resources from Ukrainian land, which made the famine artificially caused by them. In its terminology, many textbooks (from 1994 and 1995) also refer to *Holodomor* as genocide (Janmaat 2007, 315).

Holodomor is also often connected with Holocaust. Since the former is seen as one of the major tragedies for the Ukrainian people, it is considered at least as significant for Ukraine as Holocaust. Interestingly the narrative of *Holodomor* seems to compete with the memory of Holocaust, as it was suggested that more Ukrainians died in *Holodomor* than Ukrainian Jews in the Holocaust. This also functioned as an argument for justifying collaboration of Ukrainians with Nazis. In examining Ukrainian school textbooks, Johan Dietsch finds that Holocaust was barely mentioned. However, this narrative is changing. Modern history textbooks pay more attention to Holocaust, which is according to Dietsch is the result of a Ukraine, which wants to position itself as part of the European community (Dietsch 2006, 147; 194; 233). In foreign policy, the fight for recognition of *Holodomor* as genocide influences Ukraine's relations with many countries. The controversy about it turned into a "war of memories" (Kappeler 2014, 114), in which Russia as legal successor of the Soviet Union is accused of having committed *Holodomor* and demanded an official excuse, which is however denied by Russia.

2.7. Second World War

Ukraine's experiences during Second World War are part of fierce discussions in today's Ukraine. The term itself which is used for the war raise difficulties. While Soviet (and Russian) historiography refer to it as the "Great Patriotic War", official Ukrainian historiography uses the Western term "Second World War". However, in 2010 a majority of 56,9% of the Ukrainian population still referred to it as the "Great Patriotic War" (Hrytsak 2011, 414).

Common memory of official Soviet history portrayed the victory in the "Great Patriotic War" as the victory of Russian and Ukrainian people, which constituted one of the most important national myths in the common Ukrainian-Russian memory. This narrative is still very much alive among Ukrainians. Nevertheless, Ukrainian collaboration with National Socialist Germany are interpreted differently. Particularly the Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), which have fought against the Soviet Union are the basis for various historic interpretations, which also led to disputes in foreign policy. For many experts, the question of the historical role of the OUN and UPA is not simply a historical debate, but one of the main foundations of Ukrainian nationality and self-understanding (Golczewski 2011, 319).

Although these organizations partly cooperated with Nazi-Germany, their role was reinterpreted in official history of Ukraine (Kappeler 2014, 212; 114). Bandera and other leaders of OUN and UPA are heroes for many Ukrainians, particularly in Western Ukraine. Contrary to this narrative, they are the opposite to many people in Eastern Ukraine (Cohen 2016). It is therefore safe to say that the myth of UPA is more important for Western Ukraine than for Eastern Ukraine (Kasyanov 2009, 19). This different interpretation could also be observed in the different handling of it, since the Ukrainian independence. Already in 1990 local councils ordered the dismantling of Lenin statues in Western Ukrainian cities, to replace it with monuments of soldiers of the UPA. In Eastern Ukraine, the Soviet legacy in form of statues remained present for a long time (Kasyanov 2010, 38). The regional differences even went so far as the Donetsk oblast council issued a statement in 2007 accusing Western Ukraine of collaboration with Nazi-Germany during the Second World War. Additionally, an Eastern Ukrainian court overturned a decree by President Yushchenko in 2010 honouring Ukrainian nationalist leaders Stepan Bandera and Yuriy Shukhevych (Kuzio 2011, 227). Still, the involvement of Ukrainian nationalist groups in Holocaust and ethnic cleansing is disputed. Some historians, like Volodymyr Viatrovych, see in both organizations brave fighters for Ukrainian independence, ignoring their role in ethnic cleansing of Poles and Jews between 1941 and 1945 and the collaboration with the National Socialist Germany. Instead, this is dismissed as part of Soviet information war

against Ukrainian independence. Their role is constructed as organizations fighting a guerrilla war against the oppressive power of the Red Army. Viatrovych describes the role of OUN and UPA as cornerstone of Ukrainian independence. For him, the role of these organizations is so important that he doubts, whether independent Ukraine would even exist today without them (Cohen 2016).

Furthermore, the events happening during the Second World War which included ethnic cleansing on the Polish and Ukrainian side, but especially the massacre in Volhynia in 1943-1944, have influenced national narratives in Poland and Ukraine and consequently relations between both countries. While all these events were widely covered by Ukrainian media, its interpretation led to fierce debates within and between the countries (Marples 2007 4-10; 209). Many Soviet veterans in Ukraine are still convinced that the Katyn-massacre never happened (as they are convinced that there was no famine in 1932-33) (Marples 2007, 5). The events which were described by Yale historian Timothy Snyder as one of the earliest ethnic cleansing in the twentieth century, were rarely addressed from Soviet official propaganda. The UPA-OUN actions against Poles were, if at all, depicted as cruel assaults on the local population. This narrative only changed with the beginning of the 1990s (Marples 2007, 203). Today's estimates speak of up to 100,000 victims of an event which is called by official Poland a "massacre", while Ukraine tends to speak of a "tragedy". Although Hrytsak calls it genocide, he notes that it must be seen in the context of the forced assimilation policy of Poland and other genocidal acts like Holocaust and *Akcja Wisła*, the forced deportation of tens of thousands of Ukrainians from Polish territory after the Second World War (Kyiv, 2013).

2.8. Soviet Ukraine

The impact of the Soviet legacy on contemporary Ukraine is undisputed. Apart from the turbulent years of the first half of the twentieth century, the period from 1945 until 1991 when the whole territory of today's Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union and constituted an own republic is certainly playing a decisive role for the historical narratives of Ukraine. However, the Soviet period is discussed controversial among historians and politicians. Independence of Ukraine led to an immediate re-evaluation of Soviet history. This reinterpretation of historical events and heroes of the Soviet Union was not welcomed everywhere. Particularly the population in Eastern and Central Ukraine were contesting it (Hrytsak 2011, 204). Soviet nostalgia has played and is still playing an important role in national self-consciousness for

many Ukrainian citizens. The division in interpreting this historical period, is generally also reflected in the division between Russian and Ukrainian speakers. In a study of semi-structured interviews on Ukrainian national identities Korostelina (2013, 299-300) characterizes 7% of respondents as persons with a pro-Soviet narrative. They appreciate the victory in the Great Patriotic War against the fascists and emphasized the technological (rockets, sciences, airplanes etc.) and economic achievements of the Soviet period. While the Ukrainian nationalist narrative see the economic policies as colonization, for a pro-Soviet narrative, Western Ukraine experienced a rapid economic development from an agricultural society to a modern economy.

