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The Myth of 'East' and 'West' Ukraine

To what extent can identity constructs around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages explain the Ukraine Crisis?

Student ID number: 9129392

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Supervisor: Dr. Olga Onuch

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Abstract

Academic analysis of the Ukraine Crisis often sustains the notion that the conflict is the product of two competing identity constructs around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages. It thereby, adheres to the popular narrative of ‘two Ukraines’, which delineates the country into an ethnic Ukrainian, Ukrainian-speaking, pro-European ‘West’ and a bi-ethnic, Russian-speaking, pro-Russian ‘East’. This dissertation aims to challenge the assumptions underlying the separation of Ukraine into two homogenous identity constructs. It advocates the presence of increasingly fluid and mixed identities that cut across ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages to formulate a more civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian. Working with the latest national poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in September 2015, it explores in how far Ukraine’s regions are far more complex and the views of its various linguistic and ethnic groups far more diverse than popular discourse likes to acknowledge. Its objective is to make a contribution to the understanding of the Ukraine crisis by including the nuances of opinions that are expressed by the Ukrainian population into the analysis. Examining the identities taken up and views expressed by the Ukrainian people sheds light on the fact that the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’ is increasingly being challenged in a bottom-up fashion and that Ukrainians are ideologically more united than contemporary literature recognises.

The Ukrainian Crisis is essentially a struggle between different visions of what it means to be Ukrainian and who is to decide and, following from that, what is Ukraine's proper place in the world'.

(Sakwa 2014, p. 50)

One of the legacies of the Orange Revolution, that took place in Ukraine in 2004, is the representation of Ukraine in the public, political and academic discourse as a deeply divided country along the territorial dimensions of east and west. In the election of 2004 the pro-European candidate Viktor Yushchenko won with an overwhelming majority in the seventeen oblasts of what came to be known as 'West' Ukraine, while his pro-Russian rival Viktor Yanukovych obtained the same level of voter majority in the ten oblasts of the 'East' (2006b, p. 12). As neither candidate obtained the absolute majority, gaining 39.87% and 39.32% respectively, the voting proceeded to a second round of which Yanukovych was declared the winner with a majority of 49.46% (Copsey 2004, p. 6). The world's attention was drawn to the Maidan Square in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv when people began to protest against Yanukovych's victory, suspecting the results were rigged. They were to be proven right, when a fair vote a month later confirmed Yushchenko the winner with a majority of 51.99% (Copsey 2004, p. 10). The media, academic scholars and politicians were quick to tell a story of 'two Ukraines', producing a narrative of a 'pro-European' western Ukraine fighting for inclusion into the European Union, while its eastern counterpart desired closer ties with Russia (Mulvey 2004; Ragozin 2004; Portnov 2014; Arel 2006a). This regional cleavage increasingly became associated with the ethno-linguistic divide of the country. The latest Ukrainian census, taken in 2001, revealed that the majority of the ethnic Russian minority of 17.6% lived in the south-eastern oblasts of the country (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). Moreover, various sociological polls have demonstrated that about half of the population, predominantly in the east, prefers to

speak Russian (KIIS 2015). Therefore, the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’ depicts a country where the majority in the ‘West’ speaks Ukrainian and is of Ukrainian ethnicity, while the ‘East’ is predominantly Russian-speaking and home to the Russian ethnic minority of the country; in other words, a country that is divided along ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages.

Nearly a decade later, the world’s eyes were yet again set on the Maidan Square of Kyiv, where a protest movement, now commonly referred to as the Euromaidan, began after President Yanukovich, having won the election of 2010, failed to sign the long awaited Association Agreement with the European Union and announced that he would seek closer ties with Russia instead. A storyline, harmonious with the narrative of the ‘two Ukraines’, began to unfold. After the police resorted to violence in order to disperse the growing number of protesters in Kyiv, the demonstrations began to sweep across the country and eventually led to the ousting of Yanukovich in February 2014 and the installation of a pro-democratic, pro-European interim government (The House of Commons 2014, p. 31). In response to the events in Kyiv gunmen took over regional parliament buildings in the Crimean Peninsula, situated in the south-east of Ukraine, installed a pro-Russian leadership and held a referendum on joining the Russian Federation on the 16th March 2014 (Yekelchuk 2015, pp. 130-131). With a majority, albeit contested result, of 96.77% the Crimean population opted for the integration (Somin 2014). While the government in Kyiv and the international community did not recognize the referendum, Russia went on to annex the peninsula (The House of Commons 2014, p. 7). In an address to the Russian Federation and the Crimean civil society on the date of the annexation, the Russian president Vladimir Putin declared that ‘[m]illions of Russians and Russian-speaking people live in Ukraine and will continue to do so. Russia will always defend their interests using political, diplomatic and legal

means' (The Kremlin 2014). Putin therefore, made use of the narrative of a 'pro-Russian' eastern Ukraine to legitimize Russia's involvement in the crisis. Shortly afterwards a separatist movement began to emerge in the Donbass region of eastern Ukraine, constituting of the oblasts Donetsk and Luhansk, with the aim to secede to Russia. It escalated into an armed conflict between the separatist forces of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republic and Ukrainian government forces and is still ongoing (Yekelchik 2015, p. 143). Even though the amount of involvement Russia has had in the separatist movement is still contest, few scholars doubt that there is indeed a connection to be found between Moscow and the conflict in the Donbass (Giuliano 2015, p. 514). In the course of two and a half decades, so the story goes, Ukraine went from being a country united in its desire for independence to a country being ripped by competing pro-European and pro-Russian sentiments.

Even though ethnic and linguistic differences in contemporary Ukraine indisputably exists, scholars have argued that the tale of 'two Ukraines' is not simply the product of a combination of demographic factors, most notably what language a person speaks or what ethnicity that person belongs to. Wilson rightly argues that 'Ukrainians have no difficulty distinguishing between linguistic and state identity or between ethnic origins and belonging' (2014, p. 26). According to the narrative, what divides the country are competing identities, fuelled by juxtaposing political interests put forward by the ruling Ukrainian elite since independence in a nation-building project that repeatedly favoured one half of the Ukrainian society over the other (Shulman 2005, p. 35). Arguably, no one in power has so far managed to unite the country around a civic understanding of Ukrainian citizenship (Bachmann & Lyubashenko 2014, p. 453; Sakwa 2015, p. x). Thereby, domestic politicians have laid the groundwork for external powers interfering into the Ukrainian domestic context. It is these identities that this

dissertation will focus on and analyse in how far the narrative of a set of competing identities delineating Ukraine is an accurate representation of the country and can explain the crisis at hand.

Korostelina (2013, p. 294) argues that elites play an important role in constructing identities that then trickle down into national consciousness through popular discourse. It is nonetheless, of vital importance to analyse how the population adheres to these constructed identities and not simply assume their presence based on the actions by political elites. Therefore, this dissertation will challenge the narrative of 'two Ukraines' by looking at the nuances of opinions expressed by the Ukrainian population and consequently, address the question of the extent these supposedly constructed identities around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages can explain the Ukraine crisis. This is especially relevant, as the majority of literature on the Ukraine crisis published so far bases its arguments around this identity cleavage without seriously challenging it (Sakwa 2015; Bachmann& Lyubashenko 2014; Wilson 2014). It thereby, omits the variety of opinions present in Ukrainian society and the increasingly important phenomenon of fluid, civic and mixed identities. The paradox is that academics acknowledge that mixed identities exist without challenging popular discourse (Sakwa 2015, p. 21; Wilson 2014, p. 123). Why then, do they adhere to the simplification of Ukraine as a country neatly divided along identities constructed around ethno-linguistic and regional lines? By looking at the latest national opinion poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology [KIIS] in September 2015, this dissertation aims to argue for two aspects in relation to Ukrainian identities that challenge popular discourse. Firstly, it will demonstrate that identities are increasingly build around a much more civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian and thereby, contest the allegedly predominantly ethnic narrative that presidents have adopted since independence and

external forces have used to justify involvement in the Ukraine crisis. Secondly, it will establish that the phenomenon of increasingly fluid and mixed identities is cutting across the ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages much of the contemporary literature still upholds. Analysing the identities taken up and opinions expressed by the Ukrainian society sheds light on the fact that the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’ is increasingly being challenged in a bottom-up fashion and that Ukrainians are ideologically more united than contemporary literature likes to acknowledge. The Ukrainian population should therefore, not only be taken into account when seeking to formulate an understanding of the Ukraine crisis, but should also indisputably be part of its solution.

For this purpose, this dissertation will first of all, trace the evolution of the narrative of competing identity constructs in Ukraine. It will go on to demonstrate how scholars have used this narrative to explain the Ukraine crisis and have thereby, failed to significantly challenge it. Afterwards, it will analyse literature published previous to the crisis and the data retrieved from the KIIS national poll of September 2015 in order to advance the idea that mixed ethno-linguistic identities based around a more civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian, as well as a regional diversity more complex than the simple ‘East-West’ dichotomy, challenge the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’.

1. The emergence of a tale of ‘two Ukraines’

Mykola Riabchuk introduced the concept of ‘two Ukraines’ in 1992, shortly after the country gained independence (Zhurzhenko 2002). As will be seen, since then the author has developed and challenged the concept, a process that has largely been lost in translation, evident in news headlines such as ‘Ukraine’s crisis – A tale of two countries’ (Economist 2014) or ‘Divided Ukraine roiled by protest, love-hate with “Mother Russia”’ (Mayer 2013). He based his formulation on the two different historical nation-building processes that are evident in Ukraine, resulting in the the majority of people considered themselves Ukrainians, but attaching different meanings and emotions to the term (Riabchuk 2015, p. 145). While western Ukrainians rejected the Soviet legacy as alien, considering Russia the main ‘Other’, eastern Ukrainians had internalized the view of themselves as ‘Little Russians’, not alien, but ‘almost the same’ (Riabchuk 2015, p. 141). The product was a country full of Ukrainians with no consensus of what it exactly meant to be Ukrainian. This section will reconstruct the origins of the tale of ‘two Ukraines’ and demonstrate in how far politicians since independence have failed to offer an answer to the question ‘Who are we, the Ukrainians?’ (Zhurzhenko 2002). They instead engaged in competing projects of identity politics that capitalized on the historical heritage of diverging national self-identifications.

‘Identity politics’ are about how people ‘conceive themselves in relation to others, how they come to acquire this conception and how their self-understanding affects, or is affected by, process of collective action and state policies’ (Arel 2006b, p. 2). For none other is this arguably more relevant than for Ukrainians, whose identities have allegedly been shaped, moulded and reinforced by the elites in power, who

continuously engaged in a top-down construction of two competing national identities in post-Soviet Ukraine (Kuzio 2001, p. 345). It will be demonstrated that popular discourse argues that these competing identities translate into sets of beliefs and these beliefs in turn convert into regional distinct political behaviour, which often divide the country during election time, as in the case of the 2004 election between Yushchenko and Yanukovich. Scholars argue that as a result the 'West' of Ukraine has adopted an 'Ethnic Ukrainian' identity, who sees the main unifying features of the Ukrainian nation-state to be its ethnic Ukrainian majority, as well as its language and culture (Shulman 2005, p. 38; Korostelina 2013, p. 301). On the other hand, the 'East' of Ukraine has adhered to an 'Eastern Slavic' national identity and perceives Ukraine as fundamentally 'bi-ethnic, bi-cultural, and bi-lingual nation-state where Ukrainians and Russians have an equal place in the construction of nationhood' (Shulman 2005, p. 38; Pirie 1996, p. 1984). The former identity sees itself as fundamentally different to Russian history and culture and calls for the promotion of ethnic Ukrainian culture, history and symbols and integration with the culturally similar West (Riabchuk 2015, p. 141; Korostelina 2013, p. 302). The latter calls for compatibility between Ukrainian and Russian culture, history and symbols and favours a foreign policy orientation focused on the Eastern Slavs, namely Russia and Belarus (Shulman 2005, p. 38; Kulyk 2006, p. 290). That these identities and beliefs increasingly came to be associated with language and ethnicity is owed to the fact that the latest census conducted in Ukraine in 2001 demonstrated the majority of Russian-speakers and Russian ethnics live in eastern Ukraine, as well as politicians politicizing these issues as a means to increase their political stronghold in either western or eastern Ukraine (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001; Kulyk 2006; Shulman 2005). Therefore, conventional wisdom and scholarship suggests that competing identities and their respective beliefs predict the opposing political

behaviours, most predominately in the region’s voting pattern, that can be found in Ukraine (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 70). Consequently, Shulman concludes that

public opinion polls show large and systematic differences on a great many policy questions between ethnic Ukrainians and Russians, between Ukrainian-speakers and Russian-speakers, and between inhabitants of the west and north versus those of the east and south. [...] The oft-heard portrayal of Ukraine bifurcated between west and east really does capture a fundamental facet of the country (2005, p. 44).

This part of the dissertation will trace the emergence of a narrative, regularly employed by popular discourse, which demarks identities based around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages in Ukraine as an established fact. The simplified break-down of this narrative can be found in Table 1.

Overview: The narrative of ‘East’ and ‘West’ Ukraine

Feature	‘West’ Ukraine	‘East’ Ukraine
Language	Ukrainian	Russian/ Bi-lingual
Ethnicity	Ukrainian	Bi-ethnic (Ukrainian and Russian)
Identity	Ethnic Ukrainian	Eastern Slavic
Attitudes to Russia	Russia as ‘the Other’	‘Almost the same’
Foreign Policy Preference	Pro-European	Pro-Russian

Table 1 (Source: Shulman 2005, Korostelina 2013, Riabchuk 2015)

The now Russian-ruled Autonomous Republic of Crimea is often treated as an exception that arguably falls outside of the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’ as its identity cannot simply be explained by the ‘Eastern Slavic’ identity construct (Riabchuk 2015, p.

151; Barrington & Herron 2014, p. 58; Birch 2000, p. 1029). This has historical, as well as ethnic reasons. The peninsula was given to Ukraine by Russian president Khrushchev in 1954 and is the only region where ethnic Russians constitute the majority of the population (Birch 2000, p. 1029; Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 58). Out of these, around 30% were born in Russia and merely migrated to Crimea (Balcer 2014, p. 109). Moreover, it was the only region that did not strongly support Ukrainian independence (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 58). Due to the fact that the viability of the referendum held in March 2014 is still subject to scholarly debate, as well as a lack of data available on current attitudes prevailing on the peninsula, analysing Crimean identities in the context of the Ukrainian nation-building project is beyond the scope of this dissertation and will be left to future research (Somin 2014). It will concentrate on the separatist movement in the Donbass as allegedly representing the epitome of an 'Eastern Slavic' identity construct in eastern Ukraine.

In order to understand the narrative of identity creation in Ukraine along the above mentioned cleavages one needs to understand the varying degrees of influence the Soviet historical background has had on the different regions of the country. Birch (2000, p. 1019-1020) identifies five main historical regions that have been subject to varying degrees of Russian rule. The Left Bank of the Dnieper river, what is now considered part of 'East' Ukraine, has had the greatest experience of imperialist Russian rule, dating back to the Treaty of Pereyaslav in 1654. Over the course of the 18th century the Russian Empire expanded into southern Ukraine, winning land from the Ottoman Empire. The region one would generally call central Ukraine was acquired from Poland in 1793. Therefore, these parts have been subject to centuries of Russian domination. The former Habsburgs region in the far west, including the historical regions of Galicia, Transcarpathia and Bukovyna, are the only regions that have never been part of the

Russian empire. They were only annexed by the Soviet Union after the defeat of Germany in 1944. Western Volhynia, incorporating the oblasts of Volyn and Rivne, experienced 150 years of imperial Russian rule before being given to the Polish after World War I. It therefore, experienced Western influence in the interwar period, before being incorporated into the Soviet Union along the former Habsburg lands. It concludes that what is now known as 'East' Ukraine, consisting in Birch's framework of the Left Bank regions, southern Ukraine, as well as parts of central, has had the greatest historical experience of Russian rule, both under the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, while the majority of 'West' Ukraine only joined the USSR after World War II. Popular discourse makes use of these historical differences to explain a more 'pro-Russian' identity in those parts of Ukraine that experienced the longest Russian rule.

Another Soviet legacy is the imposition of ethnicity as a fundamental social category (Kulyk 2006, p. 285). After the Soviet Union abolished its indigenization policy in the 1930s, which pursued the goal of creating autonomous nations with their own language, culture and leadership, a Russification of the Soviet territories began, making the Russians 'first among equals' (Slezkine 1994, p. 434). Arguably in southern and eastern Ukraine the negative attitudes towards this policy were weakened by the fact that Russians were not perceived as alien, but as similar in language and cultural heritage (Kulyk 2006, p. 290). Additionally, after the 1930s, it was taken for granted that everyone throughout the Soviet Union spoke or could at least fully comprehend the Russian language. Speaking Ukrainian was either seen as backwards or as expressing nationalistic feelings, which was regarded as suspicious during Soviet times (Kulyk 2006, p. 291). These policies explain the large number of Russian-speaking Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine. The Russification policy, as well as the fact that the share of Russians in the Ukrainian population doubled during Soviet times due to migration movements from Russia, explains the proportion of ethnic Russians in present day Ukraine. It needs

to be noted however, that these numbers have been declining since the breakup of the Soviet Union from 22% in 1989 to 17.2% in 2001 (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). It seems logical that the regions that have lived under Russian rule for longer, are demonstrating a greater amount of assimilation to Russian language and culture, while those who have only experienced shorter rule reveal resistance to adapting to the foreign power. However, how do these demographic and historical factors translate into identities?

Comparing two academic studies that have dealt with identity creation in the different parts of Post-Soviet Ukraine will shed light on the fact that identities in Ukraine are the products of both, historical and geographical circumstances and the ethno-linguistic narrative adopted by the political elite of the country. Zhurzhenko & Umland (2014) have investigated attitudes in villages in the border region of Ukraine to Russia, while Risch (2011) has focused on identity creation in the western Ukrainian city of Lviv. Although significant differences in settlement types exist between these two case studies, they nonetheless offer valuable insight into how different parts of Ukraine have dealt with the demise of the Soviet Union and how it has affected its populations' identities. In the near-border, predominately Russian-speaking village of Udy, situated in the Kharkiv oblast in eastern Ukraine, the inhabitant's experience of 'becoming Ukrainians' has been connected to the experience of 'becoming a borderland', an ethnic and linguistic 'other' in the larger context of the Ukrainian nation-building project (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 282). Being faced with unemployment and depopulation the border symbolizes 'the irreversible break with the Soviet era, nostalgically related to social security and relative prosperity' (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 282). The cultural life in Udy in 2003 reflected this fact as the village inhabitants preferred Russian TV Channels to Ukrainian ones and were better informed

about the political life on the other side (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 282). Soviet nostalgia based on economic security is a common phenomenon across the industrialized 'East' of Ukraine. The general trends that have characterised post-Soviet developments in the region are a dramatic increase in prices, accompanied by a sharp fall in production as well as growing levels of poverty. In post-Soviet Ukraine, Soviet-era jobs are insufficient to maintain an adequate standard of living (Birch 2000, p. 1028). The experience of the population of Udy resonates with what Oushakine describes as that of 'people cut in half' by the disappearance of the USSR (2009, p. 261). It is therefore, simple for the pro-Russian Party of Regions to play on issues of Soviet nostalgia and the importance of the Russian language to maintain its electoral base in the eastern Ukraine and thereby, sustain the narrative of a pro-Russian 'East' (Yekelchik 2015, p. 21).

The experience of the city of Lviv in western Ukrainian is radically different to its rural eastern counterpart. Risch argues that the Soviet efforts to implement a revolution from above to overcome Ukrainian 'backwardness' ended up creating a distinctively 'Western Ukrainian identity' (2011, p. 255). This was arguably owed to the fact that Lviv, due to its geographical location and strong ties to Poland, operated as a window to "Europeanness" and was termed the Ukrainian 'Soviet Abroad' (Risch 2011, p. 91). It consequently, needed to battle negative stereotypes such as 'anti-Soviet', 'bourgeois' or 'nationalistic' and essentially, articulated its identity around them (Risch 2011, p. 91). It can thus be concluded that the fall of the Soviet Union left Lviv with a strong regional and Ukrainian identity, while villages in eastern Ukraine were left with an identity that was constructed around nostalgia for Soviet economic security and a feeling to be the ethnic and linguistic 'other' in a new country. This perception is used by Putin when he exclaimed that '[m]illions of people went to bed in one country and awoke in a different one, overnight becoming ethnic minorities in former Union

Republics' (The Kremlin 2014). These differences in identity should also be attributed to the different historical experiences of the regions; the former having experienced a relatively brief period of Soviet occupation, while the latter's history has been intertwined with Russia for centuries. As will be seen, politicians have made use of these regional differences and used them as a tool for political mobilization, thereby, reinforcing ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages for their own political advancement. As a by-product, they employed and strengthened the narrative of 'two Ukraines'.

