

Vladimir Putin

On the
Historical
Unity of
Russians
and
Ukrainians

Vladimir Putin

On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians

**Essay by President Putin, Including His Other
Statements and Speeches on the Same Theme**

e-artnow, 2022

Contact: info@e-artnow.org

EAN 4066338128058

Table of Content

[On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians](#)

[Putin Commentaries About the Essay “On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”](#)

[The World Order](#)

[Address by the President of the Russian Federation, February 21, 2022](#)

[Address by the President of the Russian Federation, September 21, 2022](#)

On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians¹

[Table of Contents](#)

During the recent Direct Line, when I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people - a single whole. These words were not driven by some short-term considerations or prompted by the current political context. It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe. I therefore feel it necessary to explain my position in detail and share my assessments of today's situation.

First of all, I would like to emphasize that the wall that has emerged in recent years between Russia and Ukraine, between the parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space, to my mind is our great common misfortune and tragedy. These are, first and foremost, the consequences of our own mistakes made at different periods of time. But these are also the result of deliberate efforts by those forces that have always sought to undermine our unity. The formula they apply has been known from time immemorial - divide and rule. There is nothing new here. Hence the attempts to play on the "national question" and sow discord among people, the overarching goal being to divide and then to pit the parts of a single people against one another.

To have a better understanding of the present and look into the future, we need to turn to history. Certainly, it is

impossible to cover in this article all the developments that have taken place over more than a thousand years. But I will focus on the key, pivotal moments that are important for us to remember, both in Russia and Ukraine.

Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe. Slavic and other tribes across the vast territory – from Ladoga, Novgorod, and Pskov to Kiev and Chernigov – were bound together by one language (which we now refer to as Old Russian), economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty, and – after the baptism of Rus – the Orthodox faith. The spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir, who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev, still largely determines our affinity today.

The throne of Kiev held a dominant position in Ancient Rus. This had been the custom since the late 9th century. The Tale of Bygone Years captured for posterity the words of Oleg the Prophet about Kiev, "Let it be the mother of all Russian cities."

Later, like other European states of that time, Ancient Rus faced a decline of central rule and fragmentation. At the same time, both the nobility and the common people perceived Rus as a common territory, as their homeland.

The fragmentation intensified after Batu Khan's devastating invasion, which ravaged many cities, including Kiev. The northeastern part of Rus fell under the control of the Golden Horde but retained limited sovereignty. The southern and western Russian lands largely became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which – most significantly –

was referred to in historical records as the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Russia.

Members of the princely and "boyar" clans would change service from one prince to another, feuding with each other but also making friendships and alliances. Voivode Bobrok of Volyn and the sons of Grand Duke of Lithuania Algirdas - Andrey of Polotsk and Dmitry of Bryansk - fought next to Grand Duke Dmitry Ivanovich of Moscow on the Kulikovo field. At the same time, Grand Duke of Lithuania Jogaila - son of the Princess of Tver - led his troops to join with Mamai. These are all pages of our shared history, reflecting its complex and multi-dimensional nature.

Most importantly, people both in the western and eastern Russian lands spoke the same language. Their faith was Orthodox. Up to the middle of the 15th century, the unified church government remained in place.

At a new stage of historical development, both Lithuanian Rus and Moscow Rus could have become the points of attraction and consolidation of the territories of Ancient Rus. It so happened that Moscow became the center of reunification, continuing the tradition of ancient Russian statehood. Moscow princes - the descendants of Prince Alexander Nevsky - cast off the foreign yoke and began gathering the Russian lands.

In the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, other processes were unfolding. In the 14th century, Lithuania's ruling elite converted to Catholicism. In the 16th century, it signed the Union of Lublin with the Kingdom of Poland to form the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The Polish Catholic nobility received considerable land holdings and privileges

in the territory of Rus. In accordance with the 1596 Union of Brest, part of the western Russian Orthodox clergy submitted to the authority of the Pope. The process of Polonization and Latinization began, ousting Orthodoxy.