According nationalist history, Russian and Soviet domination separated Ukraine from the rest of Europe, while independent Ukraine is now trying to re-establish its relations by integrating into Western Europe (Kappeler 2014, 212). The Soviets are often perceived as continuation of the Tsarist Empire, following a policy of russification and denying the existence of a Ukrainian nation. Like the Tsarist Empire, the Ukraine as part of the Soviet Union is for some observers compared to a colonial empire (Riabchuk 2009, 230). On the other hand, some authors argue that the Soviet institutional setting and the existence of a separate Ukrainian SSR preserved a national Ukrainian identity and assisted in the creation of a cultural and political elite after Ukrainian independence (Brudny 2003, 828). Soviet experience, strengthened in the eyes of many historians the supranational Soviet identity in Ukraine which was in fact the Eastern Slavonic identity of the Russian Empire. In this narrative, the “West” was deemed to be the enemy and nationalistic and so were Western oriented Ukrainians. For Riabchuk, this is one of the reasons why Central and especially Southern and Eastern Ukrainians feel a greater social distance to Western Ukrainians than to Russians. In this historical division, Riabchuk sees the different disparities in the view of the status of Russian language, but also in relations with Russia and the geopolitical orientation of Ukraine as such (Riabchuk 2012, 442). This division can also be observed in the inability to establish a common Ukrainian pantheon. While some figures are generally accepted as national heroes of Ukraine (like Taras Shevchenko, Lesia Ukrainka and Bohdan Khmelnytsky) others are disputed (like Ivan Mazepa, Stepan Bandera, or Hrushevsky) since only the former belonged to the pantheon of Soviet heroes (Kasyanov 2009, 19).

In Ukrainian school textbooks, the Soviet period is ambivalently depicted. The reform phase of Khrushchev for example, which allowed for more freedoms after years of Stalinism, are described with a positive and a negative notion. On the one hand, the authors of the history textbooks welcomed the economic reforms, the improvement of living conditions and more

personal freedoms. However, they describe the reforms on the other hand as the only means the communist party could achieve their economic and political goals (Janmaat 2007, 313-319).

Chapter 3: The instrumentalization of discourses since 1991

After almost 70 years integrated as a republic in the Soviet Union, Ukraine became independent in 1991 and started its nationalization process. For many new states in the post-Soviet space, institutions, borders and identities had now to be defined or established (Kappeler 2014, 108). Although nationalization of Ukrainian history was in most parts friction free some periods and events led to conflict and are politically debated (Kasyanov 2010, 39).

Additionally, Ukraine faced a dilemma in foreign policy, between closer ties with Russia and integration into Western institutions. This division is reflected in the political scene of Ukraine where the main political actors had partly fundamentally different foreign policy approaches and are supported by different parts of the elite and population (Proedrou 2010, 454). For Ukrainian politicians, it is therefore inevitable to foster the identical attachment in their foreign policy in order to justify it. History plays a vital role for this identification. For Ukraine, Filippos Proedrou sees a political division alongside historical borders that were shaped by the 19th and 20th century control of Western Ukraine by the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Poland and later Czechoslovakia the Eastern part was controlled by the Russian Empire (Proedrou 2010, 452).

Numerous factors influence a country's foreign policy. In this thesis, it is assumed that a foreign policy doctrine is connected with certain historical discourses that portray Ukraine's history in one or another direction to justify foreign policy decisions. It is typical for Post-Soviet countries, to settle disputes with neighbouring countries, particularly with Russia, by using political instrumentalization of history. This happens under the pretext of raising awareness and for national unity but bears the risk of leading to further conflicts in domestic and foreign policy (Kasyanov 2010, 50).

To understand foreign policy of Ukraine, it is firstly vital to understand the decision-making process of the country. In foreign policy, the operation of the Ukrainian political system of decision making is not always transparent. Basically, it is the president himself who represents Ukraine abroad and manages the foreign political activity, conducts international negotiations, appoints Ukrainian heads of diplomatic missions and concludes treaties. The Ukrainian

parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, is only “determining the principles of foreign and domestic policy” (Legislatonline 2016), according to article 85 of the Ukrainian constitution (Copsey 2009, 65-66). Furthermore, all positions that have an influence on foreign policy like the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Defence, are admitted by the Verkhovna Rada, but only upon submission by the President. The President and the Presidential Administration are therefore the most important factors in foreign policy and its decision-making process, although the Constitution officially restricted the President’s role in foreign policy until its amendment in 2004 (Copsey 2009, 65; Legislatonline 2016).

Since presidents of Ukraine play the decisive role in the formulation of the country’s foreign policy strategy, this chapter focuses on various presidencies (Kravchuk, Kuchma, Yushchenko, Yanukovich and Poroshenko) and is divided into five sub-chapters dealing separately with each president. Generally, the presidencies of Kravchuk and Kuchma can be characterized as hybrid regimes similar to the Yeltsin or the early Putin regime (Brudny 2003, 814), also the Yanukovich presidency is often compared to the Russian and even the Soviet political system, while the Yushchenko and Poroshenko presidency are in principle Western oriented. The ideologically different presidencies seem to represent the ideological split, which expresses itself in the different visions of the country’s future and the different perceptions of the country’s past. Riabchuk identified two main concepts of Ukraine. On the one hand, there is the “Ukrainian nation” or “Central East European” concept, based on the idea that Ukraine is a European country and was only for a long time subordinated to foreign domination. On the other hand, it exists a Russian oriented “East Slavic”, “post/crypto Soviet” or “Little Russian” (Riabchuk 2012, 443). These different concepts are in general mirrored in the presidencies and have mutual repercussions on the country’s foreign policy.

Historical reasons are, however, not the only issue that influences domestic and foreign policy of Ukraine. Before analysing the impact of historical discourses on a countries foreign policy, it is important to note that several factors are shaping foreign policy. It is furthermore necessary to focus at this point on certain historical narratives events and periods in Ukraine, which have the largest potential to influence foreign policy, hence those events which are controversially discussed and differently interpreted by two or more states. This can be assessed for relations with Russia and Poland, but also with the West in general, regarding the narrative of Ukraine’s self-perception of being a part of Western Europe. Therefore, Ukraine’s foreign policy is analysed in this chapter with regards to the two mentioned states, the EU and NATO.

As Hrytsak argues, reconciliation between Poland and Ukraine could be similarly important for Eastern Europe, as the rapprochement between Germany and France after the Second World War (Hrytsak 2011, 415). However, other discussions appear often marginalized vis-à-vis the dominant and seemingly contrasting Russian-Western conflict. The different historical narratives have been politically exploited which often increased the division and preserved it for the future (Riabchuk 2009, 232).

Russia on the other side, views Ukraine as its “near abroad” and consequently as its zone of influence. In its narrative, Ukraine is, like Belarus, a brother country, referring to common culture, language and ethnicity. The ambivalent national identity of Ukraine which is based on the different interpretations of history, have influence on the international standing and position to Russia. This can be observed most importantly in the major split between the pro-Russian and pro-Western policy, with the former believing in the “sameness” of the two “brother countries”, while the other supports the European drive of the country (Riabchuk 2012, 440). Not only Russia, but also the West, namely the EU and NATO, has increasingly tried to gain influence in Ukraine. It is their aim to integrate Ukraine economically and politically in the Western sphere (Proedrou 2010, 452). However, large parts of the population still identify themselves as part of the Russian world or at least prefer close relations to their Russian neighbours and support a pro-Russian foreign policy of Ukraine.

