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Ukraine in the future. Vectors of development as shaped by political parties and their programmes

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Abstract

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the following proclamations of independence by its republics might have resulted in a gradual fadeaway of the 'inferiority complex' these countries had developed as a result of having been part of the former Soviet empire. One example is Ukraine, which embarked upon building its own national state in 1991. The question now is whether the country has succeeded in forging its own national identity since then or whether it still suffers from the aforementioned inferiority complex. This paper will examine whether the Ukrainian political leadership has indeed managed to build a self-sufficient national state or whether Ukraine's national identity and development is still dictated by 'little russianism'¹.

The national identity concept is examined thoroughly here, with an emphasis on determining what kind of national identity would qualify as self-sufficient. Up to now, Ukrainian sociologists have not yet explored the phenomenon of 'little russianism' as a form of national inferiority complex. This paper therefore focuses on defining the indicators of 'little russianism' and then applies them to analyse the materials of the parliamentary elections campaigns held in 2006 and 2007. In addition, I define the vectors of development as they were seen and presented by Ukrainian political parties and their leaders.

I also argue that the willingness to 'attach' Ukraine to any supra-national communities (i.e. the EU, NATO, SES) among representatives of the political elite might be considered as evidence of an 'inferiority complex' and thus implies doubts about the self-sufficiency of the national state. This paper will define the characteristics of this 'inferiority complex' and provide specific evidence of its existence.

The research sample consisted of the programme documents of the political parties that participated in the parliamentary elections of 2006 and 2007. Grounded theory was applied to define research categories while content analysis was the method used to analyse the parties' programme documents.

The paper identifies the following results:

- I. The characteristics and particularities of the Ukrainian inferiority complex appeared as two indicators: the first one is the orientation vector (with respect to values, norms, standards, strategies, etc., common either in Russia or in Europe but considered to be absent in Ukraine) and the second one is the 'willingness to be attached' (i.e. to a stronger external entity).
- II. 'Little russianism' was more or less found to be present among all analysed political parties and blocks, reflected in their willingness to be attached to a stronger external entity through pro-Russian or pro-Western vectors or manifested in their inferiority complex, expressed as uncertainty about their national self-sufficiency.
- III. Two political parties exhibiting a fairly low level of uncertainty about national self-sufficiency won the majority of votes both in 2006 and 2007, and it could therefore be argued that Ukrainians also feel more confident about national self-sufficiency. In contrast, Yulia Tymoshenko's party, the BYuT, expressed a very high level of pro-Western 'willingness to be attached', which could be understood

¹ Motyl, Alexander: *Dilemmas of Independence. Ukraine after Totalitarianism*, New York/NY: Council of Foreign Relations Press, 1993.

as an attempt to present voters with a European approach to improving the unstable political and economic situation in Ukraine.

1. Introduction

The political borders on the modern world map display a number of new national states. The question is how these newly independent countries now perceive themselves after having been a part of various former empires and how their self-perception has influenced their development. Therefore, different interpretations of concepts such as 'nation', 'national identity' and 'national state' coincide when we refer to a community with a state system and sovereignty, political borders and power institutions, a legislative system and people who become a united national organism when it is necessary to possess the features of self-sufficiency in an international context.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent proclamations of independence by its former republics might have resulted in a gradual fadeaway of the 'inferiority complex' they developed due to having been cogs in a powerful empire. For example, the newly independent Ukraine began building a national state in 1991, but has the leadership managed to shake off the aforementioned inferiority complex over the years, or does the country still feel afflicted by 'little russianism'? In other words, the question is whether the national leadership has managed to instill a sense of self-sufficiency among the population or whether Ukraine's national identity is still informed by a lingering inferiority complex.²

The national identity concept has been widely examined,³ and the previous research on the topic helps to answer the question of what constitutes a self-sufficient national identity, and in what way this identity influences the formation of a national state.⁴ The basic definitions in this paper are based upon earlier works. Beyond that, however, modern Ukrainian sociology has not yet studied the phenomenon of 'little russianism' as a form of national inferiority complex. It is therefore hard to find any research that provides suitable operational categories for analysing the data used in this paper, i.e. the programme documents of Ukrainian political parties. For this reason, this paper first defines the indicators of 'little russianism' and then applies them to the analysis of Ukrainian political parties' programmes in the 2006 and 2007 elections and re-elections, respectively.