A defining characteristic of Ukrainian politics is that the four presidents, ruling the country from independence to the outbreak of the crisis in 2014, have made use of the set of competing narratives to mobilize regional support along four dimensions, namely Ukrainian history, especially the Soviet legacy, the use of language, the matter of ethnicity and foreign policy orientation. Depending on the views they put forward, politicians have hoped to mobilize political support in either the 'West' or 'East' of Ukraine. Therefore, Zhurzhenko termed the ongoing conflict of the political and economic interests of the country's elite a 'war of identities' (2002). Ukraine's first president after independence, Leonid Kravchuk, encouraged Ukrainian nationalist myths and traditions to be implemented in national consciousness in an attempt to legitimize the rather unexpected independence. This was especially apparent in relation to history, where Kravchuk advocated a history of the country marked by its resistance to Russia's imperial policies and a struggle by the Ukrainian people for independence (Kulyk 2006, p. 295). This appropriation of history was designed to defend a foreign policy orientation towards Ukraine's 'return' to Europe. The national discourse used in relation to ethnicity and language was treating Russian-speakers and the Russian ethnic part of the population as a minority with no privileged status (Kulyk 2006, p. 295). This produced a radical break with the common sense assumptions held by former Soviet

people, who envisioned close ties with Russia and in some cases Russian as a second state language (Kulyk 2006, p. 295). Elites in the east and south of the country presented the nation-building project under Kravchuk as unacceptably 'nationalistic' and mobilized the population to oppose it (Kulyk 2006, p. 296). This paved the way for the victory of Leonid Kuchma in 1994, who, in his inauguration speech, proclaimed that he was 'putting an end to Kravchuk's unequivocal preference for ethnic Ukrainian traditions' (Kulyk 2006, p. 301). He courted the east through a focus on economy, enhancing Ukraine's ties with Russia and defending the interest of Russian-speakers (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 70). Some argue that Kuchma took a 'centrist' approach during his years of rule, diffusing an acceptance of both languages into the common sense of the Ukrainian people (Kulyk 2006, p. 307). Arguably this was achieved by sending different messages to different regions, most notably by speaking different languages depending on whether he was visiting east or west (Kulyk 2006, p. 296). Through these ambiguous ideological parameters, Kuchma could justify whatever alliance he needed at a given moment. Wilson went so far to use the 'divide and rule' typology, normally found in colonial discourse, to characterise Kuchma's presidency (2014, p. 42). However, it cannot be ignored that once in power Kuchma's policies were geared more towards the promotion of an 'ethnic Ukrainian' national identity. Shulman (2005, p. 38-40) identifies three major achievements in the sphere of ethnic Ukrainian nation-building under Kuchma. First of all, in the 1996 Constitution the Ukrainian language is classified as the sole official language, giving Russian only ethnic minority status alongside languages such as Belarusian. Secondly, in line with Kravchuk's policies, he argued for Ukraine's separate historical development from Russia and constituted Russia as Ukraine's primary 'Other'. Lastly, he continued the linguistic Ukrainization of the education system (Shulman 2005, p. 39). It therefore, comes of no surprise that in the election of 1999 Kuchma's victory was owed to the adoption of a popular platform

for voters in the 'West' of Ukraine, concentrating on Ukrainian national interests and emphasize on the 'European Choice' for Ukraine (Barrigton & Herron 2004, p. 70).

In the presidential campaign that would lead to the Orange Revolution, both sides build upon the two competing stereotypes present in Ukraine to discredit their opponents. Viktor Yushchenko's camp, alongside pro-Yushchenko mass media, linked Yanukovych to the Kuchma regime and exploited his low level of literacy, especially in the Ukrainian language (Polkovsky 2005, p. 320). Yanukovych and the Party of Region on the other hand, employed slightly modified communist rhetoric and attempted to describe Yushchenko as beholden to US interests (Polkovsky 2005, p. 325). They mobilized support in their respective regions by painting the other candidate as an opponent to their voters' ethnic and linguistic interests. During the Orange revolution, Yushchenko adopted the popular rhetoric of 'two Ukraines', thereby further dividing the nation (Sakwa 2014, p. 72). He concentrated on building a narrative that painted the famine devastating Ukraine in 1932/33, commonly known as Holodomor, as a Soviet 'genocide' of the Ukrainian nation and rehabilitated the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists, a west Ukrainian organization known for its violent independence struggle against Russia that is often portrayed as anti-semitist (Portnov 2014, p. 6; Sakwa 2014, p. 17). During his time in opposition, Yanukovych increasingly focused on the defence of the Russophone population and translated his words into action when, upon becoming President, he passed the Bill 'On the Fundamentals of the National Language Policy' in 2012, increasing the relevance of the Russian language through divesting autonomy on the matter to the regions (Giuliano 2015, p. 517). Unsurprisingly, one of the first acts of Ukraine's interim government after the ouster of Yanukovych was to annul this language law. It was only reinstated after an international outcry (Giuliano 2015, p. 517). As can be seen the political game in Ukraine is characterised by politicians making use of the narrative of either the Ukrainian-speaking, European orientated 'West' or the

Russian-speaking, Russia orientated 'East' to consolidate their power bases. So far Ukraine has been subject to a 'flawed nation-building project', where politicians have repeatedly promoted an ethnic concept of what it means to be Ukrainian, thereby further reinforcing, not consolidating, the narrative of competing identity constructs around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages in contemporary Ukraine (Bachmann & Lyubashenko 2014, p. 453).

2. Literature Review: The crisis of ‘two Ukraines’

It has so far been established that Ukrainian politicians and external forces have contributed to the emergence of a narrative of two competing identities in Ukraine by playing on the diverse historical and geographical circumstances of the country’s regions and by promoting the allegedly ethnic-linguistic and regional interests that divide the country with the aim to gather votes and win elections ever since the country gained independence in 1991. This section will critically assess in how far the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’ has remained unchallenged and in fact, was employed by scholars, explaining the contemporary crisis. To this date, there are three predominant explanations put forward by academics in the process of formulating an understanding of the crisis. First of all, a body of literature concentrates purely on the international context and thereby equates the ‘West/East’ dichotomy of Ukraine to Western and Russian spheres of influences. Andrew Wilson for example, argues that the crisis fits well into a twenty-first century storyline, namely that ‘the Russians went ape’ (2014, p. vii). He claims that the crisis was ‘of Russia’s making and about Russia’s future’ and the result of Russia having ‘the world’s biggest persecution complex’ (2014, p. vii). On the other hand, staying true to realist theory that a ‘balance of power’ is characterizing the international political system, Mearsheimer argues that ‘Putin’s pushback should come as no surprise’ as the ‘West has been moving into Russia’s backyard’ (2014, p. 78). This group largely ignores the domestic context in their analysis and reduce the country to being a battlefield for ‘proxy war’ between the West and Russia. A second group takes an elitist approach to explaining the crisis by concentrating on the actions of politicians and political parties. While they do include Ukrainian agency in the crisis, they are omitting the nuances found in population’s opinions. They uphold the narrative of a divided country by

focusing on the ideological vacuum characterizing Yanukovich's rule, meaning his lack of 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian' orientation for the sake of his personal enrichment, and the violent nature of nationalism in the east, equated with the Party of Regions (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2015; Kuzio 2015). This dissertation however, will focus on the third group of academics that paint a picture of the Ukraine crisis as a conflict based around an ideologically divided society.

An overwhelming majority of the literature on the Ukraine crisis has not seriously started to challenge the narrative of 'two Ukraines'. Their explanations use the narrative to demonstrate in how far the mismatch between the two competing definitions of what it means to be Ukrainian has allegedly been used as a political mobilization tool by external forces and Ukrainian politicians. They thereby, overstate the importance that can be attributed to ethnic and linguistic identity markers in Ukraine and leading on from that, the capabilities to mobilize the Ukrainian population. Thus, they merely reinforce the perception that Russia has the means to mobilize a 'pro-Russian East', while the EU and pro-Western politicians can count on the 'pro-European' sentiments in the 'West'. They thereby, fail to grasp the more diverse nuances underlying Ukrainian identities.

Sakwa is particularly colourful in the way he splits the Ukrainian nation in halves, dividing it into the 'Orange' tendency, which he equates with a monist model of statehood that affirms a link between Ukrainian ethnicity and the state, and the 'Blue', pluralist tendency, which recognizes the ethnic plurality of the Ukrainian nation (2015, pp. 15 – 23). He argues that the tension between the two models of Ukrainian state formation have distinct spatial dimension, namely that 'the monist view is obviously stronger in the western part of the country, while the pluralist approach is stronger in the east and south' (Sakwa 2015, p. 24). He thereby, uses a regional cleavage to

generalize identities in Ukraine. Similarly, Torbakov argues that a fault line exists that divides Ukraine along two competing identities, delineating the countries into the 'liberals, champions of a Ukrainian civic nation' on the one hand and those 'clinging to a post-Soviet identity' on the other (2014, p. 201). What Ukraine lacks, according to these authors, is a 'master narrative' that melds the different sides into a 'rainbow nation' (Bachmann & Lyubashenko 2014, p. 453; Sakwa 2015, p. x). This circumstance was then exploited by foreign powers, most notably Russia, and domestic politicians to mobilize either side for their own political purposes. Torbakov argues that 'the Russian leadership deployed their highly ethicized narrative to drive a wedge into Ukraine's existing ethno-linguistic cleavages' (2014, p. 201). It fed the population of Ukraine's southern and eastern region the 'diet of ethnic hatred, brutally "othering" the Maidan revolutionaries' as 'fascist' threatening the security of Russians and Russian-speakers in Ukraine (Torbakov 2014, p. 202). Giles et al., in a report for the Chatham House, argue along the same lines, claiming that Russia made use of 'intensive information warfare' that used media and language skills to mobilize the Crimean and eastern Ukrainian population as 'compatriots', creating the 'entirely false impression that Russia is justified in its actions' (2015, pp. 41 – 48). Sakwa disagrees with these views, arguing that scapegoating Russia deflects attention from the tensions within Ukraine, the country's failure being that the 'the culture, language and political thinking of western Ukraine have been imposed on the rest of Ukraine' by domestic politicians (2015, p. 25). Similarly, Giuliano (2015, p. 520) argues that the separatist movement was the result of the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan and a subsequent increase in nostalgia for the Soviet era due to the growing influence of ultranationalists in Kyiv and an accompanied anti-Russian, ethnically exclusive national discourse.

While these scholarly works make important contributions to the study of the Ukraine crisis by incorporating the identities of Ukrainian society into the analysis and going beyond simple demographic cleavages, they fail to seriously challenge the identity cleavage in itself. A few hint towards the existence of mixed identities. Sakwa states that ‘identities are so mixed that the majority of the population comfortably lives with multiple identities’ (2015, p. 21). Wilson acknowledges that many eastern Ukrainian locals ‘were happy with their fuzzy identities’ and refers to what Raibchuk identifies as the ‘it’s-all-the-same-ism’ when talking about overlapping Russian and Ukrainian cultures (2014, p. 123). However, as demonstrated, they don’t take the existence of mixed identities seriously enough to significantly diverge from the ‘East/West’ dichotomy that allegedly divides Ukraine ideologically. They therefore, argue that external powers and domestic politicians used and thus reinforced the narrative for their own political interests and consequently produced the crisis at hand. This dissertation does not aim to say that these are not valuable observations to make. The reluctance of the EU to sign the Association Agreement and Yanukovich’s actions arguably produced the Euromaidan (Dragneva & Wolczuk 2015, pp. 60-61). Russia’s involvement led to the annexation of Crimea and allegedly helped the separatist movement attain the scale it did in the Donbass (The House of Commons 2014, p. 7; Giuliano 2015, p. 514). However, this dissertation argues that viewing identities of the Ukrainian population mainly as a tool for mobilization conceptualizes the Ukrainian population in a way that does not do the complex identities on the ground justice. As the next section of the dissertation will demonstrate, fluid and mixed identities are common and preclude a more civic understanding of Ukrainian citizenship. They thereby, transcend the identity cleavage prominent in the tale of ‘two Ukraines’.

To end this part, this dissertation wants to highlight a few important observations made by several scholars that hint towards the more complex nature of identities in Ukraine. Dragneva & Wolczuk argue that during the Euromaidan the ‘population became engaged’ in ‘a battle for Ukraine, fought by the Ukrainian people for the right to choose whether to adopt “the Western way” or “Putin’s way” for their country’ (p. 2015, p. 126). Even though this remark fails to grasp the more civic nature of the protests in Kyiv, it points towards an active, outspoken civil society that is not merely a tool to be used at politicians’ whims. Furthermore, Bachmann & Lyubashenko, addressing the question of errors committed by the external powers during the crisis, argued that the main error in the West was an assumption, ‘according to which the Maidan represented the whole country and manifested the commitment of all Ukrainians to the EU’ (2014, p. 453). Meanwhile, the Russian government ‘overestimated the viability and mobilisatory capacities of separatism in Ukraine’ (Bachmann & Lyubashenko 2014, p. 453). The remainder of this dissertation will aim to provide possible answers to why external powers underestimated their powers of mobilization based on a narrative of a set competing identities constructed around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages in Ukraine.

3. The Myth of ‘East’ and ‘West’ Ukraine: A tale of Fluid, Civic and Mixed Identities

Prior to the crisis various literature has been published that examines the increasingly fluid, civic and mixed features of identities in contemporary Ukraine and thereby, challenges identity construction around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages that separate the country in halves. Riabchuk (2015, p 139) even goes so far to talk of a ‘sort of academic consensus’ that has emerged, arguing that Ukraine is not sharply and unambiguously divided along ethnic or even linguistic lines and that even though these cleavages correlate with political orientation, they do not necessarily match. Furthermore, no one can agree where ‘West’ Ukraine ends and ‘East’ Ukraine begins, both proverbial regions being heterogeneous within themselves. Most importantly, scholars claim that no popular will for any division can be found in Ukraine (Riabchuk 2015, p. 139). Unfortunately, as demonstrated, scholarly works on the Ukraine crisis have so far failed to incorporate these reflections into their analysis by adhering to a narrative that conceptualizes Ukraine along an ‘East/West’ divide in identity constructions. They thereby, fail to enquire into how far identity construction from the top-down translates into realities on the ground. This section aims to address this discrepancy in scholarly literature about the Ukraine crisis. With the help of the body of literature that focuses on the civic, fluid and mixed characteristics of identities in Ukraine and the most recent national poll of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology [KIIS], conducted in September 2015, it aims to critically analysis and challenge the two competing identity constructs around ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages that are used to explain the crisis at hand. It advocates a presence of increasingly fluid, mixed identities in Ukraine that cut across these cleavages to

formulate a more civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian. Moreover, it will demonstrate that the views Ukrainian citizens express on several issues with regard to the Ukraine crisis contest popular discourse and the frame of analysis currently upheld by a bulk of scholarly literature on the topic.

To start off, this section will turn its attention to academic work that has described identities of the Ukrainian population as exhibiting more diverse, civic and fluid characteristics than the tale of ‘two Ukraines’ dares to acknowledge. It will turn to each of these three characteristics in turn.

In an attempt to capture the variety of national identity narratives present in Ukraine, Korostelina (2013, p. 295) conducted interviews with scholars, political leaders and journalists about the current situation in Ukraine, the status of national identity, the politics of language and history. Even though the focus of the research are in fact, the elites of the country, the findings give an indication of the variety of different identities present in Ukraine that go beyond a simple ‘pro-European’ or ‘pro-Russian’ stance. In her analysis she identifies five widely shared narrative concepts, ranging from a ‘Pro-Soviet’ to a ‘Fight for Ukrainian Identity’. However, the ones that are of interest to this dissertation, are the ones that are in-between these two rather radical forms of identity expressions. One of them is the ‘Dual Identity’ narrative, which 28% of the respondents fall into. Ukrainians within this category claim that Ukraine can develop ‘a democratic European identity’, which ‘is supportive of the dual identity of citizens educated in both (Russian and Ukrainian) cultures’ (Korostelina 2013, p. 296). They moreover, recognize that ‘Russians in Ukraine are different from Russians in Russia; their identity has become a *mélange* of cultures’ (Korostelina 2013, p. 298). Another narrative that promotes dual or mixed identities as a key feature of Ukrainian society is the ‘Multicultural-Civic’ narrative, which represents 16% of the respondents and argues that

A key mistake is to believe that Russian propaganda works effectively in Ukraine and that people want to be in union with Russia. People actually want to live in a Ukraine with a common shared society and the aim of joining the European Union. Ukraine should build its own civic identity and civic society [...](Korostelina 2013, p. 306).

Her research presents important findings on the nuances of opinions in Ukraine and is enlightening, as it portrays Ukraine as a country with a variety of identities and points towards their hybrid nature. This dissertation would strongly disagree with the author's conclusion that the intellectual landscape of Ukraine is missing 'liberal civic ideologies' that define society 'as a community of equal citizens independently of their ethnicity, language or religion' (Korostelina 2013, p. 312). The two narratives discussed above demonstrate a clear trend towards civic values and represent nearly half of the respondents. While this research is rather elitist in its methodology, Onuch's (2014) analysis of the protestors of the Euromaidan demonstrates a substantive civic understanding of Ukrainian identity held by parts of the wider Ukrainian population. At the same time it discredits literature that paints the protest movement as simply manifesting 'pro-European' tendencies of western Ukraine.

In her analysis of the protestors of the Maidan movement, Onuch argues that the majority displayed 'a democratizing and cosmopolitan tendency and a capacity to come together despite partisan and other cleavages' (2014, p. 51). The median protestor of the Euromaidan wanted a better political future for Ukraine and was more worried about the infringement of basic rights, demonstrated by the use of force against the protestors by Ukrainian government forces, than about forming closer ties with the EU (Onuch 2014, p. 47). The Euromaidan might have started out as a call for closer ties with the EU, but it acquired its critical mass due to a desire by Ukrainian citizens to

have universal civil rights and a state that does not resort to violence to quiet dissident voices. It was not as much about the EU per se, as it was about ‘European values’ (Onuch 2014, p. 48). Moreover, 22% of the Maidan protestors were Russophone and 4% were ethnically Russian, with 26% of respondents having voted for a candidate or party associated with Yanukovych and 8% coming from eastern and southern Ukraine (Onuch 2014, pp. 48-49). The Maidan protestors therefore, cut across ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages to a noteworthy extent. Furthermore, a fact rarely picked up on by media discourse, various similar protest movements sprung up in in eastern and southern Ukrainian cities, such as Kharkiv, Donetsk, Odessa and even Crimea, and reached up to two-thousand participants (Onuch 2014, p. 46). It seems that what united Ukrainians during the time of the Maidan was a fight for a Ukrainian identity based on civil rights and not necessarily a ‘pro-European’ stance.

Another important observation that needs to be made about identities in Ukraine that is often neglected in popular discourse, is that, apart from being diverse and civic, they are fluid and therefore, changing. This is illustrated in the previously mentioned case study of the Ukrainian village Udy, situated at the Russian border in eastern Ukraine (Zhurzhenko & Umland, 2014). While in 2003 the inhabitants’ identities were still constructed around Soviet nostalgia and intensified by the strong cultural links the village maintained with Russia, the authors note that by 2005 ‘the village was becoming in a way “more Ukrainian”’ (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 283). This is most evident in the context of schooling in the village, which had increasingly been conducted in Ukrainian with the approval of the majority of teachers. Teachers noted that children ‘should learn both Ukrainian and Russian’ and that ‘if we are Ukraine, if we are a country, we should be Ukrainians’ (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 310). Moreover, the authors argue that the election of 2004 made an impact on the village in

terms of the interest its inhabitants started to express in Ukrainian politics over Russian ones. They argue that ‘the growing awareness about Ukrainian political life and the emotional engagement in Ukrainian politics have strengthened national identity and accelerated the break-up with the Soviet past’ (Zhurzhenko & Umland 2014, p. 321). In the space of two years, attitudes and identities in Udy had arguably started to change. The inhabitants moved away from feeling like an ethnic and linguistic ‘other’ in the Ukrainian nation-building project and towards getting involved in the project itself.