3.1. The Kravchuk presidency

Leonid Kravchuk became the first President of independent Ukraine and stayed in office until 1994. He was then overthrown by his Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma. He can be considered a supporter for a rather pro-Soviet and Eastern oriented national identity and interpretation of history. Kravchuk, was a former communist leader, who received a two-third majority in the first presidential election of Ukraine, while his either anti-communist or former dissident opponents, were not able to gain enough support (Riabchuk 2012, 444).

He quickly mastered the political potential of historic events, particularly of the “totalitarian past” such as *Holodomor*. As part of the old Soviet elite and trying to build a new elite, the president and his government recognized the importance of legitimizing the regime by separating it from the dark chapters of Soviet past (Hrytsak 2011, 407; Kasyanov 2010, 40-41). He aimed to create and strengthen an own Ukrainian national identity, which is also reflected in his

education policy, where the official governmental education programme of 1994 depict its goal to create

“a national orientation which proceeds from the indivisibility of education from national foundations, the organic unity with national history and folk traditions, and the preservation and enrichment of the culture of the Ukrainian people” (Janmaat 2007, 309).

From the beginning, the Ministry of Education closely observed the national curricula, the adoption of textbooks and followed the Soviet approach of dividing history into world and national history classes (Janmaat 2007, 312). However, as Stanislav Kulchytskyi, deputy head of the history department of the National Academy of Sciences in Ukraine, noted in 1992, Ukraine was in a status of confusion regarding its historical identity (Marples 2007, 1).

Politically, events like *Holodomor* were used as excuse and blamed for current problems of nation-building. However, Kravchuk had to balance the national democratic urge to condemn the events of the Soviet past, while remaining committed to it since he himself was a product of it and needed the support of the left-wing majority in Verkhovna Rada. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of *Holodomor* in 1993, Kravchuk issued a decree that not only “legalized” the term, but also had international consequences. The UNESCO was asked to mention the tragedy in its calendar and the Ukrainian Diaspora was invited to be part of the commemoration activities. Kravchuk even himself proclaimed that the famine of 1932-33 was deliberate act of genocide (Kasyanov 2010, 40-41).

Since the foundation of independent Ukraine, relations with Russia were a decisive factor in foreign and domestic politics. As Kravchuk and Yeltsin worked together against Gorbachev to separate Ukraine from Russia as part of the Soviet Union, they seemed to be natural allies. Russia had certainly wished for a closer post-Soviet connection in the newly established Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), however relations between the two countries remained difficult until 1997. The historically close links inevitably led to tensions between the two young states. The status of Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet stationed in Sevastopol, the Russian minority in Ukraine, the question of future energy supply and Ukraine’s prospects in European integration posed questions that showed a larger conflict potential (Kappeler 2014, 108-109). Although Yeltsin’s foreign policy was not aggressive, it was clear for Russia that Ukraine, as part of the so-called “near-abroad”, was considered to be part of Russia’s zone of influence, not at least because Ukraine was economically depended on Russia. Prior to the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which started in 2014, Russia was the second biggest

market for Ukrainian goods (after the European Union), namely coal, steel and other metal industries (Proedrou 2011, 448-550). Overall, Ukraine's economy strongly depended on foreign trade. Exports and imports made around 70 to 80% of Ukraine's GDP (Fritz 2007, 148). Furthermore, Ukraine's economy stayed dependent on subsidized Russian gas (Proedrou 2012, 448-450). From the beginning the relations can therefore be characterized as asymmetrical relationship. Ukraine's economic vulnerability particularly in the field of gas prices remained an important political factor in the following years to come. For this reason, Ukraine tried to establish stronger relations with the EU. The prospect of membership promised economic and political independence from Russia. Ukraine's hope for an early accession, for political reasons, although Ukraine did not fulfil the economic standards (similar to Greece), did not come into being (Wolczuk 2003, 50-51; 115). Consequently, Kravchuk had to be careful in dealing with sensitive historical issues, which could upset Russia.

Even though Kravchuk's main priority were the relations with Russia, one of Ukraine's foreign policy goals were from 1991 on the integration into Western Institutions with the ultimate goal to join the European Union. In its attempts to integrate into Western institutions the country tried to join the Visegrad group, but was rejected by its members as they feared too much influence of Russia through Ukraine (Wolczuk 2003, 100-104). Ukraine started to accept the West's integration rhetoric, while remaining politically and economically closely related to Russia (Proedrou 2012, 448-450).

While good relations with Russia were the highest priority for Kravchuk, relations with Poland were also very important from the beginning of Ukrainian independence since they ensured Ukraine's access to the Western sphere of Europe. However, the interpretation of their historical past was always important for the relations between both countries. Ukrainian-Polish history is characterized by many violent conflicts, which make it now easier to differentiate between both historical narratives. The Polish-Ukrainian war in 1918-19, the Volhynia massacre and the operation Vistula in 1947 provoke political resentment between the two countries until today. Polish intellectuals in their attempt to reconcile with Ukraine and followed the ideas of the Polish *Solidarnosc* movement, describing both sides as equally guilty (Hrytsak 2011, 414-415). Both countries saw themselves in similar geostrategic positions and aimed for a tight cooperation. Therefore, Kravchuk was careful enough not to raise the disputed episodes in the common history. A treaty on Good Neighbourly and Friendly Relations in 1992 was hoped to settle the question of minorities and territorial claims that was still open since the Second World War. However, at least until 1994 relations between Poland and Ukraine were characterized by

competition, incompatible demands and ideological suspicions, since Poland's anti-communist president Lech Walesa had a completely different background than Kravchuk and distrusted him (Wolczuk 2003, 71-76).

In the end one of the reasons for Kravchuk's loss in the presidential elections in 1994 was the fact that his slow turn to the West resulted in the loss of his support in Eastern Ukraine. His opponent Leonid Kuchma an industrial manager, who promoted economic reforms, upgrading the Russian language and promising tighter relations with Russia eventually won the elections (Brudny 2003, 826).

It can be assessed that Kravchuk in his historical policy carefully tried to create an Ukrainian identity, however without departing too far from the Soviet legacy, as it would have undermined his own power. In foreign policy Kravchuk focused on the relations with Russia, while trying to establish close ties with the West. It is important to note that domestic reasons played a more important role in historical instrumentalization than foreign policy. As the example of Ukrainian-Polish relations shows, Kravchuk was willing to leave out disputed historical events, in order not to jeopardise economic interests.

3.2. The Kuchma Presidency

Protests of the Russian-speaking population in Ukraine against Kravchuk, also regarding his historical policy, were one of the reasons that eventually led to his fall in 1994. His successor, Leonid Kuchma managed to win the election not least because he secured the support of the Russian-speaking Eastern and Southern Ukraine and stayed in office until 2004. After being elected the first time, Kuchma adopted many cultural, political and foreign policy reforms that his nationalist rivals advocated for, which secured him the second election win in 1999 (Brudny 2003, 826). However, corruption became endemic during his presidency. Kuchma gathered a range of wealthy businessmen who supported him in return for privileges and concessions (Proedrou 2010, 449). His attempt to hand over power to Viktor Yanukovych led to the Orange revolution in which eventually Viktor Yushchenko succeed as president.

