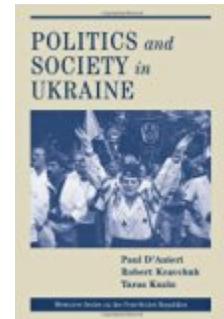


# H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Paul D'Anieri, Robert Kravchuk, Taras Kuzio, eds. *Politics and Society in Ukraine*. Westview Series on the Post-Soviet Studies. Boulder: Westview Press, 1999. xv + 344 pp. \$30.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8133-3538-4.

Reviewed by Katrin Boeckh (Department of History, Institute for Eastern Europe, Munich)  
Published on H-Russia (March, 2002)



“Ukraine will survive, even though times will remain difficult”: Ukraine’s Ten Years of Independence

In the western hemisphere, Ukraine, Europe’s largest state after the Russian Federation, is little known. But in a European context, its political significance should not be underestimated, because instability in a state as large as Ukraine could impact all the transforming states in East Central Europe.

In historical perspective, Ukraine and the Ukrainians long stood in the shadow of Russia: beginning with the treaty of Pereiaslav in 1654, the right bank Cossack state was ruled by the Russians tsars, while Galicia came to the Habsburgs after the first partition of Poland in 1772. Within the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic was founded in 1922. In the twentieth century, several attempts to establish an independent Ukrainian state failed. The governments of 1918 to 1920 remained mere episodes, and the Ukrainian “state” proclaimed in Lviv in 1941 shortly after Hitler’s German attacked the Soviet Union, lasted only a few days. During the German occupation “Reichskommissariat Ukraine” was established, but it had nothing to do with a Ukrainian national state, and it was devastated, destroyed, and plundered by the German government. The existing Ukrainian borders go back to the end of World War II, when the Soviet Union annexed Eastern Galicia and Carpatho-Ukraine. The Crimea was a “present” from Khrushchev to Kiev in 1954.

With the communist hardliner Shcherbits’kyi heading the Ukrainian government, Gorbachev’s reforms were resisted by Kiev for a long time. Meanwhile the political opposition and the Ukrainian movement for political independence gained more and more supporters.

Separation from the Soviet Union was reached peacefully. In 1991 an overwhelming majority of voters in all Ukrainian regions endorsed the independence of Ukraine proclaimed that same year. Since that time, several attempts have been made to restructure Ukraine internally, but the results have been meager, and the enthusiasm of the first months has faded away. Nevertheless, in 1996 the Ukrainian constitution was adopted, and in that same year a new currency was introduced. Although the transformation of the Ukrainian economy and the transition to civil society are still on-going, the process of democratization cannot be interrupted.

For Paul D’Anieri (University of Kansas), Robert Kravchuk (University of Connecticut), and Taras Kuzio (University of North London), this is the right moment to present an overview of the political processes, structures, leading forces, and tendencies in Ukraine. The authors are familiar with the characteristics of the land and its people. In this joint project, their various perspectives are reflected in the varied of topics covered in the book. Apart from their personal experiences, they have used Ukrainian newspapers and nearly exclusively English-language articles appearing within the last decade. The authors employ no single theory of transition, but borrow from several theoretical approaches. Their goal is to interpret Ukrainian politics according to Western social-science paradigms to show that Ukraine is not unique, but similar to other transformations. In their opinion, many of the existing problems “may be traced to a series of policy choices that have been conditioned by many...factors but that are in no sense inevitable or irreversible” (p. 8). Ukraine’s last ten years are not presented chronologically, but topically. Eight major chapters focus on the emergence of independent Ukraine, the

national identity of her inhabitants, the role of religion in public life, the “weak state,” politics and civil society, economic reforms, foreign policy, and defense policy. A concluding chapter sketches prospects for the twenty-first century.

For the authors, independent Ukraine has to undergo a “quadruple transition”: democratization, economic transformation, as well as the construction of a Ukrainian state, and of a Ukrainian nation. The latter seems to be of utmost importance, as a modern state demands a stable nation. But in Ukraine the development of the nation has not been completed, for in the eyes of many observers, Ukraine inherited from the former Soviet Union the features of a “quasi-state” and of a “quasi-nation.” Because of its historical background, a Ukrainian consciousness is much more developed in western than in eastern Ukraine. Due to russification, intermarriage, and migration during Soviet times, about twenty percent of the population declare Russian their nationality. But despite the need to foster Ukrainian patriotism, the Ukrainian governments were wise enough not to insist on Ukrainian as the state language, or on one of the Ukrainian churches as the single state church. This would have caused more turmoil than it might have prevented. At this point the reader might ask, however, whether “nation building” in reality plays the role political analysts demand, and incidentally, when one can declare that a nation has been “built”?