2. Research background and basic definitions

One of my research hypotheses assumes that the centuries during which Ukraine was a part of the Moscovia state, the Russian empire, and then the USSR helped to form the Ukrainians' willingness to be attached to its strong 'neighbour'/'elder brother' Russia. This willingness still persists despite Ukraine's fifteen years of independence. However, this 'willingness to be attached' and inferiority complex can be manifested not only through a pro-Russian vector but also through a pro-Western one, with the latter serving as an objection to pro-Russian orientation and an attempt to find another 'elder brother' in the form of large 'defenders' like the EU, NATO or the SES. Presumably, possessing a self-sufficient national identity would enable Ukraine to develop into a national state and help it to cast off its 'little russianism'

² Ibid.

³ Smith, Anthony D.: *National Identity*, Kyiv: Osnovy, 1994 (in Ukrainian); Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities*, Kyiv: Krytyka, 2001 (in Ukrainian); Gellner, Ernest: *Nations and Nationalism*, Kyiv: Takson, 2003 (in Ukrainian).

⁴ Ryabchuk, Mykola: *Vid Malorosii do Ukrainy. Paradoksy zapiznilogo natsiietvorennia* (From Ukraine to Little Russia. The Late Nation-forming Paradoxes), Kyiv: Krytyka, 2000 (in Ukrainian).

inferiority complex. At the same time, the *vectors* of the state's development demonstrate the country's uncertainty about its self-sufficiency as an independent political unit.

The historical experience of the 'Soviet brotherhood' or 'Slavic solidarity' might interfere to a certain extent with Ukraine's ability to form its own identity, community and membership. By the same token, if state-building is not accompanied by a sense of self-sufficiency, then the leaders of this political community will probably exhibit a 'willingness to be attached' to larger and more powerful supra-national formations, which they hope will be more able to guarantee the existence and development of their newly formed nation. Thus, the governing leaders who demonstrate this willingness are essentially sending the message that their 'young' nation appears to be less than self-sufficient and inferior to its neighbours.

The research object was therefore pre-determined by the function of those who participate as candidates in the elections and thus supposedly represent the people's interests in the parliament as the state's highest legislative body. Members of the political elite were also treated as those who spread national ideas among the masses (electorate). Perhaps not surprisingly, the political elites do not actually represent the attitudes and orientations of the populace but instead voice their opinions on how Ukraine should be developed. In so doing, politicians might transmit different variants of the inferiority complex while defending the particular vector of state development that they consider to be the most 'appropriate' and advantageous.

The data for the analysis was taken directly from the election programmes of the parties that participated in the parliamentary elections in 2006 and re-elections in 2007. As Ukraine's inferiority complex was the focus of the research, the main objective was to seek evidence of it and determine its characteristics by examining the election programme documents. Thus, the research tasks were:

- I. to explore whether the inferiority complex and 'little russianism' were present among certain groups of the Ukrainian political elite;
- II. to discover how the fifteen years of Ukrainian independence have influenced the formation of national identity in Ukraine and whether self-sufficiency is a characteristic of this identity (through the example of the Ukrainian political elite).

2.1 Research methodology and sample

To implement the research objectives and tasks, the method of discourse/content analysis was used in order to:

- I. utilize the programme documents/public speeches as analysis categories so as not to be limited to words or sentences only;
- II. examine the documents in the context of a broad political, economic and socio-cultural discourse.

Moreover, grounded theory was applied to define the categories for investigation. The purpose of this approach is to construct a 'mini-theory' of the particular phenomenon.⁵ The process entails analysing

⁵ Strauss, A. / Corbin, J.: Basics of Qualitative Research. Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques, Sage, 1990.

the collected empirical information, selecting concepts, generalizing them step by step into the more abstract concepts, and finally forming the theoretical 'case'⁶.

The 2006 sample consisted of the eleven programmes of the election campaign participants: the Party of Regions (PR), the Ukrainian Communist Party (KPU), the 'Our Ukraine' (NU), Yulia Tymoshenko's Block (BYuT), the Socialist Party (SPU), Vitrenko's Block (NO-Vitrenko), the People's Block of Lytvyn (NB-Lytvyn), the NDP Block (NDP), the Kostenko-Pliushch Block (NBKP), Viche (Viche), and the PORA-PRP Block (Pora-PRP). Regarding the re-elections in 2007, the programme documents of eight parties and blocks were examined: the Party of Regions, Yulia Tymoshenko's Block, the 'Our Ukraine – National Self-Defence' Block (NU-NS), the Ukrainian Communist Party, the Lytvyn Block (Block Lytvyna), Vitrenko's Block, the Suprun Block (Block L. Suprun, including the NDP), and the Ukrainian Socialist Party.