During the 1990s, nationalization of history played a political marginal role. The political left parties held the majority in Ukrainian parliament until 2000 and only the national democratic opposition used the totalitarian Soviet past, accusing the ruling Ukrainian elite of being part of it and therefore responsible for past and current problems. The left refused these accusations and

warned against dragging the past. With the beginning of the new millennium, ideology and consequently a special historical narrative became more important in public debate. This debate was now also extended to foreign policy, where it started to provoke conflicts notably with Poland, Russia, the EU and other international organizations. The involvement of national parliaments in historical debates reflected the ideological internationalization of politics of history (Kasyanov 2010, 39).

As soon as Kuchma was inaugurated as president, he tried to balance the power between all sides. His presidency involved a shift of historical narratives, which attempted to combine national Ukrainian and Soviet history, while avoiding any controversial topic or character (Hrytsak 2011, 407). The president showed little interest in the problematic events of the Soviet period. His commemorative decrees regarding *Holodomor* mostly coincided with current political conflicts, like oppositional demonstrations in 2002 or election campaigns in 1998, while his party refused to call for the recognition of the famine as genocide. (Kasyanov 2010, 40).

Although Kuchma published in 2003 a book called "Ukraine is not Russia" (*Ukrainna – ne Rossija*), in which he tried to establish a picture of Ukraine that suits Soviet nostalgic citizens and Ukrainian nationalists, he agreed on the other hand already a year before to establish a common Russian-Ukrainian commission to elaborate on a historical narrative which would be acceptable for both sides. This common commission reminded critics of the Soviet past and many of them feared that the commission would prefer a Russian version of history. The reaction was an own Ukrainian commission to "preserve" Ukrainian history under the lead of Jaroslav Dashkevych, a prominent Ukrainian scholar and Soviet dissident from Lviv. In 2008, the Russian-Ukrainian commission published two school textbooks which claimed to tell a reconciliatory version of Ukrainian history (Subtelny 2011, 20). Kuchma, although eventually re-elected, failed with this attempt to reconcile the two camps. It shows, however that Kuchma was aware of the importance of public opinion and a historical narrative for (foreign) policy making (Copsey 2009, 65-66). When he came into power, he needed, like Kravchuk, an ideological foundation for his regime. His government introduced the official *Holodomor* commemoration day, the Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the *Holodomor*, which was later renamed to Day of Remembrance for the Victims of the *Holodomor* and Political Repression. The famine became again a fiercely debated issue in domestic politics in 2003 when 70th anniversary of the tragedy coincided with upcoming presidential elections. Following parliamentary hearings in the Verkhovna Rada, a statement was issued saying that the famine was

“deliberately organized by Stalin’s regime and must be publicly condemned by Ukrainian society and the international community as one of the biggest acts of genocide in human history in terms of the number of victims.” (Kasyanov 2010, 42; Verkhovna Rada 2003).

Under Kuchma, the first commemorative event for *Holodomor* was organized and the government gave order to lower the national flag. Furthermore, the Ukrainian government was looking for international recognition of the famine as an act of genocide. While the Senate of Canada and the government of the USA recognized it as genocide, the United Nations issued a resolution offering condolences to all victim groups of the famine, including Russians and Kazakhs. Politically, this recognition as genocide led to an immediate alienation of the Russian government, who refuses to take responsibility for crimes which happened under the Soviet regime. Russia’s position found support in many Communist and pro-Soviet oriented parts of Ukrainian society (Marples 2007, 52; 72).

Like in the discussion on national historical narratives, Kuchma tried, to balance between pro-Western and Pro-Russian foreign policy. While Ukraine made first steps towards NATO and EU, Kuchma was careful enough, not to upset Russia. Especially in comparison to Belarus, Ukraine did not oppose NATO-enlargement in principle. Moreover, it followed certain US requests, for example, to cancel an agreement with Iran to build together with Russia a nuclear power plant. At the same time, it tried to carefully build an own army completely independent from Russian forces (Proedrou 2010, 449). The rapprochement with NATO gained only momentum after the first period of NATO enlargement in 1993-94. Kuchma’s main policy goal was not to end up as a buffer between NATO and Russia. The country slowly left its initial position from remaining in a non-bloc status to a more positive stance towards NATO. In 1994 Ukraine managed to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme. With the prospects of its Western neighbours to join the North Atlantic alliance, Ukraine had the outlook of facing Russian pressure on its own (Wolczuk 2003, 50; 105; 110)

In comparison to his predecessor, Kuchma was more reform minded but focused much more on Russia than on relations with Poland. He was, however, aware of the strategic importance of Poland as an access country to European Integration. In 1996, Kuchma proclaimed the strategic goal of EU membership. It was therefore vital for Ukraine to establish a good working relationship with Poland (Wolczuk 2003, 77-79). Potential conflicts due to opposing historical narratives between the countries should not interfere. After long discussion between the Polish and Ukrainian side, both sides reached in 2002-2003 reconciliation on conflicting topics during the two world wars. A trend which was enforced during and after the Orange revolution (Hrytsak

2011, 414-415). Viktor Yushchenko, then opposition leader, made some reconciliatory statements regarding the Volhynia massacre addressing the responsibility for past events (Marples 2007, 203). A joint declaration for commemoration of the massacre triggered a fierce debate in Verkhovna Rada (and in the Polish Sejm) on the wording of it. Polish opposition insisted on the inclusion of the phrase “genocide of the Polish people”, whereas some members of Ukrainian Parliament were upset about the fact that Polish victims were mentioned in the first and Ukrainians only in the last sentence of the declaration. Eventually, the declaration was adopted by both parliaments, but by a one-vote majority in the Ukrainian Rada. Similarly, in 1999 the film of Henry Sienkiewicz “*Ogniem i Mieczem*” (By Fire and Sword) fictionally portraying the Cossack rebellion of Bohdan Khmelintsky against the Poles in the seventeenth century, sparked discussions in Ukraine and Poland. Some commentators argued that the film is based on chauvinist Polish stereotypes of Ukraine (Copsey 2009, 76). The 60th anniversary of the Volhynia massacre revealed the unsolved issue. While Ukraine did not even have a common narrative, the Polish side, pressured by right-wing forces, expected an apology and that their version of the events as a whole would be accepted by Ukraine. A chance of reconciliation was thereby missed (Marples 2007, 223-224).

Kuchma, tried to balance both, historical narratives and his foreign policy between Russia and the West, hoping not to alienate any side and to prevent ending up as buffer-zone between Russia and NATO. He set some steps to further strengthen a Ukrainian national narrative which distinguished Ukraine from Russia. This narrative was mainly based on the victimization of Ukraine and focused on the Holodomor. Although he aimed at keeping controversial events away from foreign policy, they interfered in many ways. On the one side, Holodomor and its recognition as genocide, raised disputes between Russia and Ukraine. On the other side, Polish-Ukrainian relations seriously suffered from the unsolved dispute on the massacre of Volhynia and the role of UPA and OUN.