As a consequence, in the 16–17th centuries, the liberation movement of the Orthodox population was gaining strength in the Dnieper region. The events during the times of Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky became a turning point. His supporters struggled for autonomy from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In its 1649 appeal to the king of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Zaporizhian Host demanded that the rights of the Russian Orthodox population be respected, that the voivode of Kiev be Russian and of Greek faith, and that the persecution of the churches of God be stopped. But the Cossacks were not heard.

Bohdan Khmelnytsky then made appeals to Moscow, which were considered by the Zemsky Sobor. On 1 October 1653, members of the supreme representative body of the Russian state decided to support their brothers in faith and take them under patronage. In January 1654, the Pereyaslav Council confirmed that decision. Subsequently, the ambassadors of Bohdan Khmelnytsky and Moscow visited dozens of cities, including Kiev, whose populations swore allegiance to the Russian tsar. Incidentally, nothing of the kind happened at the conclusion of the Union of Lublin.

In a letter to Moscow in 1654, Bohdan Khmelnytsky thanked Tsar Aleksey Mikhaylovich for taking "the whole Zaporizhian Host and the whole Russian Orthodox world under the strong and high hand of the Tsar". It means that,

in their appeals to both the Polish king and the Russian tsar, the Cossacks referred to and defined themselves as Russian Orthodox people.

Over the course of the protracted war between the Russian state and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, some of the hetmans, successors of Bohdan Khmelnytsky, would "detach themselves" from Moscow or seek support from Sweden, Poland, or Turkey. But, again, for the people, that was a war of liberation. It ended with the Truce of Andrusovo in 1667. The final outcome was sealed by the Treaty of Perpetual Peace in 1686. The Russian state incorporated the city of Kiev and the lands on the left bank of the Dnieper River, including Poltava region, Chernigov region, and Zaporozhye. Their inhabitants were reunited with the main part of the Russian Orthodox people. These territories were referred to as "Malorossia" (Little Russia).

The name "Ukraine" was used more often in the meaning of the Old Russian word "okraina" (periphery), which is found in written sources from the 12th century, referring to various border territories. And the word "Ukrainian", judging by archival documents, originally referred to frontier guards who protected the external borders.

On the right bank, which remained under the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the old orders were restored, and social and religious oppression intensified. On the contrary, the lands on the left bank, taken under the protection of the unified state, saw rapid development. People from the other bank of the Dnieper moved here en masse. They sought support from people who spoke the same language and had the same faith.

During the Great Northern War with Sweden, the people in Malorossia were not faced with a choice of whom to side with. Only a small portion of the Cossacks supported Mazepa's rebellion. People of all orders and degrees considered themselves Russian and Orthodox.

Cossack senior officers belonging to the nobility would reach the heights of political, diplomatic, and military careers in Russia. Graduates of Kiev-Mohyla Academy played a leading role in church life. This was also the case during the Hetmanate – an essentially autonomous state formation with a special internal structure – and later in the Russian Empire. Malorussians in many ways helped build a big common country – its statehood, culture, and science. They participated in the exploration and development of the Urals, Siberia, the Caucasus, and the Far East. Incidentally, during the Soviet period, natives of Ukraine held major, including the highest, posts in the leadership of the unified state. Suffice it to say that Nikita Khrushchev and Leonid Brezhnev, whose party biography was most closely associated with Ukraine, led the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) for almost 30 years.

In the second half of the 18th century, following the wars with the Ottoman Empire, Russia incorporated Crimea and the lands of the Black Sea region, which became known as Novorossiia. They were populated by people from all of the Russian provinces. After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Russian Empire regained the western Old Russian lands, with the exception of Galicia and Transcarpathia, which became part of the Austrian – and later Austro-Hungarian – Empire.

