

Ukrainian Identity: Citizenship or Attitude

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Thank you Mr. Baryn, for sending me the Autumn 2012 CUPP Newsletter, which contains several papers from the CUPP Washington MODEL UKRAINE Conference.

I enjoyed the commentary of my CUPP colleague Pavlo Shopin from Luhansk, but the issue of Ukrainian identity is on the one hand complicated as Pavlo states but on the other hand less so, if you consider the following.

I would like to share some of my ideas with the CUPP community concerning Pavlo Shopin's "Implication of the Fact that a Significant Number of Ukraine's Population do not Consider Themselves Ukrainian Either in the National or Civic Sense".

I found the topic interesting and timely, given the emerging focus on the roles of state (Ukrainian) and minority (Russian) languages in Ukraine. The author emphasizes Ukrainian citizenship as the major indicator in identifying himself as a Ukrainian. He also draws our attention to the fact that attempts of "nationalistic minority" to make Russian-speaking citizens disintegrate from Ukrainian society does more harm than good for the unity of the country. Finally, in his concluding remarks Pavlo stresses the idea that principles of tolerance and multiculturalism should prevail in modern Ukraine relative to principles of a mono-ethnic state, which prevailed, according to the author, during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko.

I think that this work presents an important topic for the CUPP commu-

nity as well as for every person who identifies himself as a Ukrainian. However, I disagree with some of the ideas raised in the article and most of my critique centers on the role of the Ukrainian language, the notion of "nationalistic minority" and the role of citizenship.

First, my native language is Ukrainian and I have been using it throughout my life both at home and at work while living in Ukraine. At the same time, I have always been tolerant to citizens of Ukraine who in their daily life use languages than Ukrainian. But while language tolerance is important for Ukrainian society, I have steadfastly disagreed with making Russian a second state language in Ukraine. One can find many examples in Ukraine's history when the Ukrainian language was proscribed both in education and public service usage. For example, during Soviet times all public servants in Western Ukraine were required to speak Russian in public in a region where 95% of the population spoke Ukrainian. This is a striking example of the restriction on the Ukrainian language and the imposition of a foreign language through this policy of Russification?

So what has changed in current history? The answer is short – nothing. As a Ukrainian, I do not find a single nation-wide magazine published in Ukrainian. Similarly, I find it difficult to find a good book in Ukrainian, as 80% of all published material is in Russian. On Ukrainian airlines most of the service is in Russian, even though I greet

the staff in Ukrainian and would expect them to reciprocate in Ukrainian. This list seems to be never-ending. But my major point is this. When asked in Ukraine why most of the means of communication are in Russian, the typical answer would usually be as follows, "Everyone in Ukraine knows Russian. Stop showing off."

The predicament for a majority in Ukraine begs the question! Do we have the moral obligation/ do we owe some duty to cleanse our country to our past domination by Russia / and the right to sacrifice our national language because of our linguistic competence in the Russian language? Again, the answer is an emphatic NO!

In brief, I do not believe that civilized multiculturalism requires the displacement of the indigenous language by another language (in this case the language of the historical oppressor) in order to create conditions under which the indigenous national language gradually becomes a marginalized such as has occurred in Belarus, so as to proclaim that the country has attained linguistic tolerance and equality for all.

Marta Onufriv has recently published a very interesting article in Ukrainska Pravda (<http://www.pravda.com.ua/columns/2012/09/14/6972760>) explaining some of the speculations that arise in modern Ukraine around the issue of language. To my modest opinion, it could be interesting for the CUPP community to read this article.

Second, I have never quite understood what the term "nationalistic"

means. It seems to mean different things to different people especially of one wishes to distort or subterfuge the debate. On this point Bohdan Vitvitsky gave an interesting address at the CUPP Washington Conference, which would be valuable to republish.

After my most recent experience in Crimea, the terms "nationalist", "bandera" or "zapadenets" are applied to everyone who lives west of Kyiv, speaks Ukrainian, and does not obsequiously switch from Ukrainian to Russian, or to the "language everyone understands" the minute a person of undetermined language preference

joins the conversation. Unfortunately, the author did not spend enough time in explaining what he understands by the term nationalist and the anecdotal allegation that "nationalistic minority" dictates to the majority.

The question must be posed; in what manner do the so-called "nationalists" disrespect the rights of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine? Has the number of Russian-speaking media decreased? How many Ukrainian-speaking classes are there in Crimea or Donbas? Was anyone prohibited from using Russian in a region where the Russian language is dominant?

Likewise, I do not see any connection between the mono-ethnic state and the loss of popularity of ex-President Mr. Yuschenko. I think that even the "nationalistic minority" to whom I supposedly belong (according to the author) will converge on the notion that the former President lost his popularity for reasons other than those mentioned in the article (note that President Yuschenko never had any considerable support in Eastern and Southern regions of Ukraine who traditionally demand a special status for Russian language). Finally, why is there a difference in attitude of Ukrainian-speaking citizens to Russian-speaking citizens of Kyiv and Donetsk? Isn't that explained by the fact that in Kyiv Russian-speaking majority respects national symbols like Ukrainian language while in Donetsk they do not?

Third, to be Ukrainian does not only mean to be a citizen of Ukraine. To be Ukrainian means to be able to speak, read articles, and watch movies freely in Ukrainian no matter what language you speak in daily life. To be Ukrainian is to respect the culture, customs and traditions of Ukraine. To be Ukrainian means not to support any external force that works for the degradation of Ukraine rather than its development. Ukrainian should not be merely mirrored in the passport, but rather in person's mindset and attitude to the country where he lives.

I know that my opinion of Ukrainian identity might seem different from the author's, but I hope that my brief comments are at least partially interesting as CUPP community continues with the discussion of identity issue in Ukraine. I am sure that the domestic policy will one day change in Ukraine, but it might take too long for future generations of Ukrainians to direct this policy to where it needs to be – respect of national symbols that constitute being Ukrainian, including language.



CUPPers in the School Bus on the way to Migus Seminar.



CUPPers at Paul Migus' House.