

# A b s t r a c t s

## **Geometry of the Nation Ukraine's Past and Present**

**Emil Souleimanov**

**Unexpected Alliances**

**Karabakh, Gaza and the Consequences**

The security situation in Northwest Asia is undergoing dynamic change. The latest Karabakh war and the attack on Israel carried out by Hamas are both an expression and consequence of this. The South Caucasus and the Levant seem far apart, but are part of the same security nexus. Against all logic of cultural affinity, Azerbaijan and Israel have been working closely together for a long time, while Iran has become an important partner for Armenia. Ankara is Baku's main ally, but after a phase of rapprochement, Turkey is once again positioning itself against Israel. Russia has given up its role as Armenia's protector, downgraded its relations with Israel, and is working ever more closely with Iran in the name of the struggle against the United States. The conflict between Azerbaijan and Iran has the potential to escalate.

**Nikolay Mitrokhin**

**The War in Ukraine 2023**

**Assessment of a Horrible Year**

In 2023, the Ukrainians wanted to force the Russian aggressor from their country with a successful counteroffensive. They failed: The liberation of the south-east and the Crimea lies in the distant future. There is a lack of men and matériel. The war goes on. The Ukrainian leadership will have to conduct a war of defence. It faces the task of raising the production of armaments, motivating able-bodied men to serve in the army, and ensuring the Western support.

**Christine Engel**

**The Joke as Barometer of the People's Mood**

**Putin, the War and the Situation in Russia**

Political jokes are an indicator of society's mood within a country. In Russia, this genre reacts briskly and sarcastically to political developments, be it the 2020 constitutional referendum, Western sanctions, or the partial mobilization for the war against Ukraine. The figure of Vladimir Putin looms over everything. In jokes, he cuts a poor image: he is seen as aloof and mendacious, cynical and cold, and his efforts to communicate with the population lead to nothing.

**Nikolay Mitrokhin****Russia's War against Ukraine****Weekly Reports from the Winter of 2023/2024**

Ukraine's counteroffensive failed. Russia has launched attacks on all of the important sectors of the front. Ukraine is building up its defensive positions. On the ground, the battle of attrition continues, with both sides losing men and matériel without any prospect of substantial success. Russia and Ukraine want to exhaust their opponent in the air war in terms of morale and matériel. The arms race for drones and missiles is in full swing. Without an increase in Western support, Ukraine will lose it.

**Gerhard Simon****Go West!****Stages of Ukraine's Special Path**

The Ukrainian political nation was significantly shaped by the repression in the Russian Empire. The denial of a cultural and political identity presented Ukrainians with the alternative of "all or nothing". The Cossack heritage provided inspiration, but an insufficient institutional basis for the formation of a nation. The Soviet period was ambivalent: on the one hand, all Ukrainians were united in Soviet Ukraine; on the other, millions of Ukrainians were killed in the Holodomor or shot. Soviet Ukraine played a central role in the dissolution of the Soviet Union. But this liberation from the empire remains incomplete. Russia is trying to use war to achieve the de-Ukrainianization of Ukraine. But Ukraine's path to the West is irreversible.

**Ulrich Schmid****Postcolonialism without End?****Ukraine as a Test Case for Theoretical Alternatives**

The concept of postcolonialism has dominated Ukrainians' description of themselves since the annexation of Crimea. It has also become established in foreign descriptions of Ukraine. Russia is perceived not only as an aggressor, but also as a colonial power. Assessments of Russian culture are correspondingly harsh. It is seen as an instrument of imperial power. "Decolonization" has become a battle slogan. Postcolonial theories can indeed contribute to an understanding of Russian-Ukrainian relations. However, other theoretical approaches lead to more differentiated insights in many aspects and are better suited to describing the agency of Ukrainian political, social, and cultural actors.

**Stephan Rindlisbacher**  
**The Soviet Legacy**  
**Territories, Borders, and Their Relevance for Today**

When the Bolsheviks organized the administration of the Soviet state a hundred years ago, they did so primarily according to national-ethnographic principles. They deviated from this as soon as they saw the “interests of the Union” at risk. In territorial revisions between the Union republics after Stalin’s death, economic issues were crucial. Ideological constructs such as “friendship of peoples” or “gifts” between the Union republics were not categories in Soviet spatial thinking. Today, economic aspects and access to water play an important role in territorial conflicts and wars in the post-Soviet space. This applies to Crimea, the border war between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, and the wars in the South Caucasus.

**Bozhena Kozakevych**  
**Modernization and Sovietization**  
**Soviet Power and the Jews in Berdychiv**

Early Soviet nationality policy promoted the language and culture of the peoples who had been oppressed in the Russian Empire. The Bolsheviks wanted to win their loyalty and consolidate their own power. Jews also benefited from this policy. Yiddish was promoted, and schools and cultural institutions were established. Religious Jews, however, came under increasing pressure. This is shown in the case of Berdychiv, the prototype of a Jewish shtetl in central Ukraine. The Sovietization of life was more difficult to implement in a small town with deeply evolved structures than in a fast-paced big city. However, confronted by the development of a secular, proletarian-Jewish culture, social change, and anti-religious politics, centuries of Jewish tradition began to erode over the course of the 1920s.

**Claudia Dathe**  
**Futurism in Ukraine**  
**Departure, Upheaval, Termination**

Ukrainian Futurism flourished after the First World War. Authors such as Mykhail' Semenko, Mykola Khvyli'ovyi, and Maik Yohansen broke with tradition, knocked the national poet Shevchenko off his pedestal, and experimented with language, forms, and genres. In the artists' association VAPLITE, they wrestled with the orientation of Ukrainian literature. Some were concerned with aesthetic renewal, others with the development of proletarian art. The language question was of particular importance. Ukrainian was to become the language of emancipation and internationalism. Starting at the end of the 1920s, the communist regime increasingly intervened in cultural life, and in 1932, all independent literary associations were dissolved. Khvyli'ovyi evaded repression by committing suicide. Semenko and Johansen were arrested in 1937 and shot along with hundreds of members of the Ukrainian intelligentsia. The Ukrainian avant-garde fell into oblivion.

**Andrii Portnov**  
**Ukrainian Studies at the Viadrina**  
**Opportunities and Challenges**

The European University Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder, is expanding its historical Ukrainian studies. The former “Center for Interdisciplinary Polish Studies” has become the “Viadrina Center of Polish and Ukrainian Studies”. Andrii Portnov, who holds the Chair of Entangled History of Ukraine, modifies the classic question “What does it mean to study history and to what end?” He warns against the politically motivated reductionism of post-colonial historiography and against falling back on a schematic national history. The complexities of Ukrainian history can only be studied and explained as a history of entanglements. Transnational, comparative history requires knowledge of local material. The development of Ukrainian Studies does not mean negating research on Poland or Russia.

**Christian Thomas**  
**Crying and Resistance**  
**Taras Shevchenko and Ukraine: A Rapprochement**

Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) is the Ukrainian national poet par excellence. He is both a romantic and a realist. With his poetry, he made a fundamental contribution to Ukrainian nation building, but also contributed a chapter to the social history of Tsarist Russia. Anyone who wants to read him in German will run up against obstacles. His prose and diaries are not available, much of his poetry exists only in old translations by communist cultural functionaries, such as Alfred Kurella and Erich Weinert. Yet Shevchenko has something to tell us: about the relationship between the imperial centre and the periphery, autocracy and justice, repression and freedom. A new translation of Shevchenko’s work should be the first step in rediscovering the classic. And then read, starting with the lesson on Curiosity, from the chapter Crossing Borders.

**Mikhail Ryklin**  
**Genius and Fool**  
**Brodsky’s Poem “On the Independence of Ukraine”**

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and Ukraine gained the independence it had longed for since the 19th century, an anti-Soviet Russian poet was enraged in a manner that nobody would have ever expected. Joseph Brodsky wrote a poem full of invective that made a comeback in 2014.

**Evgenii Breido**  
**Not a Diatribe**  
**Joseph Brodsky’s “On the Independence of Ukraine”**

Joseph Brodsky’s much-maligned verses “On the Independence of Ukraine” (1991) are read by his critics as a lyrical poem. In it, there is a lyrical ego speaking, and this is supposed to represent the author’s voice. Brodsky, they argue, is personally insulting Ukraine. This view is untenable. Rather, Brodsky is arranging several voices into a small dramatic work in verse. In the poem, he is putting on display precisely and straightforwardly the views of the Russian public at the time.