The incorporation of the western Russian lands into the single state was not merely the result of political and diplomatic decisions. It was underlain by the common faith, shared cultural traditions, and - I would like to emphasize it once again - language similarity. Thus, as early as the beginning of the 17th century, one of the hierarchs of the Uniate Church, Joseph Rutzky, communicated to Rome that people in Moscovia called Russians from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth their brothers, that their written language was absolutely identical, and differences in the vernacular were insignificant. He drew an analogy with the residents of Rome and Bergamo. These are, as we know, the center and the north of modern Italy.

Many centuries of fragmentation and living within different states naturally brought about regional language peculiarities, resulting in the emergence of dialects. The vernacular enriched the literary language. Ivan Kotlyarevsky, Grigory Skovoroda, and Taras Shevchenko played a huge role here. Their works are our common literary and cultural heritage. Taras Shevchenko wrote poetry in the Ukrainian language, and prose mainly in Russian. The books of Nikolay Gogol, a Russian patriot and native of Poltavshchyna, are written in Russian, bristling with Malorussian folk sayings and motifs. How can this heritage be divided between Russia and Ukraine? And why do it?

The south-western lands of the Russian Empire, Malorussia and Novorossiya, and the Crimea developed as ethnically and religiously diverse entities. Crimean Tatars, Armenians, Greeks, Jews, Karaites, Krymchaks, Bulgarians,

Poles, Serbs, Germans, and other peoples lived here. They all preserved their faith, traditions, and customs.

I am not going to idealise anything. We do know there were the Valuev Circular of 1863 and then the Ems Ukaz of 1876, which restricted the publication and importation of religious and socio-political literature in the Ukrainian language. But it is important to be mindful of the historical context. These decisions were taken against the backdrop of dramatic events in Poland and the desire of the leaders of the Polish national movement to exploit the "Ukrainian issue" to their own advantage. I should add that works of fiction, books of Ukrainian poetry and folk songs continued to be published. There is objective evidence that the Russian Empire was witnessing an active process of development of the Malorussian cultural identity within the greater Russian nation, which united the Velikorussians, the Malorussians and the Belorussians.

At the same time, the idea of Ukrainian people as a nation separate from the Russians started to form and gain ground among the Polish elite and a part of the Malorussian intelligentsia. Since there was no historical basis – and could not have been any, conclusions were substantiated by all sorts of concoctions, which went as far as to claim that the Ukrainians are the true Slavs and the Russians, the Muscovites, are not. Such "hypotheses" became increasingly used for political purposes as a tool of rivalry between European states.

Since the late 19th century, the Austro-Hungarian authorities had latched onto this narrative, using it as a counterbalance to the Polish national movement and pro-

Muscovite sentiments in Galicia. During World War I, Vienna played a role in the formation of the so-called Legion of Ukrainian Sich Riflemen. Galicians suspected of sympathies with Orthodox Christianity and Russia were subjected to brutal repression and thrown into the concentration camps of Thalerhof and Terezin.

Further developments had to do with the collapse of European empires, the fierce civil war that broke out across the vast territory of the former Russian Empire, and foreign intervention.

After the February Revolution, in March 1917, the Central Rada was established in Kiev, intended to become the organ of supreme power. In November 1917, in its Third Universal, it declared the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic (UPR) as part of Russia.

In December 1917, UPR representatives arrived in Brest-Litovsk, where Soviet Russia was negotiating with Germany and its allies. At a meeting on 10 January 1918, the head of the Ukrainian delegation read out a note proclaiming the independence of Ukraine. Subsequently, the Central Rada proclaimed Ukraine independent in its Fourth Universal.

The declared sovereignty did not last long. Just a few weeks later, Rada delegates signed a separate treaty with the German bloc countries. Germany and Austria-Hungary were at the time in a dire situation and needed Ukrainian bread and raw materials. In order to secure large-scale supplies, they obtained consent for sending their troops and technical staff to the UPR. In fact, this was used as a pretext for occupation.