2.2 Indicators

A pro-Russian orientation, as outlined in the parties' programmes and presented during the public speeches of their leaders, was determined as *the first indicator* of 'little russianism'. A pro-Western orientation was considered to be the counterpart to the pro-Russian discourse of the election process in 2006, and therefore, the aggregated indicator of the external orientation was given the label 'willingness to be attached'. This reflects the observation that certain political parties or blocks want Ukraine to be politically and economically aligned with a direction-vector (either pro-Russian or pro-Western), and feel that it is necessary for Ukraine to join particular organizations or unions (of states). For example, the pro-Russian vector was evident in the case of the programme that advocated entering the Single Economic Space (SES), joining Russia and forming a new Union of Independent States (consisting of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan, as well as other post-Soviet states); the pro-Western vector was found to exist in the documents of the parties or blocks declaring their desire to have Ukraine join the EU, NATO or the WTO.

The 'willingness to be attached' analytical concept is linked with uncertainty about one's own national identity and thus served as *the second indicator* of 'little russianism' as a form of inferiority complex. Grounded theory methodology was used to define this feature. Therefore, the analysis categories were formed after the research had been conducted. Several groups of the characteristics were defined and their presence was used to prove the lack of a sense of self-sufficiency in Ukraine's national identity. The documents were checked for the following tactics/rhetorical devices:

- I. using the word 'European' at the same meaning level as 'national' in the context of 'Ukrainian', and understanding 'Ukrainian' as a part of 'European';
- II. using 'European' or 'world' standards as guidelines for transforming Ukraine into a 'developed', 'civilized' country;
- III. separating Ukraine into regions (west, centre, south, east) and emphasizing the differences between them;
- IV. focusing either on adopting intellectual and technical capital from other countries or on boosting foreign investment in order to develop the Ukrainian economy with the help of other countries;

⁶ Yadov, Vladimir A.: Social Research Strategy. Describing, Interpreting, Understanding of the Social Reality, Moscow: Dobrosvet, 1999.

- V. suggesting the strategy of allowing Ukrainians to be 'guest workers' (i.e. legally permitting them to work abroad) as a way to improve the economic welfare of Ukrainians;
- VI. focusing on security questions, i.e. on the necessity of making the Ukrainian military more competitive by boosting the enterprises of the Ukrainian military-industrial complex and joining the European collective security system in order to increase Ukraine's security with respect to nearby Russia – in other words, 'protecting the national interests' by attaching to 'stronger world players';
- VII. ignoring the language question or advancing the radical solution of giving Russian secondary official language status in the context of Ukraine's and Russia's long history of co-existence.

3. Research results

After applying discourse analysis and grounded theory methodology, I listed the characteristics of the Ukrainian inferiority complex and then proceeded to apply these to analyse Ukrainian political elites by scrutinizing their parties' programme documents. Further quantification allowed me to compare the degree of the inferiority complex between the different political actors. Thus, each characteristic discovered in the programme documents or public speeches was given a particular weight.

The first indicator of the inferiority complex described in detail in the previous section was measured by the number of instances of 'willingness to be attached' and therefore demonstration of the particular vector of 'attaching' (to either pro-Russian or pro-Western entities). A particular party or block got one point for each expression of willingness to attach to an external formation. This indicator scale had two vectors, directed oppositely. The index of the 'willingness to be attached' vector displayed the discovered orientations, either pro-Russian or pro-Western, to determine the directions; in the event that both directions were present, the difference between the two vector scores was calculated.

The second indicator built upon the seven components listed above:

- I. using 'European' as a Ukrainian quality, describing Ukraine as a 'European' state;
- II. looking to 'European' and world standards as a blueprint for achieving a civilized society;
- III. separating Ukraine into regions and emphasizing the difference between them;
- IV. expressing the intention to develop Ukraine with external help;
- V. offering to give Ukrainians legal opportunities to work abroad;
- VI. calling attention to the defence of national interests, including intentions to join the collective security formation of other states;
- VII. ignoring or addressing the language question.