3.3. The Yushchenko Presidency

Viktor Yushchenko was inaugurated as president in January 2005 and remained in power until 2010. The event which enabled Yushchenko to come to power was the so-called Orange Revolution in 2004. The forces that stood behind the Orange Revolution were different ideological camps, but were mainly considered to be national democratic forces supporting a foreign policy which would turn to Europe (Kuzio 2010, 294). In the wake of the revolution a new

generation of politicians came to power, which were partly enthusiastically welcomed, since large part of the Ukrainian population had enough of the established corrupt elite. To achieve his domestic and foreign policy goals, historical discussions were activated by Yushchenko, but also fostered by his competitors Kuchma and Viktor Yanukovich. Their goal was to replicate the electoral success of 1994, playing the more Russian-minded Ukrainian East against the West, by depicting Yushchenko and his bloc *Naša Ukraïna* (Our Ukraine) as fascist movement (Hrytsak 2011, 412). This strategy did however not work in 2004. Yushchenko was elected president with 51.99% of the votes (OSCE 2004, 45).

The newly elected president preferred a clear pro-Western approach, which was also welcomed by many Western politicians, since the Orange Revolution was supported by the European Union. Yushchenko abandoned the multi-vector foreign policy of his predecessors and declared EU membership as the main goal of Ukrainian foreign policy. This goal, however, alienated at the same time Russia (Gretskiy 2013, 7-8). It also became immediately clear that his use of historical discourses will influence his politics. The nationalistic “war of memories” was accelerated during his presidency and inevitably lead to conflict with Russia (Kappeler 2014, 212). Hrytsak even argues that Yushchenko was obsessed with history and provoked necessary and unnecessary discussions on the country’s historical past (Hrytsak 2011, 403-412). Already in his inauguration speech, he mentioned *Holodomor* and stressed the image of Ukraine as a victim (Yushchenko 2005). During the four years of his presidency the reconciliatory historical narrative of the Kuchma presidency changed to a more nationalized version of Ukrainian history, emphasizing the differences between Russia and Ukraine instead of common features (Subtelny 2011, 21). Indeed, the administration had certainly some success in developing an historical narrative, which increasingly differed from the Russian. This is illustrated by the evaluation of Stalin, whose historical role became more positively depicted in Russia, while experiencing the opposite trend in Ukraine. The different image of Stalin in Russia and Ukraine, even led to a proposal by Russian politicians to condemn Stalin in order to bring both collective memories again closer together (Hrytsak 2011, 414). The national democrats view of “returning to Europe” (Riabchuk 2009, 240) played an important part in ideologically justifying pro-Western foreign policy. Implicitly the return refers to the fact that Ukraine was, unlike Russia, influenced by “Western” European countries like Poland or the Habsburg Empire. Yushchenko advocated for a nationalized historical narrative and actively used history as instrument of politics and nation-building, but deepened simultaneously polarization in Ukrainian society (Kasyanov 2010, 40).

Most disputed was the interpretation of the role of OUN and UPA. The organizations were declared heroic fighters for the Ukrainian people by official historical politics, which culminated in erecting statues and declaring leaders of these organizations like Roman Shukhevych or Stepan Bandera heroes of Ukraine. The myth of the Soviet fight against fascism was replaced by the myth of Ukrainian struggle for independence. This interpretation of Ukraine, led to protests from the Russian government, political parties, media and parts of the Ukrainian population (especially in Eastern and Southern Ukraine). The term “*banderovtsy*” serves until today in the Russian discourse as negative term, which is associated with fascism (Kappeler 2014, 114; Shekhovtsov 2015, 80). However, with his policy Yushchenko reduced the negative image of OUN and UPA in Ukraine itself. From 2006 to 2007 the number of people that had a negative image of UPA dropped from 52% to 46%, although positive associations with UPA can almost exclusively be found in Western Ukraine (Hrytsak 2011, 412). Not only historians, also the Ukrainian Security Service got involved in the “war on history”, by providing access to its archive to find information about the famine of 1932-33 and the activities of the UPA (Subtelny 2011, 21). Yushchenko made the controversial historian Volodymyr Viatrovych head of the archive of the Ukrainian Security Services. Viatrovych’s critics suggest that his goal is to rewrite the history of OUN and UPA as guerrilla organization fighting against the Red Army and honour their leaders. Part of this promotion was the rewriting of school textbooks or the renaming of streets to honour fighters of OUN or UPA (Cohen 2016).

Due to the Yushchenko’s pressure, a law on *Holodomor* was passed in 2006 in Verkhovna Rada, which qualified *Holodomor* as genocide against the Ukrainian nation and prohibited denial of it. The draft law referred to Holocaust and Holocaust denial laws of European countries in order to make Yushchenko’s initiative more convincing in the eyes of Western politicians. When he visited the European Parliament and the US congress he mentioned in his statements *Holodomor*, making it thus an instrument of his foreign policy. The Ukrainian foreign ministry started to advocate for international recognition of *Holodomor* as genocide (Kasyanov 2010, 44-47). His policy was successful at home, in raising the recognition of the famine as genocide in Ukrainian society from 39% to 63% (Hrytsak 2011, 412-413). Russia however felt that it was accused of committing *Holodomor* and refused to apologize. In a letter from Russian President Medvedev to Yushchenko, he criticized the political instrumentalization of the famine, depicting it as genocide of the Ukrainian people, an interpretation which, according to Medvedev, aimed at dividing Russia and Ukraine, two countries which had a common culture and heritage. Russia, although legal successor of the Soviet Union, saw itself not responsible for Stalinist crimes (Kappeler 2014, 114). With regard to *Holodomor*, Yushchenko quoted the work of

Stanislav Kulchitsky, naming the number of victims of the great famine between seven and ten million. Although no definite numbers exist, more moderate estimations are put at 3.5 million. He also tried to link the tragedy to current problems and as a means to enhance unity for his nationalistic orientated policies (Kasyanov 2010, 40).

Under Yushchenko Ukrainian foreign policy experienced a first significant change. His rhetoric and actions were mainly pro-Western. His party, Our Ukraine Block, and the party of the Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, openly declared NATO and EU accession as their goal. Nevertheless, shortly after the successful Orange Revolution, the alliance between Yushchenko and Tymoshenko broke (Proedrou 2010, 449-450). Although Yushchenko was aware that rapprochement to Western Europe meant a re-evaluation of Ukrainian-Polish relations, many conflicts based on historical events remained unsolved during his presidency. Yushchenko's decision to declare Bandera a hero of the Ukraine was part of the negative implications on Ukrainian-Polish relations (Hrytsak 2011, 415). The adopted governmental programme of 2004 included a chapter on foreign policy and made the impression that Ukraine's way towards Western Europe will soon be accomplished. The programme included a closer cooperation with the European Union, which should eventually have led to EU accession, WTO accession and NATO membership, but also mentioned a closer cooperation with Russia. By the time Yushchenko was inaugurated the EU offered Ukraine a three-year Action Plan within the framework of its European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The fulfilment of the Action Plan, which consisted mainly of assistance for economic reforms, was the precondition for an Association Agreement. Yushchenko hoped that by 2007 he would be able to sign it. Domestic policy struggles in Ukraine and enlargement fatigue in the EU, delayed his plans and relations between both sides soured. In 2009, the Commission of the Union stressed that reform progress had considerably slowed down, while the Ukrainian government threatened to suspend negotiations on visa regulations. By the end of Yushchenko's presidency no considerable progress towards a European integration was achieved. The second main foreign policy goal, which was already initiated during Kuchma's presidency, was accession to NATO. While the Ukrainian government did everything to speed up the accession process, the main obstacle to achieve this goal turned out to be public opinion and the Verkhovna Rada in Ukraine. Also, this foreign policy goal was not achieved, and no option anymore when Viktor Yanukovich became president. In its relations with Russia the Yushchenko government wanted to reset relations. In 2005, a Russia-Ukraine Intergovernmental Commission was introduced to replace the Committee on Cooperation. Nevertheless, tensions increased between both countries. When Dmitry Medvedev became Russian president, issues like the status of the