With these realities in mind, this dissertation will now turn its attention onto how increasingly mixed identities translate into the political attitudes of the Ukrainian population and directly challenge the popular narrative of the Ukraine crisis as a conflict based around an ideologically divided society. It will do so with the help of the latest KIIS national poll taken in September 2015. It was conducted at the institute’s own expense in 110 settlements in all regions of Ukraine, except the Autonomous Region of Crimea. Additionally, in Donetsk the institute managed to interview in the territories under the control of separatist forces. A total of 2041 responses were recorded through face-to-face interviews. The KIIS poll methodology’s value lies in its ability to uncover mixed identities in the population. This is best explained by looking at Arel’s (2002) critique of the latest Ukrainian census and analysing in how far the KIIS poll overcomes the census’ shortcomings.

The latest, albeit out-dated, census on the Ukrainian population was conducted in 2001 and revealed that the ethnic composition of the population was made up of 77.8% Ukrainians and 17.3% Russian. Additionally, 67.5% were Ukrainian-speakers, while 29.6% were Russophone (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine 2001). Arel claims that the census was grounded on the belief of the regime ‘that somehow an unchanging identity can be discovered by statistics’ and that Ukrainian officials and scholars ‘tend to

present the census categories of nationality and language as based on “science” (2002, p. 215). However, there is no ‘scientific’ method to measure political preferences, as these are affected by the system of measurement itself (Arel 2002, p. 217). For example, the census enquired about language by using the word ‘native language’ instead of mother tongue and thereby, respondents often used it as a restatement of their nationality, thereby obscuring the higher number of Russian-speakers in Ukraine (Arel 2002, p. 240). Moreover, the census question referring to nationality used the words ethnic origin and equated them in parentheses with nationality, sub-nationality or ethnic group, which confused many respondents (Arel 2002, p. 227). These observations lead to two conclusions about the enquiry of ethnic self-identification in a multi-ethnic and language in a bi-lingual society. First of all, how delicate an issue the framing of questions is and the influence it can have on the response. Secondly, that the majority of questions would fail to capture mixed identities in terms of language and ethnicity. The KIIS national poll overcomes these grievances to a large extent in both, the category of language and ethnicity. In the realm of language the KIIS poll has a section at the end of the interview to be completed by the interviewer about the characteristics of the language(s) actually spoken during the interview. This gives an indication on the preferential language use of the respondent and allows for an assessment of mixed language use as well as overcoming the bias of respondents using questions about language to state political preferences. In the realm of the question of nationality, the first question reads ‘Who do you consider to be?’. This allows for a more balanced enquiry about the identity of the respondent. More importantly however, is the next question in which the interviewer tells the respondent that he or she will ‘ask you to answer one more question about ethnicity to record it more accurately. This is due to the fact that some people consider themselves as belonging simultaneously to a few

nationalities'. The respondent then has the chance to select the degree to which he or she feels Ukrainian, Russian or both.

Therefore, the KIIS national poll methodology is best equipped to uncover the increasingly mixed identities along ethno-linguistic lines this dissertation is aiming to investigate. In its analysis it will focus on the opinions expressed by the various ethnic, linguistic and regional groups on matters directly related to the contemporary crisis and Ukraine's outlook to the future. By looking at attitudes of the population towards issues of foreign policy and unity this dissertation aims to make a contribution towards a better understanding of the crisis that goes beyond external powers and domestic politicians and incorporates the views of the Ukrainian people. It will go on to explain the two issues under consideration.

Foreign Policy: The KIIS poll asked several questions on the preference of respondents towards Ukraine either acceding to the European Union or to the Eurasian Customs Union, which was initiated by Russia with the aim to form an economic alliance of former Soviet states. The opinions of the Ukrainian population on this issue are of paramount importance, as arguing that the Ukrainian speaking, ethnically Ukrainian 'West' is more 'pro-European' and the Russian-speaking and ethnically heterogeneous 'East' more 'pro-Russian' sustains the narrative of the 'East/West' dichotomy of the country. The analysis will focus on the responses to one question in particular, which is enquiring about the foreign policy course respondents would want Ukraine to take. Participants are giving the options of Ukraine either joining the EU, the Customs Union or neither. In popular discourse respondents of Ukrainian ethnicity and Ukrainian-speakers living in the 'West' would be expected to opt for joining the European Union, while Russian-speakers, Russian ethnics living in the 'East' should vote for the Eurasian Customs Union.

Unity: This analysis will look at the value the Ukrainian population places on unity. Several statements were read out to the KIIS poll participants, who had to rank the extent of their agreement or disagreement towards them. One such statement was as followed: ‘For the sake of peace, it is better to forget about what happened in the Donbass in 2014 – 2015 and together think about the future.’ Even though the phrasing of the statement is ambiguous by who is meant to be thinking together about the future, be it Ukraine and Russia, Ukraine and the separatist forces or more generally the different regions of Ukraine, responses can be treated as an indication in how far Ukrainians value unity in the process of state-building. Judging from the condemnation of Russian troops on Ukrainian soil by 74.3% of the south-eastern population of Ukraine, agreement to this statement would hint towards a preference of domestic unity (KIIS 2014). Taking the respondents’ answers to these issues into account will give an indication of how the wider Ukrainian population feels about a united country in spite of ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages.

This dissertation will now turn to the three cleavages of region, language and ethnicity in turn and look at in how far diversity of region in the case of the former, and mixed identities in the case of language and ethnicity, influence political preferences on the issues of foreign policy and unity.

3. *1 Regions: A tale of Lviv and the Donbass and 'the immense space in-between'*

Out of the three cleavages under analysis in this dissertation, region is the most directly related to the narrative of 'two Ukraines'. In popular discourse ethnicity and language are often equated with the regions of 'East' and 'West' Ukraine, but as the subsequent analysis will discuss, this is not necessarily the case with the linguistic make-up of the population and definitely not with the ethnic one. Therefore, the cleavage of region comes as close to the narrative of competing identity constructs in Ukraine as possible. Indeed many scholars, both before the current crisis and after, have highlighted the importance region plays in Ukraine as an identity marker (Arel 2006a; Birch 2000; Bachmann & Lyubaschenko 2014). As far as the popular narrative on identity construction around regional cleavages goes, the western part of the country is prone to elect right and center-right parties that have historical ties with Europe and thereby, are supposedly true to the 'ethnic Ukrainian' identity (Arel 2006a, p. 15; Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 70, Shulman 2005, p. 38). The eastern part of Ukraine supports parties on the left, being historically industrial and geographical proximate to Russia and having constructed an 'Eastern Slavic' identity (2006b, p. 15; Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 70; Pirie 1996, p. 1984).

Riabchuk (2002), the author of the concept of 'two Ukraines', reflects on the term by arguing that Lviv and Donetsk can be considered the 'geographical and geopolitical' symbols of the 'two Ukraines', but that the immense space between these two regions remains fluid and heterogeneous, with many regions that each 'have their own peculiar combination of "Ukrainianness" and "Russianness", "Europeanness" and "Sovietism"'. In search for a methodological approach to classify this 'vast space' many

studies have demonstrated that focusing on the simplistic division of 'East' and 'West' obscures significant differences prevailing in the 'space' between Lviv and the Donbass (Arel 2006a, Barrington & Herron 2004, Birch 2000). Arel (2006a, p. 18) argues that most academic studies that consider regions in Ukraine, divide the country along four geographical axes, namely west, centre, south and east. In this scenario the west of Ukraine comprises the regions of Lviv, Ivano-Frankivsk and Ternopil, otherwise known as Galicia, as well as Volyn, Rivne, Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia. As already pointed out in a previous section of this paper, these oblasts have in common that before coming under Soviet domination, they belonged to non-Russian empires and have therefore, experienced Western influence and parliamentary elections (Birch 2000, p. 1021). Galicia was the heart of Ukrainian nationalism between 1870 and 1940 and again in 1980. These regions most prominently adopted what one might call an 'ethnic Ukrainian' identity. The centre is the agricultural region of Ukraine and stretches alongside the banks of the Dnieper River from Zhytomyr and Khmelnytskyi on the right bank to Sumy and Poltava on the left bank. Even though the left bank was incorporated into the USSR around 150 years before the right one, Arel (2006a, p. 21) argues that since 2002 the electoral behaviour of these regions, as well as their political orientation towards Russia, have increasingly converged. The industrial heart of the east is the Donbass, alongside the industrial oblasts of Kharkiv, Zaporizhia and Dnipropetrovs'k. The south regroups into the oblasts of Kherson, Mykolaiv, Odessa and Crimea (Arel 2006a, p. 22). For obvious reasons some scholars argue that these regions are still too heterogeneous to be helpful units of analysis. For example, Barrington & Herron (2004, p. 58) argue for an 8-region model in which the Donbass is treated as a single unit of analysis, due to its amplified Russification, both in ethnic and linguistic terms, as compared to the other oblasts normally grouped under eastern Ukraine in the 4-region model. Moreover, due to the historical differences of the right

and left bank of the Dnieper River the authors also suggest that the centre should be divided into two distinct regions. They also make a strong argument that Galicia, as the heart of anti-Russian Ukrainian nationalism, should be separated from Chernivtsi and Zakarpattia, whose level of 'Ukrainianness' is much lower (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 59). Most obviously, Crimea should be a separate entity, as it is the only region where the majority of the population is ethnically Russian (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 58). Through statistical analysis the authors have proven that the 8-region model paints a much more nuanced and statistically significant picture of regional divisions in Ukraine than the 4-region model, both in terms of electoral behaviour and political attitudes (Barrington & Herron 2004, p. 70). While the suggestions of Barrington & Herron drive home the point that regions in Ukraine are much more diverse than popular narrative acknowledges, this dissertation agrees with Arel (2006a, p. 23) that, for the purpose of keeping analyses practical, a four-region model is sufficient to discredit the simplistic division of Ukraine as a country separated into an 'ethnic Ukrainian' and 'Eastern Slavic' identity adhered to the regions of 'East' and 'West' respectively.

This dissertation will now go on to analyse what opinions respondents from the different regions of Ukraine express on matters of foreign policy and unity. As the regionally distinct identities of 'East' and 'West' are used in much academic literature to explain the Euromaidan in the 'West' and the separatist movement in the 'East' as exhibiting 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' identities respectively, it will be interesting to see in how far opinions on these issues differ between the west and centre, as well as between the south and east. If there were significant regional differences in views expressed, this would clearly contest the clear-cut division of the country into two competing identity constructs. The KIIS methodology also employs a 4-region model in subdividing Ukraine into macro-regions. It needs to be noted that there are slight

differences to Arel's model, most notably that Zaporizhia and Dnipropetrovs'k are classified as southern Ukraine and Khmelnytskyi is added to western Ukraine.