The new political system in Ukraine has not fulfilled the hopes and expectation of many Ukrainians. The chapter on “Ukraine’s weak state” explains very clearly the weaknesses of the political system. The “governance crisis” is certainly the most important question discussed in the volume, linking as it does several levels of the administrative apparatus, the Soviet legacy, and the confrontation between new economic liberty and the old state-planned economy. The chapter concludes realistically without much optimism. The effective implementation of economic reforms will still require time, and both the restructuring of the public administration and the reform of the government itself are necessary prerequisites. In this context, the authors discuss the unitary structure of the state, that is the subordination of all lower governmental levels (*oblasts*, cities, rural districts, *raions*) to the central government. As Kiev has acted in many cases in its own interests, neglecting the fiscal and other needs of the regional and local Radas, in the future further conflicts between the provinces and the government might arise. One is led also to ask, whether a more federally-based constitution could more effectively stim-

ulate forces for progress and prosperity in the country than does the existing centralized model. But the fear that the country could fragment into regional divisions remains deeply rooted.

Most Ukrainians find the political situation, and the rate of economic progress deplorable, although the Ukrainian public did not support reformist politicians, nor did the government take comprehensive and wide-ranging measures against the desperate situation. The destruction of the economic network of the Soviet Union led to industrial collapse in all of its former regions. Post-Soviet Ukraine did not undertake shock therapy, but decided on a slow gradual transformation, which shows only slight success. Large-scale privatization, the backbone of the transformation, is progressing very cautiously, hindered by a parliamentary moratorium in 1994-1995. Corruption, the lack of domestic capital, and a weak infrastructure are only a few economic realities which represent serious obstacles to foreign investors. No wonder that the shadow economy is growing, for a high percentage of the well-trained and skilled workers do not receive regular wages, and the unemployment rate is very high. Further reforms are urgently needed to fill the institutional vacuum and to set up regulations for the new economy. Until then, the country will have to muddle through on foreign loans.

The most successful chapter in Ukraine’s young history is its foreign policy which today has achieved the status of an “intermediate position between East and West” for Ukraine. The most important issue, the establishment of peaceful relations with Russia, has been resolved, even after the struggle for the Black Sea Fleet was decided in Ukraine’s favor, The West, on the other hand, has strengthened its relationship to Kiev, including Ukraine in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program. Ukraine faces further challenges, deciding between renewed commitments to Russia, closer ties to NATO against Russian interests, or a neutral, politically difficult and indifferent “non-bloc status” as a “buffer” between Russia and NATO. Although it is too early to discuss actual membership in the EU, this step would not seriously affect Russia, as it bears no military connotations.

As an overall evaluation, it can be stated that the reader interested in the present state of Ukraine gets a clear impression of the most crucial and vital questions in contemporary Ukrainian politics. From a historical point of view, not much can be criticized. In a few cases, the application of modern terminology leads to misunderstanding and to an odd depiction of historical events.

For example, the Zaporozhian Cossacks were not “ethnically cleansed” by Catherine II (p. 17), even if their land was destroyed and many were killed by Russian soldiers. The expression “nation building” seems too strong for Ukrainians in the nineteenth century, where a Ukrainian state was far from being realized: Such language (the Ukrainian “nation building project in Trans-Carpathia,” p. 11; “nation building” in Galicia and Bukovina in the nineteenth century, p. 12) may be misleading. The statement that the Orthodox Church in Ukraine had fared worse than the Catholic Church under Soviet rule (p. 71), is not entirely true, for the Orthodox Church engaged in its own persecutions of the Uniates, and was never forced to live underground as was the Uniate Church. The Russian Orthodox Church even increased the number of its parishes and members in Galicia when the Uniate Church was officially banned in 1946 by Stalin.

Apart from some minor problems, the book provides basic information organized in a very clear manner, illustrated with tables, figures, maps, and photographs. It becomes evident that on its way “back to Europe” not all of Ukraine’s problems can be regarded and excused as “Soviet legacy.” In many respects, Ukraine’s transformation does not differ from other post-socialist countries. But difficulties arise from traditional differences between East and West Ukraine, not yet counterbalanced by the new governments. Others exist between Russia-oriented and national Ukrainians, and these are not caused by inept politicians. Although the authors of this book seem quite sympathetic to the Ukrainian national cause, they cautiously criticize evident defects, naming the causes and responsible officials, while avoiding general accusations. The book is warmly recommended for providing a deeper knowledge of present-day Ukraine, a country that will survive, even in difficult times (p. 270).

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-russia>

**Citation:** Katrin Boeckh. Review of D’Anieri, Paul; Kravchuk, Robert; Kuzio, Taras, eds., *Politics and Society in Ukraine*. H-Russia, H-Net Reviews. March, 2002.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=6074>

Copyright © 2002 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu).