



Winfried Schneider-Deters

UKRAINE'S FATEFUL YEARS 2013–2019

*Vol. II: The Annexation of Crimea and
the War in Donbas*

ibidem

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Part IV

The “Russian Spring” in “New Russia”

IV.1 Headwind from “South-East”

IV.1.1 The “Anti-Maidan” in the “Province”: Protest against the Change of Power in Kyiv

The insurgent “people of the Maidan” (Ukr.: “narod Maidanu”) did not represent the entire population of Ukraine. A large part of the people in the east and south of the country did not consider the government, that had come to power in Kyiv as a result of the victory of the “Maidan” to be legitimate; even less did they share the Ukrainian national feeling that had awakened—or strengthened—by the Maidan”. In the center, west and north of Ukraine, the “new power” had the support of the people, while in the large cities of the “Yugo-Vostok”¹ (“South-East”) of the country, where it had remained quiet during the “Maidan”, people began to protest against the change of power in Kyiv. These demonstrations looked spontaneous at first,² but soon it became clear that they were orchestrated by Russian agents who took control of the protest.

The Kyiv International Institute of Sociology³ conducted on behalf of the weekly newspaper *Dzerkalo tyzhnya/ Zerkalo nedeli* an opinion poll⁴ from April 10 to 15, 2014 in eight southern and eastern oblasts, namely in the southern oblasts of Odessa, Mykolaiv, Kherson, and in the eastern oblasts of Kharkov;

1 The Russian designation of the south and east of Ukraine as “Yugo-vostok” (Ukr.: “Pivdenno Skhidna Ukraina”) is not only a geographical designation, but also implies a politically “different” Ukraine due to the high proportion of the population that is more “pro-Russian” than “Ukrainian-patriotic” and mostly Russian-speaking. The “Yugo-Vostok” is a macroregion comprising the oblasts of Kharkiv, Dnipro (until 2016 Dnipropetrovsk), Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhya, Mykolayiv, Kherson, Odessa (Russian: Odessa) the Autonomous Republic of Crimea annexed by Russia and the city of Sevastopol.

2 The so-called “Anti-Maidan” organized by the “Party of Regions” in Kyiv next to the Verkhovna Rada building was “artificial”: the paid participants were brought to the capital from oblasts of the East.

3 Ukr. Kyivskii Mizhnarodnyi Instytut Sotsiologii; Russ.: Kievskii mezhdunarodnyi institut sotsiologii.

4 1476 telephone interviews, 1756 personal interviews, in 160 localities in 8 oblasts of the South and East.

Dnipro(petrovsk⁵), Zaporizhzhya, Donetsk, and Luhansk.⁶ Only 42 % of the respondents considered the Parliament legitimate, although it was the same as the one elected in 2012, and although its composition had not changed in the wake of the change of power.

The interim President Oleksandr Turchynov and the Prime Minister (equally ad interim) Arseniy Yatsenyuk were illegitimate in the eyes of half of the residents of the eight oblasts surveyed.⁷ In the two oblasts of the Donbas region, Donetsk and Luhansk, the stronghold of the "removed" President Yanukovich, 70% considered both illegitimate. The negative portrayal of the events in Kyiv broadcast by Russian television stations, which were the dominant medium in the east and south of Ukraine, strengthened the already dominant "Anti-Maidan" sentiment in these parts of the country.

The resentment of ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking ethnic Ukrainians in Ukraine's eastern and southern oblasts towards the capital Kyiv did not mean, that the majority of them wanted to "join" Russia. According to polls, only a third of the population in the Donbas harbored separatist feelings. This explains why Putin's secession project "Novorossiya" ("New Russia") ultimately failed.

With the exception of the Donbas, the east and south of the Ukraine did not get involved in Putin's separatist adventure. And in Donbas, too, the separatists were only able to hold on to a third of the two oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk militarily, because their losses of weapons and fighters were compensated for by ongoing supplies from Russia. The Russian President Putin had miscalculated his Ukrainian venture: "New Russia" did not fall into his lap like Crimea. He had not foreseen, that with his military support of separatism in Donbas, he was igniting a fortified defensive Ukrainian patriotism.

