

Foreword

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Ever since its incorporation as a modern state, Ukraine's wiggling borders have fluctuated with the changing politics of Eastern Europe. Territories were turned into states, smaller countries were integrated into bigger ones, border regions were added and lost. Famously, Transcarpathia changed its political status during the twentieth century no less than seventeen times. This disturbing historical experience has given rise to the following well-known anecdote:

A visitor, encountering one of the oldest local inhabitants, asks about his life. The reply: "I was born in Austria-Hungary, I went to school in Czechoslovakia, I did my army service in Horthy's Hungary, followed by a spell in prison in the USSR. Now I am ending my days in independent Ukraine." The visitor expresses surprise at how much of the world the old man has seen. "But no!," he responds, "I've never left this village!"¹

As this example shows, states moved their borders over places, and places suffered more often than not from these changes in statehood.² This process has still not come to an end. Notably, Ukraine recently suffered a military aggression that led to the annexation of Crimea by Russia and the loss of administrative control over much of the Donbas. The death toll so far has exceeded 13,000. This change of border has also affected the aggressor. After the dramatic events of 2014, Russia does not possess an internationally recognized border on its Black Sea coast. This has led to interesting solutions on Google and Apple maps: for Russian users, Crimea is shown as part of the Russian Federation; for Ukrainians, it is still a part of Ukraine. For users elsewhere in the world, there is a dotted line between the peninsula and the Ukrainian mainland.

And Crimea is not the only contested territory within the Russian orbit: the Kremlin is a military entrepreneur elsewhere in the former Soviet space. The *de facto* state of South Ossetia is able to exist only thanks to Moscow's ongoing military and financial efforts. Moreover, this isolated new polity implies a slow process of "borderization." What had been an "administrative fiction" on the ground is now a physical barrier that has created closed spaces for people and goods.³ It seems likely that the Kremlin envisages a "reunification" of its own North Ossetian republic with South Ossetia and the eventual integration of this territory into the Russian Federation.

This notion of "borderization" may also be applied to the history of Ukrainian statehood. The contributions in this volume show how difficult the construction of state borders has been in the Ukrainian case. Many factors have influenced the end result, which has often been imposed rather than negotiated. Following Georg Jellinek's seminal definition of statehood, we can discern several factors that influence "borderization." Jellinek considered a state to be viable if it possessed a state territory, a state people, and state power. The state territory is mainly the result of wars, politics, and history or sometimes simply inertia, whereas a state people is the product of ethnic, linguistic, and religious discourses. State power relies on international recognition and the diplomatic decisions of more powerful states.

STATE TERRITORY: WAR, HISTORY, AND INERTIA

The principal factor in the painful border-defining process in and around Ukraine has been war, most prominently the First World War. The demise of the German Kaiserreich and the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires left a power vacuum that was eagerly exploited by national movements. Within this development, a key problem was the rivalry between simultaneous state projects. However, most of these proved to be short-lived: national republics in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine collapsed in the face of military intervention by the Red Army. Poland would have met the same fate had it not been for the "miracle on the Vistula" in August 1920 that saw Józef Piłsudski's forces, following his brief Kyiv expedition, repulse a Soviet counteroffensive. Had Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky succeeded in capturing Warsaw, Poland would have become a client state of the Bolsheviks during the interwar years.

Another important facilitator of "borderization" besides war is the politics of history. Most prominently, Vladimir Putin resorted to historical arguments for the annexation of Crimea, highlighting that Russia was

baptized there and had heroically defended itself there, during both the Crimean War and the Second World War. Similar narrative approaches can be found in the establishment of the Ukrainian borders; throughout the Ukrainian nationalist historiography, Poland and Russia have been characterized as Ukraine's main enemies. In the traditional martyrological narrative, Ukrainian lands must be freed from the Polish and Russian yoke.