Russian Black Sea Fleet, or the conflict in South-Ossetia, in which Ukraine supported Georgia, were negatively influencing relations between both countries. The most critical topic, however, was gas supply from Russia. With Yushchenko taking office, the Kremlin's gas company Gazprom started negotiations with Ukraine, arguing that the price was too low (Gretskiy 2013, 7-15). The clear Western orientation of Yushchenko was accompanied by many foreign policy initiatives that have a clear anti-Russian character, like the plan for a final solution for the status of Transnistria, the reinforcement of the GUAM organization and the establishment of the Community for Democratic Choice. Viktor Yanukovich, and his party of the regions, then opposition, had an anti-NATO stance, dismissing plans to join the alliance as premature and a threat to working relations with Russia. He attacked Yushchenko for threatening the establishment of the Eurasian Union and with it all economic advantages. His party even managed to block a law, which would have allowed foreign troops to operate in Ukraine (Proedrou 2010, 449).

With regards to historical discourses, Yushchenko, like Kuchma, was seeking for international recognition of the *Holodomor* as genocide, which Russia on the other side tried to prevent. The Russian side emphasized their viewpoint that the famine was a tragedy which occurred in many regions of the Soviet Union and affected Russians as well. Therefore, it should not be characterized as genocide. The dispute escalated in 2008 and intensified the already existing disputes in Russian-Ukrainian relations (Finn 2008). The conflict culminated in a statement in which Putin supposedly said to US-President George Bush that "Ukraine is not even a state" (Riabchuk 2012, 442; RFE/RL 2008), and that Russia will try to break-up Ukraine in case the country will try to join NATO. Russia also prevented the Ukrainian effort for a UNESCO resolution calling *Holodomor* genocide. Instead, the document speaks of a "national tragedy" while also mentioning the Russian and Kazakh victims (UNESCO 2007).

In November 2009, when Yushchenko was still in office, he issued a decree on the "renewal of national remembrance and historical justice", which aimed at recognizing the fight for Ukrainian independence by OUN and UPA. With this reinterpretation Yushchenko wanted to establish a counter-narrative to the pro-Russian narrative of the Second World War and to attract voters from Western Ukraine (Golczewski 2011, 319).

Another example that illustrates the politicisation of history under Yushchenko and the consequences in foreign policy is the Battle of Poltava and the role of Hetman Mazepa. Ahead of the 300th anniversary of the Poltava-battle in 2009 Vladimir Putin suggested to have a joint celebration in Poltava which was declined by Yushchenko, who planned to attend a Swedish-

Ukrainian celebration event, where statues of Mazepa and the Swedish King Charles XII should have been erected. In Russia, this was regarded as provocation and the Russian Ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin compared it with an erection of a statue of Hitler in Stalingrad (Kappeler 2014, 113). Another example was the commemoration ceremony of the battle of Kruty, a battle at the beginning of the Ukrainian-Soviet war in 1918, when a Ukrainian army consisting mostly of several hundred students died in the attempt to defend a Bolshevik attack (Subtelny 2011, 21).

With Yushchenko assuming the presidential office, independent Ukraine experienced for the first time a significant change in its official historical narrative and foreign policy. However, in his attempt to create a national identity Yushchenko offered, according to many experts, a narrative which was too narrow and too aggressive (Korostelina 2104, 179). The historical narrative became a more nationalist tone, emphasizing differences to Russia and the European character of the country. Victimization, particularly the use of *Holodomor*, were one of the main themes of this policy. Contrary to Kravchuk and Kuchma, Yushchenko did not try to balance the interests and to avoid disputes. The outspoken anti-Soviet, and anti-Russian character of his historical narrative, alienated not only Russians, but also many Ukrainians.

3.4. The Yanukovych Presidency

Taras Kuzio (2011, 221) described president Yanukovych, the successor of Viktor Yushchenko as “the most neo- Soviet political leader since the USSR disintegrated”. According to Kuzio, his presidency was dominated by anti-Western conspiracy theories, inherited by the Soviet political culture. This culture dominated therefore domestic and foreign policy and deepened the division between Eastern and Western Ukraine (Kuzio 2011, 221). Already during the election campaign in 2004, Russia openly supported Yanukovych and the candidate supported in return closer ties with Russia and an elevation of the Russian language in Ukraine, which made him popular, particularly in the East and South-East of the country (Marples 2007, 72). While Yanukovych was still campaigning, he was already accused of instrumentalizing history, by portraying all nationalist movements in Ukraine as fascists (Riabchuk 2009, 241).

During his presidency, the dominating historical narrative changed and became a more pro-Russian and anti-Western note. Yanukovych’s presidency was perceived as a return to a positive narrative of Soviet history (Korostelina 2014, 178). He appointed Dmytro Tabachnik as Minister of Education and Science, known for his pro-Russian and pro-Soviet views while

prejudicing Ukrainian culture and language (Motyl 2013). Contrary to Yushchenko, Yanukovich was, according to many experts, simply interested in money and power and willing to sell Ukrainian history to Russia if it fits his interests since it was a non-significant value for him (Korostelina 2014, 179). The result was a regression of Ukrainian identity, resulting in a loss of sovereignty and own national interest as well as a return of russification (Korostelina 2014, 179).

In his foreign policy strategy, Yanukovich completely changed the political direction of his predecessor. In his first hundred days of his presidency, he resettled the relations with Russia. As Kuzio (2012, 559) has observed, Yanukovich adapted his politics to the political system of Putin's Russia, not only in his domestic but also on foreign policy. The prospects of NATO-membership were off the table, while Russia's Black Sea fleet was guaranteed a permanent base on Crimea (Kuzio 2012, 574). In the framework of the first state visit to Moscow, Yanukovich promised Russian President Medvedev to revoke Yushchenko's decree declaring Stepan Bandera an official hero fighting for Ukrainian independence (Golczewski 2011, 319).

Even when Ukraine opened itself economically again to the European Union, with the prospect of signing an Association Agreement, the historical narrative remained the same. In a speech on the economic situation in 2013, Yanukovich called Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, Ukraine's fraternal countries, "who we associate centuries of common history with." (Yanukovich 2013). Also from the Russian side historical narratives were repeatedly used to campaign against the Association Agreement with the EU. The Russian journalist Dimitry Kiselev spoke of "neomazepism", when talking about Ukraine, referring to the negative associated term "mazepism" which refers to the Cossack Hetman Mazepa (Kappeler 2014, 113).