Notwithstanding the above statement the "Maidan" was not a manifestation of a conflict between parts of Ukraine ("regions"), but of the resistance of a large part—the larger part?—of the people against the kleptocratic regime of President Yanukovich, who comes from Donbas. Politicians of his Party of the Regions had fuelled the (old) anti-Kyiv resentments, as well as the contempt nourished during the Soviet era against the population of western Ukraine, which was annexed to the Soviet Union under the Hitler-Stalin Pact—and which overwhelmingly supported the uprising against President Yanukovich's regime.

On December 7, 2013, the governor of the Kherson oblast, the mayor of the Kherson oblast capital, and deputies of the oblast council and municipal councils took part in an "anti-Maidan" event in the southern Ukrainian city of Kherson. In the port city of Odessa on the Black Sea, citizens demonstrated with a "march for the federalization of Ukraine" and for "Ukraine's accession to the (tripartite) Customs Union" (Tamozhennyi Soyuz / TS of the three states of the Russian

5 In 2016 renamed "Dnipro".

6 <https://golos.ua/i/219987>.

7 Ibid.

Federation, Kazakhstan and Belarus.⁸ On December 13, 2013, demonstrations were also held in the port city of Sevastopol on the Crimea in support of Ukraine's accession to the TS. In the eastern Ukrainian oblast capital Donetsk (in Donbas) there were solidarity rallies for the "Maidan" in Kyiv, but the "Anti-Maidan" clearly prevailed there.

On February 17, 2014, the magazine *Tyzhden* (published weekly in Ukrainian language) published the result of journalistic research, according to which part of the "anti-Maidan organizations" was fictitious, that is, did not exist in reality.⁹ On February 1, a fictitious "Red Sector" (Russ.: "Krasnyi sektor") acknowledged to have set fire to the vehicle of a "Maidan" activist.¹⁰ Another virtual "Organization against fascists" propagated on a Facebook page the slogan "Against violence—only violence!" (Russ.: "protiv sily—tolko sila"), but then disappeared from the network. (The founder was a certain Nikolai Omelchenko.) On February 16, 2013, another phantom organization claimed responsibility on YouTube under the name "Ghosts of Sevastopol" (Russ.: "Prizraki Sevastopolya") for the murder of an activist of the "Auto-Maidan" on February 13, 2014, in the South Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhya.¹¹ Another virtual "civic platform" ("Hromadska platforma", Russ.: "Grazhdanskaya platforma")¹² with the name "HroMaidan" (Russ.: "GroMaidan") was founded in Odessa, as its coordinator Serhii Dubenko announced at a press conference on January 15, 2014.¹³

Under a similar name—"Civic Platform Maidan" ("Grazhdanskaya platforma Maidan"—a pseudo or clone "Maidan" was created in January 2014, which was conspicuous for its massive media presence. According to the Institute for Mass Media (Institut Masovoi Informatsii / "IMI"), 11% of the cost of covert political advertising was accounted for by this platform, which posed as the "real" Maidan, broadcast false messages purporting to be from the "Maidan", and prided itself as a platform for ideas to solve the crisis.¹⁴ The origin of the funds for this strong "media presence" was unknown. It was suspected to be the leader of the pro-Russian pseudo-movement "Ukrainian Choice" ("Ukrainskii vybor"), Viktor Medvedchuk. The "GP Maidan" appeared at the time when

8 Customs Union of the Eurasian Economic Union (Tamozhennyi soyuz Evraziyskogo ekonomicheskogo soyuza).

9 <http://tyzhden.ua/News/102073>; *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russ edition), 17.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/17/7014106/>.

10 *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), 01.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/1/7012329/>.

11 *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), 16.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/16/7014042/>.

12 *HroMaidan* / "Hromadskyi Maidan; Russ.: "GroMaidan" / "Grazhdanskii Maidan".

13 News Agency "Unian": <https://www.unian.net/politics/872726-v-odesse-sozdana-obschestvennaya-platforma-gromaydan.html>. <https://www.unian.ua/politics/872727-u-odesi-stvorena-gromadska-platforma-gromaydan.html>.