As revealed by the charts, certain features of the inferiority complex were discovered during the discourse analysis of the parties' programmes. Next, the procedure of quantification enabled me to compare how strongly 'little russianism' was expressed by the different political forces according to two dimensions: the lack of a sense of self-sufficiency and the quality of 'willingness to be attached' (regarding Russia or other countries). For this reason, each feature present was assigned a value of 1, with 0 denoting the absence of the inferiority complex. Other factors also affirmed a particular degree of 'little russianism'. Given below, Chart 1 visualizes the position of the political parties and blocks prior to the

2006 parliamentary elections with respect to the degree of the 'little russianism' inferiority complex exhibited by the Ukrainian political elite. Chart 2 shows how the positions of the main political forces changed between the 2006 elections and the re-elections in 2007.

Chart 1: Ukrainian parties and blocks during the 2006 parliamentary election campaign

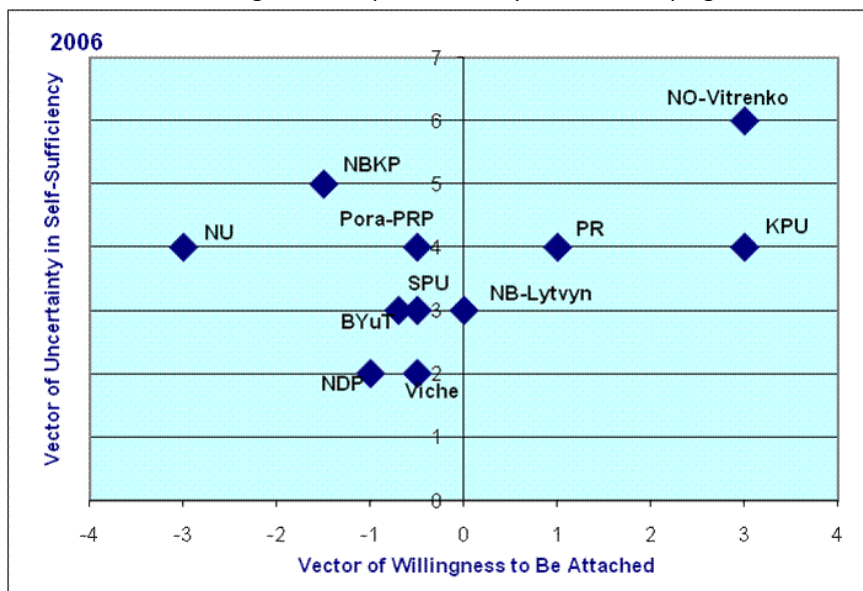
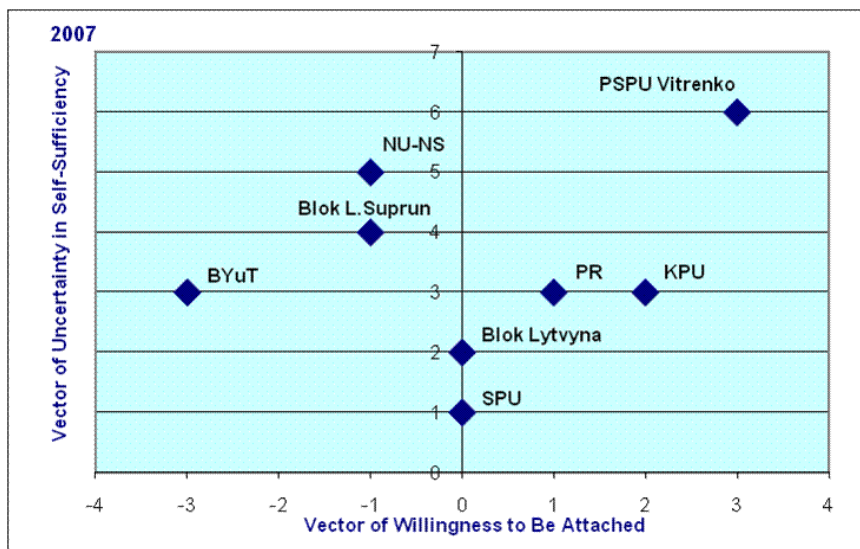


Chart 2: Ukrainian parties and blocks during the 2007 parliamentary re-election campaign