For those who have today given up the full control of Ukraine to external forces, it would be instructive to remember that, back in 1918, such a decision proved fatal for the ruling regime in Kiev. With the direct involvement of the occupying forces, the Central Rada was overthrown and Hetman Pavlo Skoropadskyi was brought to power, proclaiming instead of the UPR the Ukrainian State, which was essentially under German protectorate.

In November 1918 - following the revolutionary events in Germany and Austria-Hungary - Pavlo Skoropadskyi, who had lost the support of German bayonets, took a different course, declaring that "Ukraine is to take the lead in the formation of an All-Russian Federation". However, the regime was soon changed again. It was now the time of the so-called Directorate.

In autumn 1918, Ukrainian nationalists proclaimed the West Ukrainian People's Republic (WUPR) and, in January 1919, announced its unification with the Ukrainian People's Republic. In July 1919, Ukrainian forces were crushed by Polish troops, and the territory of the former WUPR came under the Polish rule.

In April 1920, Symon Petliura (portrayed as one of the "heroes" in today's Ukraine) concluded secret conventions on behalf of the UPR Directorate, giving up - in exchange for military support - Galicia and Western Volhynia lands to Poland. In May 1920, Petliurites entered Kiev in a convoy of Polish military units. But not for long. As early as November 1920, following a truce between Poland and Soviet Russia, the remnants of Petliura's forces surrendered to those same Poles.

The example of the UPR shows that different kinds of quasi-state formations that emerged across the former Russian Empire at the time of the Civil War and turbulence were inherently unstable. Nationalists sought to create their own independent states, while leaders of the White movement advocated indivisible Russia. Many of the republics established by the Bolsheviks' supporters did not see themselves outside Russia either. Nevertheless, Bolshevik Party leaders sometimes basically drove them out of Soviet Russia for various reasons.

Thus, in early 1918, the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic was proclaimed and asked Moscow to incorporate it into Soviet Russia. This was met with a refusal. During a meeting with the republic's leaders, Vladimir Lenin insisted that they act as part of Soviet Ukraine. On 15 March 1918, the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) directly ordered that delegates be sent to the Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, including from the Donetsk Basin, and that "one government for all of Ukraine" be created at the congress. The territories of the Donetsk-Krivoy Rog Soviet Republic later formed most of the regions of south-eastern Ukraine.

Under the 1921 Treaty of Riga, concluded between the Russian SFSR, the Ukrainian SSR and Poland, the western lands of the former Russian Empire were ceded to Poland. In the interwar period, the Polish government pursued an active resettlement policy, seeking to change the ethnic composition of the Eastern Borderlands – the Polish name for what is now Western Ukraine, Western Belarus and parts of Lithuania. The areas were subjected to harsh

Polonisation, local culture and traditions suppressed. Later, during World War II, radical groups of Ukrainian nationalists used this as a pretext for terror not only against Polish, but also against Jewish and Russian populations.

In 1922, when the USSR was created, with the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic becoming one of its founders, a rather fierce debate among the Bolshevik leaders resulted in the implementation of Lenin's plan to form a union state as a federation of equal republics. The right for the republics to freely secede from the Union was included in the text of the Declaration on the Creation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and, subsequently, in the 1924 USSR Constitution. By doing so, the authors planted in the foundation of our statehood the most dangerous time bomb, which exploded the moment the safety mechanism provided by the leading role of the CPSU was gone, the party itself collapsing from within. A "parade of sovereignties" followed. On 8 December 1991, the so-called Belovezh Agreement on the Creation of the Commonwealth of Independent States was signed, stating that "the USSR as a subject of international law and a geopolitical reality no longer existed." By the way, Ukraine never signed or ratified the CIS Charter adopted back in 1993.

In the 1920's-1930's, the Bolsheviks actively promoted the "localization policy", which took the form of Ukrainization in the Ukrainian SSR. Symbolically, as part of this policy and with consent of the Soviet authorities, Mikhail Grushevskiy, former chairman of Central Rada, one of the ideologists of Ukrainian nationalism, who at a certain period of time had been supported by Austria-Hungary, was