14 Yelena Holub, Roman Kabachyi: *GroMaidan* protiv Maidana, in: *Ukrainskaya Pravda* (Russian edition), February 17, 2014; http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/articles/2014/02/17/7014100/view_print/.

Andrii Klyuyev became the head of the President's administration. The suspicion was that it was a project of the presidential administration to discredit the "Maidan". This pseudo-"Maidan" propagated a "Maidan without politicians" (meaning: without opposition politicians); the mission was obvious: To split the "Maidan".

IV.1.2 The Kharkiv Congress of the "Party of Regions"

Coup Attempt in Kharkiv?

On February 22, 2014, on the day when President Yanukovych escaped from Kyiv, a congress of deputies of his "Party of Regions" from oblasts and municipal councils of the Eastern and Southern oblasts¹⁵ as well as of PoR's deputies of the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and of the city council of the port city of Sevastopol (which, like Kyiv, has a special status) took place in the Sports Palace of Kharkiv, the second largest city of Ukraine, under the chairmanship of the head of the Kharkiv oblast state administration Mikhail Dobkin and under the protection of the riot police, "Berkut". The speaker of the congress, along with Dobkin, was Vadym Kolesnichenko, a deputy of the Verkhovna Rada and deputy chairman of the faction of the Party of Regions.¹⁶ According to the organizers, the meeting was attended by more than 3000 people. Participating was a Russian delegation, which included Aleksei Pushkov, Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Gosudarstvennaya Duma (the Parliament of the Russian Federation); Vasilii Golubev, Governor of the Belgorod Oblast; Aleksandr Gordeev, Governor of the Voronezh oblast; Nikolai Denin, Governor of the Bryansk oblast; Mikhail Margelov, Senator of the Pskov oblast and Sergei Semenov, Consul General of the Russian Federation in Kharkiv.

The fugitive President Yanukovych had announced that he was flying to Kharkiv with the aim of participating in this congress; however, for unknown reasons he did not appear at the congress after landing in Kharkiv, but flew on to his 'stronghold' Donetsk. The resolution adopted by this congress stated:

We, the organs of local self-government at all levels [...] the Supreme Council of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the municipal council of the city of Sevastopol, have decided to assume responsibility for ensuring normal conditions for the work of the people's deputies (of the Verkhovna Rada) – without extortion and threats against them and their families – observance of the law and respect for human rights throughout the territory of Ukraine, in order to restore the constitutional order in Kiev.¹⁷

15 With the exception of the two oblasts of Odessa and Mykolaiv.

16 Kolesnichenko was known for his ostentatious contempt of the Ukrainian language. He fled after the change of power to Russia, where he took Russian citizenship.

17 *Ukrainskaya pravda* (Russ. edition), 22.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/22/7015713/>.

The resolution was open to all organs of self-government (oblast and municipal councils), including of other oblasts that wished to join it, and also open to "amendments and additions according to the political situation." The Russian media outlet RBK (RosBiznesKonsalting) reported the decision of the Congress, that "Until the restoration of the constitutional order in Ukraine and until the legitimization of the central bodies of power the bodies of local self-administration" would take over "all power."¹⁸

When the deputy of the Party of Regions in the Verkhovna Rada, Vadim Kolesnichenko, shouted the slogan: "For friendship with Russia!" the participants chanted: "Russia! Russia!" ("Rossiya! Rossiya!"). But the delegates refrained from open separatism: this decision was "to secure the constitutional order in Kyiv", it was explicitly stated. The territorial integrity of Ukraine was threatened, declared participants in the meeting, whose separatist tendencies were well known. Although the delegates did not declare their regions independent of Kyiv, they refused to recognize the new power in Kyiv. Earlier, the organizers had declared that, in view of the anarchy in Kyiv, the city of Kharkiv was ready to become the capital of Ukraine, a status that Kharkiv had temporarily held in the Soviet Union (1918-1934).¹⁹

According to the authors of the resolution, "the events of the last few days in Kyiv led to the paralysis of the central organs of power and destabilization of the situation in the state". On the contrary, the new rulers in Kyiv surprisingly quickly overcame the "interregnum" that had arisen after the victory of the "Maidan" and the flight of President Yanukovych. Speakers of the Party of Regions declared that the (previous) opposition had not fulfilled the conditions of the agreement on the settlement of the crisis of February 21, 2014 (which was true). Furthermore, "unlawfully armed formations" had not laid down their arms (what arms?); they continued to occupy buildings of the central state administration (which was true), killed peaceful people and members of the security forces (which was a lie). The authors of the resolution affirmed that "the Verkhovna Rada is working in conditions of terror, under the threat of armed force and death threats" (which too was a lie). The decisions of the Ukrainian Parliament, taken under these conditions, raise doubts about their voluntariness, legitimacy and legality.

Oleh Charov, deputy chairman of the faction of the Party of Regions in the Verkhovna Rada, declared at the congress, that an "armed seizure of power" was underway in Ukraine—with the participation of foreign states (which was nonsense). There were 20,000 men under arms in Kyiv, he claimed, and those

18 RBK, 22.02.2013; <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/do-vosstanovleniya-poryadka-v-ukraine-vsyu-vlast-berutorgany-22022014134500>.

19 Because of the anti-Soviet sentiment in Kyiv, the Bolsheviks made Kharkiv the capital of the "USRR", the "Ukrainska Sotsialistychna Radyanska Respublika", from 1937 USRR: "Ukrayinska Radyanska Sotsialistychna Respublika".

who had seized power wanted to use these people "beyond Kyiv".²⁰ The mayor of the city of Kharkiv, Hennadii Kernes, called for a purge of defectors from the ranks of the Party of Regions.²¹ (He meant the deputies of the PdR, who had – together with the previous opposition factions – voted for the laws with which the parliament had legalized the transfer of power.

The separatists in disguise turned to the signatory states of the "Budapest Memorandum", which had "not fulfilled their obligation to guarantee the territorial integrity and security of Ukraine": the territorial integrity and security of Ukraine were in danger: the country's nuclear power plants were threatened by the extremists, they claimed – or rather, they lied. At the same time, two demonstrations took place in front of the Sports Palace, one supporting the Congress, the "Young Regions" ("Molodye regiony"), the youth organization of the "Party of Regions", and an opposing demonstration of "Maidan" supporters. Units of militia (police) separated the two camps. Evgenyi Zhylyn, the leader of the "Oplot" martial arts club, called on the delegates of the congress to arm the "anti-Maidan" activists.²² In the evening, "Maidan" activists stormed the building of the Kharkiv oblast administration without capturing it.

The Russian state propaganda channel, Rossiya 24, broadcast the "Kharkov Congress" live and showed footage of the street fights in Kyiv on February 18 and 20, showing only one side of the picture, namely how militant activists of the "Maidan" beat the shields of the regime's security forces with clubs. Immediately after the end of the "counterrevolutionary" congress, the tandem "Dopa i Gepa" – Mikhail Dobkin, the governor of the Kharkiv oblast, and Hennadii Kernes, mayor of the oblast capital, Kharkiv – went to Russia by land, as the acting minister of internal affairs, Arsen Avakov reported on Facebook and as was confirmed by the border service.

Already ten years earlier, during the "Orange Revolution" in 2004, parts of the Party of Regions had tried at the so-called "Severodonets Congress" to secede eastern Ukraine, because their "regionalist" candidate Viktor Yanukovych had allegedly had the presidency "stolen" from him by the "orange revolutionaries".

20 <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/v-ukraine-proizoshel-vooruzhennyy-zahvat-vlasti-nardep-2022014131700>. Charov, who fled to Russia, is accused of treason (Ukr: "derzhavna zrada", Russ.: "gosudarstvennaya izmena") by the Ukrainian Prosecutor General's Office and has been put on trial.

21 <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/kernes-prizval-k-ochishcheniyu-ryadov-pr-ot-perebezhchikov-22022014125700>.

22 <https://www.rbc.ua/rus/news/lider-oplota-poprosil-deputatov-harkovskogo-sezda-vooruzhit-22022014133200>.

The "Ukrainian Front"

On February 21, 2014, on the eve of the regional congress of the Party of Regions in Kharkiv,²³ the "Ukrainian Front" (Russ.: "Ukrainskii Front") of civic associations was founded – an "All-Ukrainian Social Union" of political parties and individual citizens²⁴ – with a historical allusion to the "1st Ukrainian Front" of the Red Army, which took part in the reconquest of eastern Ukraine ("Battle of the Dnepr") with the declared aim of "cleaning Ukraine of occupiers".²⁵

The founding decision was passed unanimously, as the chairman of the board of the "Federation of veterans of Afghanistan" ("Soyuz veteranov Afganistana"), Volodymyr Ryzhkov informed. One of the initiators of this founding assembly and the formation of the Ukrainian Front was the Chairman of the Kharkiv Oblast State Administration (2010-2014), Mykhailo Dobkin.²⁶ The event was also attended by representatives of pseudo civil society organizations and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate ("Ukrainskaya pravoslavnyaya tserkov Moskovskogo patriarkhata"), which had been committing its faithful to Yanukovych for years. The Party of Regions simulated a movement of citizens to counteract the odium, that the supporters of Yanukovych's regime were only paid demonstrators and hired thugs ("Titushky").

As Mikhail Dobkin, the chairman of the Kharkiv State Oblast Administration (and spiritus rector of the founding assembly), explained, the name "Ukrainian Front" is particularly symbolic—as is the Front's insignia, the "Georgievskaya lenta," which has a pro-Russian, separatist connotation in Ukraine. "Our Front is beginning to cleanse the Ukrainian soil of those who have come here to occupy (our country)" – namely, the "seditious nationalists who have descended from Mount Hoverla"²⁷ and who consider themselves "the only Ukrainian 'demos' and who proclaim their "national idea" in the name of the entire Ukrainian people. Dobkin called what was going on in the country a "bad theater play", that "was not written in Ukraine". "Our patience is not infinite. When we realize that peaceful methods of restoring order in our country are exhausted, we will do it in another way," Dobkin threatened.

In Kharkiv, the martial arts club "Oplot" (bulwark, fortress) joined the Ukrainian Front as a "civic organization". On January 17, 2014, members of the Kharkiv "Oplot" had blocked the "Avto-Maidan" on European Square in Kyiv

23 According to the organizers, about 6,000 people attended the meeting, delegates from 20 oblast organizations of the Party of Regions, Representatives of the Communist Party and of about 50 civic associations.

24 <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/1/7012328/>.

25 The "Maidan" denounced the regime of President Yanukovych as an internal "occupation". In classic Soviet fashion, the "anti-Maidan" adopted the terminology of the "Maidan" and filled it with the opposite content.

26 He ran for president in the early elections on May 25, 2014.

27 Located in the Carpathian Mountains, "Hoverla" is the highest mountain in Ukraine at 2061 meters. On Independence Day (on August 24) the "Hoverla" becomes a national pilgrimage destination for patriotic politicians.

with their vehicles embroidered with the " Ribbon of Saint George".²⁸ After this 'action', the leader Yevhenii Zhylyn, together with the representative of an alleged civic organization "For Order" ("Za poriadok"), Viktor Andryeyev, gave a press conference. The two groups later united to form the "Anti-Automaidan" ("Anti-Avto-Maidan"). Igor Chernoiwanov, the Ataman of the Don Cossack "Grand Army", promised the "Ukrainian Front" the support of his (allegedly) 10,000 men. The "Night Wolves" ("Nochnye Volki"), a Russian nationalist motorcycle ("biker") club, with which Russian President Putin likes to pose in a leather jacket, also joined the Ukrainian Front.