What kind of foreign policy course should Ukraine take?
(% within macro-region)

Foreign Policy Course	West	Center	South	East
Joining the European Union	78.1	58.3	39.1	26.6
Joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan	4.3	3.5	23.0	34.0
Joining neither the European Union nor the Customs Union	10.0	23.1	25.6	27.0
Don't know	7.6	15.2	12.4	12.1

Table 2 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Foreign Policy: As can be seen in Table 2, the results on the respondents' preferences for a foreign policy course across the regions are remarkable. Even though in both, central and western Ukraine, a majority of respondents choose integration with the European Union over the Eurasian Customs Union, the centre demonstrates a clear tendency of wanting Ukraine to stay independent of regional agreements. While 78.1% in the west favour the 'European' course of action, only 58.3% do so in the centre. This discrepancy in numbers can be attributed to the 23.1% choosing the 'join neither' option in central Ukraine. It gets even more interesting if one shifts the focus onto the south and east, in popular narrative simply classed under eastern Ukraine. The majority of respondents in the south favour integration with the European Union and even in the east 26.8% articulate preference of the EU over Russia's Customs Union. While in both regions there is support for the Eurasian Customs Union, in the east the latter is not immensely more popular than the former and in the south only 23% favour it, compared to 39.1% choosing the 'European' option. Zhuk's (2011) study on the

consumption of Western mass media among the Soviet youth in Soviet Dnipropetrovsk can shed some light on the noteworthy percentage of ‘pro-European’ sentiments in south Ukraine. He argues that through imported western music records, youth periodicals and movies, reaching the city from the black market in Lviv, ‘young rock music fans and discotheque activists’ accepted the real West as a part of their identity and thereby, rejected the official Soviet version of their own ethnic identity (Zhuk 2011, p. 309). This is mirrored in a quote by Igor T., a former KGB police officer, who exclaims: ‘We lost the entire young generation. Instead of loyal Soviet Ukrainian patriots we now have westernized imbeciles [...]’ (Zhuk 2011, p. 3). His study gives an indication of how, already during Soviet times, parts of the populations were looking west in the process of articulating identities opposing the official Soviet playwright. It needs to be noted that the statistical findings in both, the south and east, also demonstrate that about a quarter of the respondents would prefer Ukraine to stay clear from any association agreement. Overall, these findings are revealing on two levels. For one, they unmask clear differences between the west and centre and east and south, normally treated as two regions with homogenous identities and political views. Second of all, the fact that there is significant support for integration with the European Union in both, the east and south, challenges the perception of a ‘pro-Russian’, region-based identity at its origins.

For the sake of peace, it is better to forget about what happened in Donbass in 2014-2015 and together think about the future.
(% within macro-region)

	West	Center	South	East
Totally Agree	14.5	11.9	23.7	10.8
Rather Agree	40.3	27.5	28.3	32.0
Rather Disagree	24.0	22.1	16.3	19.3
Totally Disagree	6.7	14.1	12.2	25.5
Don't know	14.5	24.3	19.4	12.4

Table 3 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Unity: When it comes to expressing preferences for unity, being faced with the conflict in the Donbass, the regions seem more heterogeneous within themselves than towards each other. Across all regions there is a significant number of respondents, who would agree that standing united and working together towards the future would be the best option to pursue, but equally there are quite a few dissident voices to be found in all regions. It leads to conclude that the matter of dealing with ‘pro-Russian’ separatists, who have resorted to violent means to make their political claims feasible, is based on individual choice, rather than ideological, regional affiliation. It needs to be noted that a remarkable majority of respondents in eastern Ukraine reject the notion of forgetting what happened in the Donbass for the sake of moving into the future in unity. This could be related to the fact that the separatist movement in the Donbass most directly affected the inhabitants of eastern Ukraine. In a poll conducted by the KIIS in the south-eastern region of the country in April 2014 only 6 to 12% expressed definite support for the idea that their region should secede from Ukraine and join Russia, ranging from 9 to 18% in the Donbass to 2 to 3% in Kherson. Similarly, only 6 to 11% of respondents supported introduction of Russian troops into Ukraine, the highest support being 10 to 20% in Donetsk (KIIS 2014). Therefore, their disagreement should not be translated into a desire for estrangement from the other parts of Ukraine, but their denouncement of the separatists and Russian troops on Ukrainian soil. In the case of the other three regions however, most people agree, most notably in the south, that unity is the best policy for the future of Ukraine.

This section aimed to demonstrate that the narrative constructed around Ukraine being separated into two regions, each with homogenous and opposing identities, masks important regional differences within the constructs of ‘West’ and

‘East’ Ukraine. There is indeed, a regional distinct south and centre of Ukraine and both have their own views and opinions on matters such as foreign policy and unity. Additionally, the analysis discredits identity construction around ‘pro-European’ and ‘pro-Russian’ regional sentiments, as it exhibited that the ‘European option’ resonates in the southern and eastern parts of the country as well. It will go on to look at the two demographic factors that are often equated with the regional identities of ‘East’ and ‘West’, namely language and ethnicity.

3.2 *Language: A tale of Resistance, Bilingualism and Surzhyk*

Languages spoken within Macro-regions

Languages	West	Center	South	East
Ukrainian	99.8	74.4	8.0	0.7
Russian	0.2	25.6	92.0	99.3

Table 4 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Characteristics of Language of Questionnaire

Language spoken	%
Ukrainian	45.7
Mixed Ukrainian-Russian	14.8
Russian	39.5

Table 5 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Before analysing the demographic factors of language and ethnicity as apparent identity markers in Ukraine, it needs to be noted that, even though they overlap, they cannot be directly equated with the region of ‘East’ and ‘West’. However, languages spoken in Ukraine do indeed embody a cleavage in society that is largely adhering to the regional divide promoted in the popular narrative of ‘two Ukraines’. The findings of the KIIS poll demonstrated that when interviewers had to decide on one language in which the interview predominantly took place, 49.6% said that the respondent spoke in Ukrainian, while 50.4% spoke in Russian. Moreover, these figures essentially correspond with the regional divide of the country into ‘East’ and ‘West’. As can be seen in Table 4, 99.8% of the interviews conducted in the west were with Ukrainian-speakers, while the number corresponds to 74.4% in the centre. At the same time, of all the interviews

conducted in the east, 99.3% were done in Russian, and in the south the figure corresponds to 92% respectively. Judging from the latest census data, this means that in Ukraine there is a significant number of Ukrainian Russian-speakers, who live in the 'East', speak Russian, but self-identify as Ukrainian ethnics. Moreover, there were also a substantive number of interviews that were conducted in both languages. When interviewers were asked to characterise the language(s) spoken by the interviewees with the possibility to describe the responses as a mix between Ukrainian and Russian, 14.8% opted for mixed language use, as Table 5 demonstrates. It is also remarkable that the number of purely Russian speakers drops by 14.9% to 39.5%, meaning that more Russian-speakers use both languages, even in formal settings, which an interview with an acclaimed research institute should be characterised as.

Before examining the attitude of the different categories of language speakers on the issues of foreign policy and unity, it is important to consider the various literature that was published prior to the crisis, which not only concentrated on the mixed use of both languages, but makes a strong case for state-building as not merely being a top-down process, but as being influenced from the bottom-up through adoption of and resistance towards certain language practices advocated by the political elites.

Polese (2011, p. 37) rightly argues that the process of spreading a version of national identity depends on people's agency and the way they renegotiated and in some cases resist laws imposed on them by the political elites. He defines this type of nation-building as 'spontaneous'. In Ukraine, Ukrainian is the official state language by law and therefore, needs to be used in all official settings and documents. Nonetheless, the Russian language persists as a key mode of communication in both, informal and formal settings, predominantly in the eastern part of the country (Polese 2011, p. 42). However, hearing Russian on the streets of Kyiv is definitely not exceptional either. Through the

method of observing language use in schools, universities and cultural centers, as well as conducting numerous interviews with three generations of Ukrainians in eastern Ukraine, Polese (2011, pp. 44-46) concluded that the loose enforcement of language laws in the region led to the persistence and domination of the Russian language in the settings of schools, broadcasting and the media, as well as in the political language used by politicians in different circumstances. For example, the most widely distributed newspaper in Ukraine in 2006 was *Segodnya* with a circulation of 849 000, closely followed by *Fakty i komentarii*, which was issued 761 000 times in the same year. Both these newspapers are published in the Russian language (Polese 2011, p. 45). The highest ranked newspaper in the Ukrainian language in 2006 was *Silski visti* with a significantly lower circulation of 430 000 (Polese 2011, p. 45). Additionally, according to Hrycak (2006, p. 80) in 2002, Ukrainian was the general language of instruction in only 220 out of 1193 schools in Donetsk, which is owed to the lack of enforcement of language laws in oblasts that have high numbers of Russian-speakers. Polese (2011, p. 43) thus, concludes that political language laws imposed from the top, are resisted at the bottom. Therefore, the often-heard accusation that the interests of Russian-speakers in Ukraine are threatened due to an imposed 'Ukrainization' of language needs to be revisited. Consequently, it would seem that adopting a Ukrainian identity becomes more acceptable by all citizens of the country and would have a wider reach than the popular narrative of two competing identity sets dares to acknowledge (Polese 2011, p. 43). This phenomenon also explains the lack of protests by Russian-speakers against the revival of the Ukrainian language since independence (Hrycak 2006, p. 63). Kulyk (2011, p. 628) makes the point that language use or language proficiency should not necessarily be confused with linguistic identity. Hrycak (2006, p. 64) reinforces this argument when she examines the institutional and historical legacies on the identification with language in post-Soviet Ukraine. One of the claims she puts forward is that the political passivity of

Russian speakers can be ascribed to the fact that Ukrainian Russian-speakers switched to Russian during Soviet times for convenience, but did not necessarily identify with the language. The authors discussed here have challenged the competing identity narrative based on a linguistic cleavage by demonstrating that the Ukrainian population has an agency in resisting policy implementation from above, creating a more harmonious coexistence of language use in the country.