A final important source of "borderization" is inertia. Borders, having once been drawn and having existed for a certain amount of time, tend to persist. The most prominent instance of this phenomenon is the continuity of the borders of the former Soviet republics that emerged as independent states in 1991. Another example is the so-called Curzon Line, which was proposed after the First World War but did not come into effect until after 1945, when the Polish-Soviet border needed to be defined.⁴

STATE PEOPLE: ETHNICITY, LANGUAGE, RELIGION

When talking about state territories, Jellinek distinguishes between "dominium" and "imperium." "Dominium" refers to the state's possessions, whereas "imperium" refers to the state's rule over its people. For Jellinek, imperium clearly prevails, because only individuals can become subjects of state power.⁵ In his analysis of the state people, Jellinek omits all cultural factors, convinced as he is that neither "tribal community" nor culture (he explicitly discusses language and religion) can define a nation.⁶ From his perspective, all that matters is the legal status of the citizens. However, the definition of "nation" in the newly emerging states in Central and Eastern Europe often encompassed ethnic, linguistic, or religious criteria. Ideally, in the creation of a nation, these three elements coincided. In the Polish case this meant the unity of all people of Polish descent who spoke the Polish language and adhered to Roman Catholicism. Indeed, the stereotype of the "*Polak-katolik*" had already been coined by the nineteenth century.⁷ In 1927 the Polish politician Roman Dmowski wrote in his influential publication *The Church, the Nation, and the State*: "Catholicism is not an appendage to Polishness, coloring it in some way. It is, rather, inherent to its being, being seen as constituting its very essence. To attempt to dissociate Catholicism from Polishness, and to separate the nation from its religion and the Church, is to destroy the very essence of the Polish nation."⁸

However, it was clear to the national leadership that such an exclusive definition of the Polish nation was not viable for the new state. The Polish constitution, implemented in March 1921, for example, referenced a "Polish people" without providing any detailed definition. Article 114

privileged the Roman Catholic Church as the “confession of the overwhelming majority of the people”; however, Article 113 guaranteed freedom of religion.

In Ukraine, a conservative position like that of Dmowski was hardly possible. Even a Ukrainian ethnicity was difficult to define. Under the last tsars, the Ukrainian language had been banned for forty years, until 1905, and several churches with an Orthodox rite competed for the position of “national religion.” These difficulties were evident in the First Universal of the Central Rada, tabled in June 1917. That founding document of the Ukrainian People’s Republic was addressed to the “Ukrainian People,” defined ambiguously as a “people of farmers and workers.” The author of that Universal, Volodymyr Vynnychenko, stated repeatedly that it was impossible “to consider the national question outside of the sphere of social questions.”⁹ Tragically for him and his country, Vynnychenko failed to account for Russian Bolsheviks’ subsequent efforts to monopolize the ideology of nationalities.¹⁰

Even more problematic was the situation in the northwestern Belarusian borderlands, where ethnic categories could never have taken hold. Ethnographic research from around 1900 shows that individuals in this region variously identified themselves as “Russians,” “Catholics,” “Lithuanians,” or – most prominently – simply as “locals” (*tutejszye*).¹¹ Given these vaguely defined criteria, it would have been extremely difficult to establish a border along ethnic lines.

Two ethnic arguments can be discerned as a basis for territorial claims. First, when a territory is disputed, the presence of a majority ethnic population living on it often serves as justification for its annexation. Second, when the population there constitutes only a minority – as was the case with the Polish aristocracy (*szlachta*) in Ukraine – territorial claims are typically cast as a “civilizing mission” to enlighten the rural population. However, this second argument is ultimately self-defeating: if the “civilizing mission” succeeds, those thereby civilized are then entitled to national self-determination and, eventually, their own nation-state at the expense of the “civilizing” power.

STATE POWER: INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION AND DIPLOMACY

Jellinek’s third constituent element of the state, the possession of state power, also has a direct effect on the creation of borders. In the Ukrainian case, state power depended on various sponsors. In the closing years and

immediate aftermath of the First World War, Imperial Germany and later Soviet Russia promoted the cause of Ukrainian statehood – in both cases for quite self-interested reasons. The weakness of state power in Ukraine at this time can be inferred from the first Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in February 1918, between the Central Powers and the Ukrainian People's Republic. In exchange for what was a mere semblance of independent statehood, Ukraine was obliged to supply Germany and Austria-Hungary with grain and other foodstuffs.