28 Ukrainskaya pravda (Russian edition), 17.01.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/01/17/7009851/>.

IV.2 Separatist Sheet Lightning in the “South-East”

IV.2.1 The Specter of Separatism

After the victory of the “Maidan”, latent separatism became virulent in the east and south of Ukraine; the “specter of separatism was haunting” the “Yugo-Vostok” (“South-East”) of Ukraine. Even before the flight of President Yanukovich, on February 21, 2014, the Ukrainian domestic intelligence service, the SBU, felt compelled to warn against separatist manifestations in a public statement: individual politicians, representatives of organs of local self-government, chairmen of civic associations, “radical-minded persons” would stir up the conflict in the country and “spread autonomist and separatist sentiments among the population”. This could lead to the “termination of the existence of our state as a unitary state and to the loss of state sovereignty,” the SBU warned.²⁹

At this time, the SBU is said to have become aware of “negotiations” on the division of Ukraine: Individual deputies of the councils of various administrative levels” (oblasts and municipalities (whether also of the Verkhovna Rada was not clear) had begun to “conduct separate negotiations with foreign states” (meaning Russia). “Consultations” were already being “held openly about a possible division of the country into several parts”, the SBU declared, and warned that strict measures would be taken to stop attacks on territorial integrity; those involved in such activities would be held criminally responsible.

Already at the beginning (!) of February 2014 leading politicians of the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea had initiated the introduction of changes in the constitution of the Autonomous Republic and commissioned the examination of the question, whether Crimea could turn to Russia with the request “for protection”. On February 22 2014, after the flight of President Yanukovich, the Ukrainian national parliament, the Verkhovna Rada, adopted a resolution on the prevention of all manifestations of separatism with 319 votes, i.e. with a large “constitutional” majority.³⁰ The draft of this resolution was introduced by the leaders of the three (still) opposition factions Arseniy Yatsenyuk, Vitali Klitschko and Oleh Tyahnybok.

Opinion polls from February to April 2014 showed that nowhere in Ukraine—not even in Donbas and in Crimea—was there a majority in favor of seceding from Ukraine and joining Russia.³¹ The survey conducted by the Foundation for Democratic Initiatives (Fond “Demokratychni initsiatyvy” im. Ilka Kucheriva) and the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (Kyivskyi

29 Ukrainskaya Pravda, (Russian edition), 21.02.2014; <http://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2014/02/21/7015545/>.

30 By a ‘constitutional majority’, that is to say, by a majority of two-thirds (300 of the total number of votes of 450) of votes amendments to the constitution can be introduced.

31 Coynash, Halya, April 15, 2019; <http://khp.org/index.php?id=1555201258>.

mizhnarodnyi instytut sotsiologii / KMIS) from February 8 to 18,³² showed that only 12% of the population as a whole wanted to form one state with Russia – in Crimea, however, the figure was 41%, in Donetsk oblast 33% and in Luhansk oblast 24%. In the survey conducted by the Rating Sociological Group (Sotsiologichna grupa "Reiting") from March 1 to 7, 2014, 61% were in favor of preserving the unitary state, 24% for its "federalization"; in the Donbas, 59% of the respondents were in favor of federalization, but 87% were against the secession of the Donbas and only 8% in favor. In the survey conducted by the Ukrainian Sociology Service for the "Democratic Initiatives" Foundation from March 16 to 30, 2014, 89% of the population (including the Donbas) considered Ukraine as their motherland ("rodina"), while 8% did not. In the Donbas, 18% of the population did not consider Ukraine as their motherland. So there can be no question of a separatist wave sweeping Ukraine.

IV.2.2 The Deeper Roots of Separatism in Donbas³³

As early as 1991, when Ukraine gained its independence, there was speculation in Western media about a possible split of the country. And not only in 2014, but ten years earlier, during the "Orange Revolution" in 2004, Ukraine was threatened by separatism. The industrial and financial magnates who, after the independence of Ukraine had appropriated the heavy industry in Donbas, continued to maintain the Soviet myth that the Donbas was feeding the rest of the Soviet Union, only now the rest of Ukraine.³⁴ In doing so, they distracted the impoverished "aristocracy of the proletariat" from the current plight of the previously heroized miners.³⁵ The functionaries of the Party of Regions too strengthened this belief in the "guard of the working class",³⁶ from which the party derived its claim to a leading position within Ukraine.

Separatism in the Donbas³⁷ was already stirring in the late 1980s – before the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reasons were economic and social, not na-

32 <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=uk:r&cat=reports&id=236&page=1&y=2014&m=3>.

33 http://ukraine-nachrichten.com/urspruenge-donezker-separatismus_4235?print.