Two conclusions were made after comparing the election and re-election results according to the indicators described above:

- I. The parties that were elected to the parliament reflected the highest level of 'little russianism', while the 'outliers' ('Our Ukraine' and the Ukrainian Communist Party) received fewer votes than the parties that emphasized self-sufficiency (Yulia Tymoshenko's Block and the Party of Regions). It can therefore be assumed that Ukrainian voters were more certain about their national identity and the self-sufficiency of the state than the 'outliers' supposed during their election campaigns. These parties failed to win more votes because they did not reflect the electorate's perception of national self-sufficiency and promoted a different national idea than the majority of voters supported.
- II. The parties that were discovered to be less uncertain in terms of their own national identity according to the analysis and to be the least willing to attach Ukraine to international coalitions or unions (the People's Block of Lytvyn, the NDP Block and Viche) managed to receive only 1%–2% of the votes, which was not enough to get them into the parliament. Therefore, it appears that Ukrainian voters were not yet ready to overcome the 'attaching' vectors and did not share these parties' certainty about national self-sufficiency.

To summarize the above-mentioned findings, the phenomenon of 'little russianism' as an inferiority complex was peculiar to the Ukrainian political elite, but it was not as intensively felt by the electorate as the political actors assumed (as indicated in their programmes).

The results of the re-elections in 2007 showed that some political parties changed their strategies to embrace the 'willingness to be attached' concept. Thus, the BYuT became more pro-Western, unlike the NU-NS, which lost some points for its 'willingness to be attached' but expressed more uncertainty about national self-sufficiency. It is worth mentioning that several parties joined forces with the NU-NS, such as the Pora-PRP and the NBKP. Unexpectedly, this political actor supported by President Victor Yushchenko received only 14% of the votes, which did not exceed the 2006 election results. The People's Block of Lytvyn appeared as one of the most confident about Ukrainian self-sufficiency, and the strategy of its leader, Volodymyr Lytvyn, of being loyal and neutral might explain why this political actor won more votes (the party received more than the required 3%) than the SPU. In addition, the leader of the SPU, Olexandr Moroz, fell in the ratings while serving as Head of Parliament after the 2006 elections. However, his party also lost votes – 6% of electorate flocked to other political parties. The only political force whose percentages did not change was Vitrenko's Block, which appeared to remain both strongly pro-Russian and uncertain about Ukrainian self-sufficiency according to the pre-defined indicators. Regarding the PR, it won nearly the same percentage of votes in the 2007 re-elections, but its strategy towards national self-sufficiency seems to have become one point closer to zero, which suggests the near-absence of an inferiority complex. However, the PR's success at the polls might have been due to the formation of a coalition with the Viche party. Nevertheless, Ukrainian voters did not support Vitrenko's Block, which displayed the highest level of uncertainty and strongest pro-Russian orientation, or Suprun's Block (including the NDP), which increased its vertical dimension and thus became more uncertain about national self-sufficiency.

4. Discussion

The research results regarding 'little russianism' as a form of inferiority complex in Ukraine confirmed the lack of a sense of national self-sufficiency among the country's main political forces and also revealed a 'willingness to be attached' among Ukrainian political leaders. In other words, 'little russianism' was found to be more or less present among all of the analysed political parties and blocks, reflected either in their 'willingness to be attached' through pro-Russian or pro-Western vectors or in their expression of uncertainty about national self-sufficiency.

Thus, it could be argued that because two parties with a fairly low level of uncertainty (the PR and BYuT) gained the majority of votes both in 2006 and 2007, Ukrainians are more confident about national self-sufficiency. The BYuT in particular expressed a very high level of pro-Western 'willingness to be attached', which could be interpreted as an attempt to offer voters a European approach to alleviating political and economic instability in Ukraine. The EURO-2012 football championship in Ukraine and Poland could serve as a prime example of this approach.

To summarize, the outlined research results and conclusions might be an interesting and relevant topic for further analysis, especially from the perspective of applying the indicators of the national inferiority complex to other documents, or, from a broader perspective – to the behaviour of various public opinion leaders or influencers from different social groups and communities.

Program documents of the Ukrainian political parties and blocks available from the web-site of the Central Elections Committee <http://www.cvk.gov.ua/>, accessed March 2009.

Project 'Elections – 2006: Everything About the Elections Campaign', <http://2006.liga.net/>, accessed April 2007.