Poland fared better, at least in the interwar years, having been the only Central European nation explicitly mentioned in US President Woodrow Wilson's famous Fourteen Points. Indeed, the support of the United States would be crucial for the resuscitation of an independent Poland at the Paris Peace Conference, held at Versailles in 1919–20. Wilson's Point Thirteen stated: "An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant."¹² The territorial definition of the new Polish state was, of course, highly ambiguous. What did "indisputably Polish populations" mean? Dmowski, who led the Polish delegation at Versailles, interpreted this notion broadly, proposing that the borders of the new Polish state be drawn up largely according to the 1772 delineation of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Dmowski also proposed that Poland include parts of Silesia (Oppeln, Gleiwitz, and Těšín), as well as vast swathes of Lithuanian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian territory in the east.¹³ The debates over the borders of the new Polish state demonstrate how difficult it was going to be to implement Wilson's guiding principle of self-determination, especially with regard to Point Ten, which called for the division of Austria-Hungary into sovereign nation-states: "The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development."¹⁴ The Ukrainian question was especially problematic in light of this abstract provision. What should be the destiny of Galicia and its capital, Lviv? The Poles referred to this territory as "Eastern Galicia" and to its principal city as Lwów.

A similar problem arose with the Carpathian Rus, which according to the Hungarians had for centuries been part of "Upper Hungary" (*Felvidék*). This territory, which could have become either an autonomous Rusyn state or part of a united Ukraine, was eventually folded into the new nation of Czechoslovakia. The fledgling Czech government in Prague was eager to establish its rule in the provincial town of Ungvár/Uzhhorod, and to that

end built there a new administrative district in the new Czech national style of architecture, known as rondo-cubism. Transcarpathia's peoples thus found themselves at the bottom of the informal hierarchy of ethnicities that defined interwar Czechoslovakia: the Czechs dominated, the Slovaks had been reduced to a "younger branch" of the "Czechoslovak nation," and the Rusyns – like the Germans – were to be assimilated.

Around twenty years later, this ambitious state-building project had failed. After the Munich settlement of September 1938, the Czechoslovak state found itself in a hopeless position, prompting the resignation of President Edvard Beneš. In early 1939, Beneš devised a highly secret plan whose intent was to "push the republic eastward." He was even prepared to offer Czechoslovakia's Transcarpathian territories to Joseph Stalin in exchange for Soviet military assistance. This sacrifice turned out to be in vain. After the war, Stalin simply took what had been offered to him before it started.¹⁵

Clearly, then, the fate of Central and Eastern European states and their borders did not so much depend on the actions of their governments. Of greater import were the decisions of the "Big Three," Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin, reached at the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam conferences of 1943–45. Of crucial importance during these talks was the concept of "spheres of influence," which all convening parties accepted as a guiding principle.¹⁶ Famously, Churchill came to a quick agreement with the Soviet dictator during his visit to Moscow in October 1944. This is how Churchill described the incident in his memoirs:

Let us settle about our affairs in the Balkans. Your armies are in Rumania and Bulgaria. We have interests, agents, and missions there. Don't let us get at cross-purposes in small ways. So far as Britain and Russia are concerned, how would it do for you to have ninety percent predominance in Rumania, for us to have ninety percent of the say in Greece, and go fifty-fifty about Yugoslavia?" While this was being translated, I wrote out on a half-sheet of paper:

Rumania: Russia 90% the others 10%

Greece: Great Britain (in accord with U.S.A.) 90% Russia 10%

Yugoslavia: 50-50%

Hungary: 50-50%

Bulgaria: Russia 75% the others 25%

I pushed this across to Stalin, who by then had heard the translation. There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it and passed it back to us. It was all settled in no more time than it takes to set down.¹⁷