34 <https://www.nzz.ch/das-verletzte-staehlerne-herz-der-ukraine-ld.648153?reduced=true>.

35 In the mid-1990s, the author had the opportunity to get to know the situation on the ground in the framework of a cooperation project of the German mining union "IG Berbau und Energie" and Friedrich Ebert Stiftung with the new "Independent Miners' Trade Union of Ukraine" (Ukr.: Nezalezhna profspilka hirnykiv Ukrainy / NPHU; Russ.: Nezavisimyi profsoyuz gornyakov Ukrainy / NPGU), whose chairman at the time was Mykhailo Volynets (since 2002 deputy of the Verkhovna Rada).

36 In the "Irmino mine" (Russ.: "Irminskii rudnik") in the present-day Luhansk oblast, worked the legendary Soviet model coal miner Alexei Stakhanov, whose use of innovative working methods greatly increased his personal productivity, which became the basis for the "Stakhanovite movement" in the Soviet Union. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aleksey-Grigoriyevich-Stakhanov>.

37 The "Donetsk-Krivoi Rog Soviet Republic" ("Donetsko-Krivorozhskaya Sovetskaya Respublika"), constituted by the Bolsheviks in 1918, existed for only two months – in February, March 2018. The "DKSR" included, in addition to the present-day oblasts of Sumy, Kharkiv,

tional or ethnic. The loss of importance of the Donbas began in Soviet times. After the development of hydrocarbon resources in Siberia, the conversion from coal to oil and gas began. The mines in the Donbas fell into disrepair. At the end of the 1980s, during the period of total "deficit" of goods, the coal industry of the Soviet Union fell into a serious crisis. Hundreds of thousands of miners went on strike not only for higher wages, but simply for a better supply of food and goods for daily needs.

The Ukrainian independence movement founded in 1989, the "Ruch", the "People's Movement of Ukraine" (Narodnyi Ruch Ukrayiny), which was initially a movement to support the reforms ("glaznost" and "perestroika") of the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, directed the protest of the miners in Donbas to their mills ("while we slave away here, Moscow lives like a maggot in bacon"). In the referendum on Ukraine's independence on December 1, 1991, almost 84% of the participants in the Donetsk oblast voted for Ukraine's independence – not out of "patriotism", but in the idea that the fruits of their labor would now no longer flow to Moscow but remain in the country. The "Deutsche Bank" attributed to independent Ukraine "the greatest potential of all the successor states of the former Soviet Union".³⁸

But as early as 1993 the mood changed. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought not an economic upswing, but a further decline, not only in Russia, but also in the now independent Ukraine: the striking miners demanded more independence for Donbas – this time from Kyiv. Now, for them, the parasites they supposedly kept out were not sitting in Moscow, but in the capital of independent Ukraine – and in the west of the country.

On June 7, 1993, an indefinite strike of the miners began in Donbas. In view of the possible serious consequences, the Verkhovna Rada met their demands for a 'consultative referendum' of confidence / no confidence in the President and in the Parliament, that was to take place on September 26, 1993. But on September 24, two days before the referendum, the Verkhovna Rada decided to hold early parliamentary elections on March 27, 1994 (the first since independence) and early presidential elections on June 26, 1994 (also the first since independence).³⁹ The strongest challenger to incumbent President Leonid Kravchuk was former Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma, who was elected President in a runoff election on July 10, 1994. Kuchma advocated close relations with Russia, but also claimed to be a "pro-Western" politician.

Dnipro (until 2016 Dnipropetrovsk, in zaric times Ekaterinoslav) Donetsk, Kherson in the east and south of Ukraine respectively, also the territory of the Don Cossacks in the Rostov-on-Don oblast in the present day Russian Federation.

38 Karl Walter, advisor and board member of the Bavarian House Odessa (BHO), president of the German-Ukrainian Business Club at the end of May 2013 in Odessa; in: DVZ / Deutsche Verkehrs-Zeitung. 06.06.2013; <https://www.dvz.de/rubriken/markt-unternehmen/single-view/nachrichten/logistikmarkt-ukraine-lockt.html>.

39 The dates for the regular parliamentary elections and regular presidential elections were March 1995 and late 1996 respectively.