In relations with Poland, tension between both states rose when Yanukovich was president. However, with the prospect of reaching an Association Agreement with the EU, both sides tried to improve the edgy relations. Paweł Kowal, chair of the EU-Ukraine parliamentary cooperation committee even stated that "[...] some people feel the issue of Volhynia is being sacrificed in the name of better relations with Ukraine" (Kyiv, 2013). Nevertheless, the Polish parliament voted in 2013 to describe the Volhynia massacre "genocide", which on the other side of the border infuriated the far-right Svoboda-party. In this context, Viktor Yanukovich did not attend the 70th anniversary commemorative service in the region (Kyiv, 2013).

In November 2013, the Association Agreement with the EU was ready to be signed at a summit in Vilnius. However, when Ukraine was ready to sign the Eastern Partnership Agreement with the EU, Russian pressure led to reorientation of Ukrainian foreign policy. The U-turn from Western Europe back to Russian orientation was officially justified with economic problems of Ukraine (Kappeler 2014, 107-108).

Although Yanukovich made use of certain historical narratives, his instrumentalization of historical discourses had a smaller extend compared to the activities of his predecessor and his successor. As a whole, it can be said that Yanukovich's presidency was strongly influenced by Russia. Likewise, the official historical narrative was pro-Russia oriented. However, Yanukovich used historical narratives more for campaigning and domestic issues than in foreign relations. On the contrary, it appears that he was ready to leave certain historical events under the table if they seem to threaten his interests and foreign policy goals.

3.5. The Poroshenko Presidency

Following the protests of 2013 which became known as the Euromaidan, Viktor Yanukovich had to flee to Russia. In 2014 Petro Poroshenko, born in the region of Odessa, was elected president (Poroshenko 2017). Already member of the political establishment and business tycoon, Poroshenko led a platform favouring Euro-Atlantic integration and received 54.7% of votes in the presidential election (Shevel 2014, 159). The political direction of his presidency in the area of foreign policy is clearly a pro-European and pro-NATO stance, while being critical about Russia already before the start of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and on Crimea. From what can be observed until now, Poroshenko and his government are very actively using historical narratives for nation-building.

In his narrative, he emphasizes Ukraine's emergence as a nation, its independence, both from Soviet Union and Russia, while stressing Ukraine's path towards becoming a "European" nation. Poroshenko's historical image, follows the path of nationalist historians and portrays Ukraine as an independent thousand-year old nation which has only come under domination of Russia or the Soviet Union. According to him, Ukraine is now in a process of freeing itself, also in its historical narrative, from the propaganda of the last centuries, following hereby the argument of authors like Timothy Snyder (2015).

His speeches as a president reflect this historical narrative. In his speech on Ukrainian Independence Day in August 2016, Poroshenko stressed the narrative of a Ukrainian state which is “continuing the thousand-year tradition of state development”, referring not only to independent Ukraine of the early twentieth century, but also to Yaroslav the Wise and his inauguration of principedom, as important dates for the country. On this occasion, he connects this historical narrative with Ukraine’s right of self-determination (Poroshenko 2016a). In another speech in April 2017 he refers to Timothy Snyder’s article “Edge of Europe, End of Europe”, to stress the historical differences between Russia and Ukraine and the fact that Ukraine is, in contrary to Russia, part of Europe sharing its values of freedom, human dignity and rule of law (Poroshenko 2017).

Not only his rhetoric reflects this politicized narrative, it also manifests itself in the legislation of his government. In 2015, Poroshenko signed a law that allowed the transfer of Ukraine’s archives from Soviet institutions, to the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory. The institute defines its main goal is the “implementation of state policy in the field of restoration and preservation of national memory of the Ukrainian people” (Cohen 2016). Particularly the head of the institute, the historian Volodymyr Viatrovych (who was already prominent under Yushchenko) was accused of trying to rewrite Ukrainian history in a biased way and to whitewash Ukrainian nationalist groups and their involvement in Holocaust and ethnic cleansing of Poles during the Second World War. Viatrovych is also accused of ignoring or even falsifying historical documents. For Russia, Viatrovych’s interpretation is used to portray Ukraine as overrun by nationalists who were in fact fascists and Neo-Nazis (Cohen 2016). Russia tried to exploit this allegedly dominant role of far-right movements like Svoboda or Right Sector already during the parliamentary elections in 2014, although Ukrainian far-right parties played a marginal role, not at least because they lost president Yanukovich as political enemy. Interestingly, Russia while accusing the Ukrainian government of supporting fascist groups, ignored itself the radical pro-Russian nationalist groups in Eastern Ukraine who found support in Russia (Shekhovtsov 2015, 85-87).

Similarly, the decommunization laws of 2015 paved the way for a nationalized history of the twentieth century of Ukraine by banning all Nazi symbols, but for Ukraine more importantly, all Communist symbols, too. Moreover, public denial of the criminal nature of the Communist regime was outlawed and popular historical Soviet terms like “Great Patriotic War” replaced with the Western term “Second World War”. The law which is often compared to similar laws in Poland or the Baltic States, aims at “freeing” national history from Communist propaganda (The

Guardian 2015), but at the same time denies the fact that Soviet nostalgia is still an important factor among Ukrainians. Furthermore, a list of “twentieth-century fighters for Ukraine’s freedom and independence” was established which includes not only the government of the Revolution period, but also the OUN and UPA (Yekelchuk 2015, 97).

Poroshenko himself spoke in the context of this law of the liberation of history from (Soviet or Russian) propaganda and notes that,

“In the framework of the law on de-communization more than one thousand and two hundred idols of Lenin were demounted. 26 regions and 987 of localities lost their communist names that tied their citizens by invisible mental thread to the former empire. The law has restored justice in relation to those, who dedicated his life to fight for independence and unity of Ukrainian state. The state has restored the historical truth in the question of national memory.” (Poroshenko 2016d)

Poroshenko’s anti-Soviet agenda can also be observed in his speeches. He repeatedly speaks of the crimes committed by the Soviet regime, blaming Stalin and the Soviet leadership in Moscow. At the mourning ceremony for the Babyn Yar victims he mentioned on the one hand that there were Nazi-collaborators in Ukraine, but not without adding that this was the case everywhere in Europe (Poroshenko 2016b). Furthermore, he did not refer to any names of perpetrators, but instead to the Soviet historical policy regarding the tragedy:

“I thought a lot why the Soviet regime first stonewalled the Babyn Yar tragedy for decades, and then tried to dilute its Jewish component in the general martyrology of the World War II. Might it be because Stalin, in the depth of his black soul supported the so-called “final solution of the Jewish issue”?” (Poroshenko 2016b)

Moreover, Poroshenko also identified Soviet Union in this context with contemporary Russia:

„By the way, today the Supreme Court of Russia issued a xenophobic judgment banning the Mejlis – so the Stalin’s cause is still alive!“ (Poroshenko 2016b)

Unsurprisingly, relations with Russia have dramatically deteriorated, since the occupation of Crimea by Russia and conflict in Eastern Ukraine has started. Poroshenko even speaks of a “real war” between Ukraine and Russia (BBC 2015). It is therefore only a logical consequence that Russia is portrayed by the official Ukrainian narrative as an aggressive imperialist power that tries to win back control over free Ukraine associating it in the official historical discourse

with Tsarist Russia and Soviet Union. Interestingly enough, Poroshenko tries, in his historical narrative, to destroy the partly positive image of Soviet Union and to establish links to contemporary Russia. At the same time, he characterizes Ukraine as independent always existing nation that tries to free itself from Russia and being transformed into “Little Russia” (Poroshenko 2016c).