Indeed, the Russian President Vladimir Putin has recently called for a return to such ways of managing the geopolitical global order, assigning a decisive historical role to the victorious Allied powers, which continue to sit as the permanent members on the UN Security Council.¹⁸ From an Eastern European perspective, such a proposal amounts to a step back into an imperial past when the leaders of Great Powers pored over maps and drew borders without interference. For many Poles, “Yalta” is still synonymous with the treachery of the Western powers, which had deprived inter-war Poland of its eastern provinces and now condemned Poland to Soviet satellite status. Similarly, countries like Ukraine and Georgia fear a “new Yalta” that might leave them at the mercy of a Russian great power play.

NOTES

- 1 Judy Batt, “Transcarpathia: Peripheral Region at the ‘Centre of Europe,’” *Regional and Federal Studies* 12 (2002): 155–77.
- 2 Leslie Waters, *Borders on the Move: Territorial Change and Forced Migration in the Hungarian–Slovak Borderlands, 1938–1948* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020).
- 3 Edward Boyle, “Borderization in Georgia: Sovereignty Materialized,” *Eurasia Border Review* 7 (2016): 1–18.
- 4 On the contrary, the process of international recognition and the solidifying of the Polish-Ukrainian border as had been agreed in the aftermath of the Second World War required a significant intellectual effort, championed primarily on the pages of Polish anti-communist opposition and émigré periodicals such as *Kultura*, edited by Jerzy Giedroyc. See Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus: 1569–1999* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 217–31; Khrystyna Chushak, *Nemaie Vil’noi Pol’shchi bez Vil’noi Ukraïny: Ukraïna u Politychnii Dumtsi Pol’s’koi Opozytsii* (1976–89) (Lviv: PAIS, 2011); Andrzej Turkowski, “Polish Intelligentsia Totems in Elites’ Struggles for Legitimization: The Case of Jerzy Giedroyc and Poland’s Eastern Policy,” *East European Politics and Societies* 33, no. 1 (2019): 66–88.
- 5 Georg Jellinek, *Allgemeine Staatslehre* (Berlin: O. Häring, 1905), 386, 391.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 113.
- 7 Brian Porter-Szűcs, “The Birth of the Polak-katolik,” *Sprawy narodościowe. Seria nowa* 49 (2017): 1–12.
- 8 Roman Dmowski, *Kościół, naród i państwo* (Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1993), 22.
- 9 Volodymyr Vynnychenko, *Vidrodzhennia natsii*, 3 vols. (Kyiv and Vienna: Dzvyn, 1920), 3:327.

- 10 Ulrich Schmid, “Volodymyr Vynnyčenko as Diarist, Historian and Writer: Literary Narratives of the ‘Ukrainian Revolution,’” *Studi Slavistici* 15 (2018): 111–24.
- 11 Aleksej Dzermant, “Metafizika ‘tutejšesti,’” *Perekrestki. Zhurnal Issledovaniia Vostochnoevropskogo Pogranich’ia* 1 (2018): 130–49.
- 12 Transcript of President Woodrow Wilson’s 14 Points (1918). <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=62&page=transcript>.
- 13 However, during the peace talks in Riga (1921), the Polish delegation found itself in a dilemma between the construction of a homogenous nation-state and extensive territorial claims that would create new national minorities. Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*, 64.
- 14 Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations*.
- 15 Milan Hauner, “‘We Must Push Eastwards!’ The Challenges and Dilemmas of President Beneš after Munich,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 44 (2009): 628–9.
- 16 Susanna Hast, *Spheres of Influence in International Relations: History, Theory, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2014), 114–16.
- 17 Winston Churchill, *The Second World War* (New York: Rosetta Books, 2010), 227.
- 18 Vladimir Putin, “The Real Lessons of the 75th Anniversary of World War II,” *The National Interest*, 18 June 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/vladimir-putin-real-lessons-75th-anniversary-world-war-ii-162982>