A further argument that discredits a narrative promoting a clear division based on a linguistic cleavage is the bilingualism of a large part of the population. In a sociological poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre, 91% of respondents claimed to be proficient in Ukrainian and 94.1% stated that they possessed the same knowledge in Russian (Razumkov Centre n.d.). Ukraine is a country where, in many contexts, there is no distinct dominant or preferred language and dual language conversations are common, with one person speaking Ukrainian and the other Russian. This is reinforced by the fact that TV shows regularly host guests that speak different languages, but nonetheless manage to communicate (Bilaniuk 2004, p. 414).

A further phenomenon of mixed language use is the use of surzhyk, a language whose main linguistic characteristics involve ‘norm-breaking, non-obedience to or non-awareness of the rules of the Ukrainian and Russian standard languages’ (Bernsand 2001, p. 38). It is a language that takes characteristics of both languages and comes up with its own rules on how to use them. The use of surzhyk is the epitome of mixed language use in Ukraine and its presence is virtually non-existent in measurements conducted by censuses and sociological polls. In an attempt to capture the prevalence of surzhyk, the KIIS presented data in 2003 that demonstrated that between 11% and 18% of Ukrainians used this form of language mixing in everyday

communication. Regional differences vary from 2.5% in the west over 9.6% in the east to 12,4% in the south (KIIS 2003). Considering all these factors, it comes as no surprise that Bilaniuk concludes that post-Soviet Ukraine ‘is an extraordinarily complex and dynamic realm of language practices, as its people still struggle [...] to figure out what it means to be independent Ukrainian citizens, in what they say and how they say it’ (2004, p. 423). It follows that linguistic practise and identities in Ukraine are far more complex than a simple Ukrainian-speaker/Russian-speaker cleavage can hope to conceptualize.

Keeping these realities in mind, the following analysis of the Ukrainian, Russian and mixed language speakers’ responses on the issues of foreign policy and unity will demonstrate that the differences in opinions are not as stark as might be expected when one adheres to the narrative of ‘two Ukraines’.

What kind of foreign policy course should Ukraine take?
(% within language spoken)

Foreign Policy Course	Ukrainian	Mixed	Russian
Joining the European Union	67.3	41.7	38.1
Joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan	4.1	16.9	26.0
Joining neither the European Union nor the Customs Union	15.1	29.3	25.6
Don’t know	13.5	12.1	10.3

Table 6 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Foreign Policy: As can be seen in Table 6, enquiring about the preference on a foreign policy course for Ukraine, the majority of all language groups opts for joining the European Union. Ukrainian-speakers favour this course with a majority of 67.3%, while 38.1% of Russian-speakers prefer this option and 41.7% of mixed-languages speakers respectively. Joining the Customs Union receives rather marginal support

across all groups, with most support expressed by Russian-speakers. It is interesting to note that 29.3% of those speaking both languages wish that Ukraine neither joins the European nor the Eurasian Customs Union with a similar percentage of Russian-speakers favouring this course of action. All in all, a linguistic cleavage that translates into distinct ‘pro-European’ sentiments on the part of Ukrainian-speakers and ‘pro-Russian’ feelings by the Russian-speaking counterpart cannot be sustained in this analysis.

For the sake of peace, it is better to forget about what happened in Donbass in 2014-2015 and together think about the future.
(% within language spoken)

	Ukrainian	Mixed	Russian
Totally Agree	13.4	16.4	16.3
Rather Agree	30.8	40.1	29.8
Rather Disagree	24.1	15.1	18.8
Totally Disagree	10.8	9.0	20.3
Don't know	20.8	19.4	14.9

Table 7 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Unity: In terms of expressing a desire for unity, the majority of all respondents would agree with the statement that to move forward from the crisis in union would be the best option. There are moderate levels of disagreement present across all language groups, with the Russian-speakers disagreeing the most. However, as already pointed out, this can be associated with the fact that Russian-speakers are predominantly present in the eastern part of the country and therefore are also the ones that suffered the most direct consequences of the separatist movement in the Donbass. In the ‘two Ukraines’ narrative one would expect the Ukrainian-speakers to disagree with this statement, as they are the ones that would condemn the ‘pro-Russian’ sentiments in the east as

‘others’ that are disrupting their version Ukrainian national identity. It is therefore, striking to find that the findings of the poll demonstrate the reverse. Mixed language speakers express somewhat more moderate opinions on the matter, but nonetheless endorse Ukraine’s path towards unity with 56.6% expressing varying levels of agreement to the statement. It can be argued that overall, the majority of the Ukrainian population endorses ‘togetherness’ over ‘separatism’ across the linguistic cleavage that allegedly separates the nation ideologically.

All in all, bottom-up resistance to language laws, bilingualism and mixed language use significantly challenge the narrative of two competing identity constructs in Ukraine. Moreover, the identity narrative that is employed by academics to formulate an understanding to the Ukraine crisis has been deconstructed through demonstrating that all language groups express similar wishes for the future of Ukraine in terms of foreign policy and unity. It follows that Ukrainians do not simply buy into the narrative that is promoted by domestic and foreign political forces, but are autonomous agents that formulate their own understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian and where Ukraine’s place in the world should be.

3.3 Ethnicity: A tale of Ukrainian mothers and Russian fathers

Before analysing the opinions of the various ethnic groups in Ukraine, it needs to be established how poor an indicator for identity construction around ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ identity narratives ethnicity is. As already explained, the latest census in Ukraine revealed that Russian ethnics only make up 17,6% of the population and even though they are predominantly living in eastern Ukraine, they only make up 38.2% of

the population in Donetsk, 39% in Luhansk and only 25.5% and 20.7% in Odessa and Kharkiv respectively. This means that the majority of people arguably adhering to a more 'Eastern Slavic' and ultimately 'pro-Russian' identity in eastern Ukraine are Ukrainian ethnics. This fact alone challenges the narrative of Ukraine facing competing identity constructions based around ethnicity. Therefore, this dissertation will refrain from using the term ethnic identity and opt for using ethnic self-identification instead, pointing towards the more demographic nature of the concept. Moreover, as will be seen, parts of the Ukrainian population self-identify as mixed ethnics by expressing both, a Ukrainian and Russian ethnic self-identification. Their presence further contests the ethnic narrative of a country divided into two neat halves often employed by foreign and domestic political powers alike.

In the Russian language the term *natsional'nost'* subsumes both, nationality and ethnicity, while translating directly into neither and denoting more accurately a 'basic human characteristic' (Comaroff 1991, p. 665). According to Comaroff (1991, p. 665) this view, equating ethnicity with 'a perfectly "natural phenomenon"', such as someone's age or eye colour, is an out-dated concept that few would defend nowadays. It exaggerates the durability of ethnic self-identification and underestimates the extent to which they can change (Comaroff 1991, p. 669). More accurately, ethnicity describes a set of relations, whose content is constructed due to historical processes and therefore, can be fluid and changing. Pirie argues along the same lines when he claims that in southern and eastern Ukraine many individuals 'have multiple ethnic identifications, or are undergoing a transition from one identification to another' (1996, p. 1079). He argues that the tendency to assume that one is either Ukrainian or Russian has nurtured the unfortunate inclination to assume a national consciousness constructed around the homogeneity of the Russian minority and the Ukrainian majority respectively (Pirie

1996, p. 1080). Pirie’s classifies southern and eastern Ukrainians as adopting a marginal, bi-ethnic self-identification, which he denotes as a ‘weak or unstable identification with two or more ethnic groups, and vacillation between them’ (1996, p. 1984). This assessment is the result of several studies, most predominantly on inter-ethnic marriage and the self-identification of the offspring. He argues that multi-ethnic families are a regional phenomenon, largely concentrated in urban centres of eastern and southern Ukraine. For example, in the Donetsk oblast in 1992, 47.4% of all children had parents of different passport nationalities and in 1991 already 36.5% of respondents declared themselves to be both, Russian and Ukrainian (Pirie 1996, p. 1087). Therefore, the east and south ‘cannot be seen through the blinkers of a strict either/or conception of national identity’ (Pirie 1996, p. 1092). Even though this dissertation acknowledges the presence of mixed ethnic self-identification for the purpose of challenging the ethnic nature of popular discourse that is often used to describe a divided Ukraine, the analysis of the opinions of the ethnic groups as expressed in the latest KIIS national poll need to be treated with care due to the weak correlation between ethnicity and the tale of ‘two Ukraines’.

Ethnic self-identification in Ukraine

Ethnic Self-Identification	%
Ukrainian	81.1
Mixed Ukrainian-Russian	12.7
Russian	3.5
Others	0.4

Table 8 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Ethnic self-identification – Regional make-up

Ethnic Self-Identification	Ukrainian	Mixed	Russian
West	27.3	9.7	2.7
Centre	37.0	7.0	5.5
South	20.0	37.3	28.8
East	15.7	45.5	63.0

Table 9 (Source: KIIS 2015)

According to the KIIS poll of 2015 and as can be seen in Table 8, the overwhelming majority of 81.8% feels Ukrainian. A surprisingly small amount of respondents identify themselves as Russians, explicitly only 3.5%. This small number

could be explained by the fact that the survey did not collect responses in Crimea and only in parts of the area of the Donbass that are controlled by separatists, as these areas are populated by the highest amount of ethnic Russian in Ukraine. This on its own however, does not account for the large discrepancy between the latest census data and that of the KIIS poll of 2015. Another explanation could be that given the choice of describing themselves as both, ethnically Russian and Ukrainian, many ethnic Russian opted to choose mixed identities. It is also possible that since the census of 2001, ethnic self-identification has quite simply been subject to change. However, no matter what explanation one finds more convincing, if any, the views of the ethnic Russians expressed in the survey need to be treated with caution, as they only represent the views of 72 respondents. Mixed ethnic self-identification, an umbrella term used for all degrees of dual ethnicity expressed by the respondents, represent 12.7% of the sample. In line with Pirie's (1996, p. 1079) argument that mixed ethnic identities are more prevailing in the east, Table 9 demonstrates that of the 256 respondents opting for a mixed ethnicity, 45.5% are from the east, 37.7% from the south and only 9.7% and 7.0% from the west and centre, respectively.