Apart from the Russian-Ukrainian relations, the Polish-Ukrainian relations remain ambivalent under President Poroshenko, mainly due to the historical interpretation of the events in Volhynia. On the one side, Poland became one of the strongest supporters of Ukraine since fighting in the Eastern Part of the country broke out and is now one of the biggest non-lethal military providers for aid in the country. Both sides are united in their opposition to Moscow. However, historical policies like the decommunization laws and the glorification of nationalist involved in the killing of Poles during Second World War irritated Warsaw. As a reaction to the laws and the glorification of Ukrainian figures like Bandera, Poland’s parliament on the other side declared in July 2016 those killings an act of genocide. Again, Volodymyr Viatrovykh was one of the leading historians declaring that the number of Polish victims was far lower than Polish historians claim. This conflict further escalated when a parliamentary group of the Ukrainian Verkhovna Rada introduced a bill declaring Polish actions on Ukrainian territory from 1919 to 1951 a genocide, alienating Poland even further (Bateson, 2017). The film *Volhynia* by the Polish director Wojciech Smarzowski, which depicts Ukrainians killing Polish civilians caused more anger in Kiev and added another episode to the dispute. When the Polish Cultural Institute in Kiev invited Ukrainian officials for a screening of the film, the Ukrainian foreign ministry reacted by sending a note to the Polish embassy requesting a delay of the screening. On the official level certain steps were therefore taken to calm the tensions. An investigation committee was established investigating the events and trying to find a common narrative (Bateson, 2017).

On the occasion of a visit to Kiev, Poland’s foreign Minister Waszczykowski noted: “Likewise, we started a difficult dialogue on history with Ukraine some time ago. We have managed to come to terms over historical truth with many nations that inflicted greater harm on us, so in this case I’m sure and optimistic that we’ll reach reconciliation, sooner rather than later” noted Minister Waszczykowski (Waszczykowski 2016).

Overall it can be said that instrumentalization of a Ukrainian history is a vital part of Poroshenko’s political strategy. It is a clear attempt for a stronger nation-building, based on own Ukrainian national heroes and an own distinct history going back to Kievan Rus. This policy has

not only domestic reasons, like concessions to the nationalist forces in the country, but seem specifically designed to create a Ukrainian narrative that is disconnected from Russia. It is portrayed as a centuries-old hostile aggressor that tries to dominate Ukraine and therefore has suppressed its own cultural heritage. This nation-building project has on the other hand, however, negative impacts on relations with Poland. Nevertheless, for strategical reasons both sides have a strong interest in preventing the negative influence of the disputed history on their relations.

Conclusion

The analysis of historical discourses in Ukraine has shown that different historical interpretations are present in all the examined historical periods and events. Overall, it can be said that numerous variants of historical narratives exist in Ukraine. They may however vary, depending on the geographic, social or economic situation. It is therefore safe to say that Ukraine lacks a common historical memory. As surveys have proved, many different variations of historical narratives exist in Ukraine and have consequently led to different national identities. In the political sphere however, two main narratives can be identified. On the one hand, there is a pro-Western narrative, which has its base in the national Ukrainian historiography, starting with Mykhailo Hrushevskiy. This narrative is constructed, emphasizing a thousand-year-old history of Ukraine, its roots in the Kievan Rus', the democratic heritage of the Cossacks, and the Western development of Ukraine in the regions which were part of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Habsburg Empire. The narrative allows to make a strong distinction between Russia and Ukraine and facilitates creation of the image of Russia as "the other". It also denies a common East Slav heritage and sees the Russian Tsarist as well as the Soviet periods as occupation and suppression of Ukrainian culture and language. Particularly important for the national self-understanding of this narrative is the victimization. *Holodomor* has a prominent place in this narrative and is characterized as genocide. To emphasize its scope, it is also compared to the Holocaust and in its extreme version used as excuse for the Ukrainian collaboration with National Socialist Germany. Some even stress the importance for Ukrainian national-identity to have national heroes and Ukraine would therefore have to find its heroes even if they play a controversial role in history.

On the other hand, the second constructed narrative, which is politically instrumentalized, is based on a rather pro-Russian memory. In this case, the common heritage of Kievan Rus' and the shared history over centuries is stressed. This narrative has its roots in the Soviet historiography and pictures therefore a positive image of the Soviet period. It highlights the economic and technological advances of the Soviet Union and the fraternal fight of Ukrainians and Russians during the Second World War, while condemning nationalist Ukrainian movements as fascists.

The instrumentalization of these two different narratives can be observed during all presidencies of Ukraine since 1991. While Kravchuk avoided any controversial discussion about historical topics, a stronger instrumentalization can be observed during the Kuchma and Yanukovich presidencies. Both attempted to balance between a narrative that stresses the uniqueness of the Ukrainian nation and the differences to "the other", while trying not to move too far away

from the pro-Russian narrative. Contrary to them, Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko clearly instrumentalize their policy with a pro-Western Ukrainian nationalist narrative. Compared to their foreign policy, parallels between the official historical discourse and the relations with Ukraine's neighbours can be observed. While Yushchenko and Poroshenko had a clear pro-Western policy, they alienated Russia. In contrast to them, Kravchuk, Kuchma and Yanukovych tried to balance relations with both sides, since they tried on the one hand to legitimize their power and the independence of Ukraine, while they overall prioritize relations with Russia over relations with the West, since they were politically and economically more depended. However, all presidents so far tried to establish closer relations with the West.

The comparison of the presidencies not only revealed parallels between the official narrative and foreign policy strategies, but also direct effects of historical events on the relations with a country and vice versa. What can be observed in the case of Petro Poroshenko, is the fact that influence of historical discourses and foreign policy can have both ways. While the anti-Russian, anti-Soviet narrative is aimed at legitimizing a foreign policy fighting against Russia while turning to EU and NATO, the unsolved debate over Volhynia with Poland demonstrate that disputed narratives can have an unintended negative impact on foreign relations. Similarly, striving for international recognition of *Holodomor* as genocide immediately had a negative impact on relations with Russia.

In a state like Ukraine, where several competing narratives exist, political decision-makers can change and use the official narrative to make it consistent with the own (foreign) policy strategy to legitimize their actions. As the comparison of the Ukrainian presidencies has shown, different narratives were used and constructed, not only to legitimize domestically the power and mobilize certain groups of supporters, but also to legitimize their foreign policy. The construction of a certain narrative can, however, also have an unintended negative impact on foreign relations.

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On my honour as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Strohmeier', written in a cursive style.

Gerald Strohmeier

16 June 2017