What kind of foreign policy course should Ukraine take?
(% within ethnic self-identification)

Foreign Policy Course	Ukrainian	Mixed	Russian
Joining the European Union	58.8	22.7	6.9
Joining the Customs Union with Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan	8.7	39.8	56.9
Joining neither the European Union nor the Customs Union	21.2	21.9	20.8
Don't know	11.3	15.5	15.3

Table 10 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Foreign Policy: As can be seen in Table 10, while respondents having declared a Ukrainian ethnicity unsurprisingly favour joining the European Union with a majority of 58.8% and those with a Russian ethnicity opt for joining the Eurasian Customs Union with 56.9%, those with a mixed ethnic identity are somehow less distinct in their preference for Ukraine’s foreign policy course. Even though a majority of 39.8% still prefers joining the Customs Union, there is a significant increase of those favouring a ‘pro-European’ foreign policy course in comparison to those proclaiming a purely Russian ethnicity, with 22.7% of the former wanting Ukraine to join the EU and only 6.9% of the latter expressing that wish. The nonetheless high percentage of preference for the Eurasian Customs Union and thereby, a more ‘pro-Russian’ foreign policy course can be attributed to the somewhat persistent regional polarization, keeping in mind that those expressing mixed ethnic identities are predominantly from the east and south of Ukraine. Nonetheless, they are clear differences in views to be observed between those with a heterogeneous ethnic self-identification and their homogenous counterparts.

For the sake of peace, it is better to forget about what happened in Donbass in 2014-2015 and together think about the future.
(% within ethnic self-identification)

	Ukrainian	Mixed	Russian
Totally Agree	14.0	18.4	18.6
Rather Agree	30.8	37.3	34.3
Rather Disagree	22.7	12.9	5.7
Totally Disagree	13.1	15.7	32.9
Don’t know	19.3	15.7	8.6

Table 11 (Source: KIIS 2015)

Unity: Table 11 represents the results on the question enquiring about the future of Ukrainian nation building after being confronted with a separatist movement in the Donbass. As can be seen, there is a general willingness across all ethnic categories to forget about what happened and together think about the future. Mixed ethnic identities are the strongest supporters of prioritizing the unity of their country, with 18.4% totally agreeing with the statement and 37.3% rather agreeing with it. However, even though the majority of Russian ethnics do agree, there is a substantial body of 32.9% that disagrees. Therefore, the strongest to condemn separatism and Russian involvement in Ukraine's domestic context are those that should adhere to a 'pro-Russian' identity in the popular narrative of 'two Ukraines'.

Concluding the analysis of the ethnic cleavage that supposedly divides Ukraine in popular discourse, three remarks need to be made. First of all, ethnicity in itself is a poor indicator for competing regional identity construction, as the majority of the people living in the 'East' of the country are in fact Ukrainian ethnics. Secondly, as Camoroff (1996, p. 669) argued, ethnic self-identifications are fluid and can change over time. It therefore, comes as no surprise that through increasingly mixed marriage in the eastern regions of the country, a part of the population identifies as both, Ukrainian and Russian ethnics. The views of this part of the population represent a distinct category in their preference for Ukraine's foreign policy course, expressing slightly more moderate opinions than their homogenous ethnic counterparts.

4. A tale of a 'pro-Ukrainian' Ukraine

The narrative of 'two Ukraines' paints the picture of a country divided into two homogenous halves, each with its own distinct identity that is opposing the other on the issue of what it means to be Ukrainian and what Ukraine's proper place in the world is. Scholars, in their search for an understanding of the Ukraine crisis, have made use of the narrative of two conflicting identities abiding to the regional split of the country and portrayed them as a tool for mobilization along 'pro-European' and 'pro-Russian' sentiments. In this storyline, the Euromaidan was the product of a mobilized 'pro-European' identity in the 'West' and the 'pro-Russian' separatist movement its equivalent in the 'East'. This dissertation has aimed to discredit the narrative underlying these assumptions by presenting a more nuanced picture of identities in the Ukrainian population. By analysing opinions on matters of foreign policy and unity along the cleavages commonly associated with the 'two-Ukraines', namely regional, linguistic and ethnic, it has aimed to contribute to the comprehension of the Ukraine crisis and has made the following two observations. First of all, the division of Ukraine into two parts obscures important variations in opinion and demographics within the two regions. While inhabitants of western Ukraine do indeed, predominantly express opinions that adhere to 'pro-European' sentiments and an ethnic Ukrainian identity, the picture is not as clear cut in the regions of south, centre and east Ukraine, which all exhibit a mix of language use, ethnic make-up and 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian' preferences as a foreign policy course for Ukraine. Moreover, people that speak both languages and self-identify as mixed ethnics challenge the narrative build around an 'either/or' concept in a bottom-up fashion. What then, do the explanations of the Ukraine crisis build around competing identity constructs in Ukraine neglect?

Quite simply put, they omit the increasingly mixed and civic nature of Ukrainian identities that transcend ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages in the country. The Maidan revolution, as pointed out before, was not as much about Ukraine joining the European Union, as it was about Ukraine embracing ‘European values’ of civil freedoms (Onuch 2014, p. 48). Russia gravely underestimated its abilities to mobilize Ukrainians in the south-eastern part of the country with its propaganda based on ethnicity that painted the Maidan revolutionaries as ‘nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites’ (The Kremlin 2014). Indeed, in the previously consulted KIIS poll conducted in this region, 49.9% of south-eastern Ukrainians disagreed that Russia rightly protects the interests of Russian-speaking citizens, with 16.1% finding it difficult to say and only 32.6% voicing agreement (KIIS 2014). The analysis of this dissertation demonstrated that the majority of all respondents, no matter where they lived, what language they spoke or which ethnicity they belonged to, expressed the desire to move forward from the crisis in unity. In a study on the opinions of Ukrainians aged 16 to 35 or what the study called ‘Ukraine’s next generation’ 82% claimed that they were patriots of Ukraine, the figure reaching 56% in the east (The British Council 2015, p. 12). Only 38% perceived ideological division into west and east to be a barrier to the development of their country, the majority of 59% claiming that Russia’s intervention was the main problem (The British Council 2015, p. 18). It let the study to conclude that ‘in all regions, even in the east, young people share a common patriotism and belief in the concept of Ukraine’ (The British Council 2015, p. 9).

Sakwa (2015, p. ix) draws a distinction between the ‘Ukrainian crisis’ denoting the profound tensions in the Ukrainian nation and state-building process since Ukraine achieved independence and the ‘Ukraine Crisis’, referring to the way in which the internal tensions have become internationalized. In contemporary analyses of the Ukraine crisis, the conflict is mostly seen as the product of domestic politicians causing

the 'Ukrainian Crisis', denoting the two competing identity constructions, while external powers are being made responsible for using these constructs to produce the 'Ukraine Crisis'. However, the question that needs to be asked is whether the internal tensions are necessarily to be found within the population or if the tensions denounce a profound cleavage between the political elites of the country and their citizens. A sociological poll conducted by the Razumkov Centre from 2006 to 2012, demonstrated that Ukrainians repeatedly attributed the highest threat to their country to their authorities. The majority of the population did not view internal regional tensions, Russia or the NATO as the primary threat, but the authorities that should represent their interests (Razumkov Centre 2012). Kubicek (2009, p. 324) attributes the problems of Ukraine to the quality of its democracy, which he claims is seriously obstructed through the lack of ability of political institutions to govern, corruption and the rule of law as well as the government's lack of commitment to democratic freedoms and representing the interests of its voters. Ukrainian authorities since independence have failed to offer a comprehensive policy of national integration that removed ethnicity and language matters from the political sphere (Riabchuk 2015, p. 144). They have engaged in a game of inclusion and exclusion for the benefit of their 'patronage networks' instead of acting to aggregate 'the preferences of the larger public' (Kubicek 2009, p. 339). The current president Petro Poroshenko recognized this discrepancy when, in his inauguration speech in June 2014, promised to be a president that came to his people with 'peace. With a project of government decentralization. With a guarantee of free usage of Russian language in your region. With strong intentions to not divide people into right and wrong Ukrainians' (Global Research 2014). He was the first 'pro-Western' candidate that reached clear victory in all Ukrainian regions, leading Riabchuk (2015, p. 140) to argue that the Ukraine crisis managed to unite the whole country around a common cause, against a common enemy, namely Russia. However, not even two years

after assuming office Poroshenko's approval ratings have dropped to 17%, making him less popular than Yanukovych before his government was overthrown (Sputnik 2016). The lack of reforms imposed by the president, as well as the promotion of old elites to government positions, led 26-year old Julia Maruschewska, whose video 'I am a Ukrainian' went viral during the Maidan protests, to write a public letter to the president asking: 'Are you with them or with us?', adding that 'I'm sure no matter what, Ukraine will change, because we have already passed the point of no return' (Ukrop News 24 2016). Ukraine will change, because Ukrainians have started to formulate their identities around a civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian. They are making their voices heard and these voices are not either 'pro-European' or 'pro-Russian', but simply 'pro-Ukrainian'.

Conclusion

This dissertation has aimed to contribute to the understanding of the Ukraine crisis by deconstructing the narrative underlying most of its scholarly explanations, namely that the crisis is a product of internal tensions around an identity cleavage, that was exploited by international and domestic political forces for their own political gains. In 2002, Zhurzhenko argued that

today we are witnessing the emergence of a new powerful myth – the myth of the “two Ukraines”. Like other myths, it is not just an invention, but rather a re-construction of the political and cultural realities of Ukraine, based on a certain vision of history, on opinion polls and elections results, on Western theoretical constructs, cultural stereotypes and ideological prejudices (2002).

Over a decade later, this myth stands its ground. Adhering to the myth of ‘East’ and ‘West’ Ukraine has let many scholars to overlook the agency of the Ukrainian population in assembling more complex and diverse identities than those constructed in a top-down fashion. As has been demonstrated, Ukraine is a not country that is divided into two neat halves. It is not a country where one half supports European integration and the other desires separatism to Russia and dwells in Soviet nostalgia. It is neither a country that has two static populations groups that are separated through ethnicity and language, one half being Russian and Russophone and the other being Ukrainian and Ukrainian-speaking. It is a country where identities mix, where a majority of people speak both languages, where self-ascribed mixed ethnicities are not uncommon. Most importantly, it is a country with diverse regions; where the south differs from the east, and the centre differs from the west. Ukraine’s regions and its identities are far from

clear-cut. The views held by its citizens are not either 'pro-Western' or 'pro-Russian', but in a lot of cases simply 'pro-Ukrainian'. Therefore, Ukrainian politicians need to adhere to a 'pro-Ukrainian' narrative that is based on inclusive politics and depoliticize ethnicity and language. The Ukrainian population has started to transcend ethno-linguistic and regional cleavages by promoting a civic understanding of what it means to be Ukrainian in a bottom-up fashion. It is now up to their politicians to meet them halfway.

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