

Extract from **Amelie Lanier** at **Context XXI**<http://contextxxi.org/--amelie-lanier--.html><http://contextxxi.org/new-russia-odessa-and-the-crimea.html>

extracted on: 29 March 2024

Date of this contribution: 2005

„New Russia“: Odessa and the Crimea

■ AMELIE LANIER

Odessa and the Crimea belong to Ukraine nowadays, but this is a very recent development. In Tsarist times the whole area on the shores of the Black Sea was referred to as “New Russia”, while landlocked Ukraine was also known as “Small Russia”.

New Russia was founded in the time of Catherine The Great. After a Russian-Turkish war that proved disastrous for the Ottoman Empire and that was concluded by the peace treaty of Kuchuk-Kainardzha in 1774 the latter was forced to renounce from protecting the Khanate of the Crimea, thus exposing this small Tartar empire to Russian expansionism. The territory of the Crimean and Black Sea Tartars was quickly conquered and Russia finally achieved ports that did not freeze in winter. The main Russian towns and ports on the Black Sea: Odessa, Khereson, Nikolayev and Sevastopol, were founded between 1778 and 1793. With their growth and the military and commercial activity connected to it the tensions between Russia and the Ottoman Empire that controlled the access to the Black Sea constantly rose and finally led to the Crimean War of 1853-1856.

Ukraine was the scene of the first Russian empire, the Kievan Rus whose tsars converted to Christianity and imposed this belief on the Slavs. This empire was destroyed by the Mongols who captured and destroyed Kiev in 1240. Later this territory came under Polish dominion. In his efforts to escape from Polish dominion and serfdom the Ukrainian nobleman and leader of a great rebellion against the Polish state, the Rzeczpospolita, Bogdan **Khmelnitsky**

in 1654 declared the unification of Ukraina and Russia. In Russian historiography this has always been viewed as a proof that *the people of Ukraina voluntarily united with Russia*.

The unity was not unspoiled, though. Ukraina was administered by Russians, the country was referred to as “Small Russia” and the peasants found out that Russian serfdom was hard, too. In the 19th century Ukrainian nationalism began to emerge. It was severely reprimanded by the authorities. Many representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia were imprisoned, banished to Siberia or forced into exile. The use of the Ukrainian language was forbidden by a Tsarist decree.

The **Bolsheviks** had almost no adherents in Ukraina. Rumours state that when Lenin and other members of the Bolshevik party agreed with the Germans to be smuggled into Russia in 1917 he agreed to “pay” for this service with the cession of Ukraine to Germany. These rumours are fuelled by the fact that the young Soviet power in the treaty of Brest-Litovsk in 1918 indeed ceded Ukraina to Germany and Austria, as it was then stated: as a necessary concession to end the war for Russia.

The German-Austrian occupation troops and their puppet, ataman Skoropadski, were finally driven out of Ukraina, as well as the forces of the Ukrainian nationalists led by Petljura and the invasion armies led by the generals Wrangel and Denikin, by the insurgent Ukrainian peasant army of anarchist Nestor **Machno**. When Machno and his followers refused to accept Soviet power they were crushed by the Red Army in 1921 and Ukraina re-

turned to Russia, then already Soviet Union. It was then that the Black sea coastal part of New Russia, with the exception of the Crimea, was united with Ukraine.

Machno, who had even attempted collectivization in Ukraina, died in poverty and isolation in Paris in 1934. To a certain extent in Ukraina he is nowadays considered as a pioneer of Ukrainian independence, a reputation that not exactly matches his intentions.

The reintegration of Ukraina into the Soviet state was not welcomed, though, by the majority of it's inhabitants. The consequences of this Soviet Union had to experience bitterly in World War II when many Ukrainians joined the SS or the German army and fought against the Red Army. Even after 1945 there was almost a civil war in Ukraina between the Soviet military and administration and insurgent Ukrainian rebels hiding in the countryside. The tensions were aggravated by the famine that struck Ukraina in 1945 and for which many discontent Ukrainians put the blame on the Soviet government.

Nikita **Khrushchev**, himself a Russian, was a native of the predominantly Russian populated region of Eastern Ukraina, and had to administer Ukraina in the very difficult years after the war. Upon his ascent to power in Soviet Union after Stalin's death, in order to appease Ukrainian sentiments, and using the pretext of the 300-year anniversary of Khmelnytsky's decision of uniting Ukraina with Russia, he gave Crimea to Ukraina, with the exception of Sevastopol, which, due to it's military importance, remained under direct federal and military administration.

Tartarian sources, this has to be mentioned, state that the Khrushchevian present had economic reasons, too. At the end of World war II the Tartar, Greek and German minorities were deported from Crimea and replaced by mainly Russian, to a smaller extent, Belorussian and Ukrainian settlers. The number of deported population amounted to more than 200.000 people. The newcomers were unexperienced and this had a grave impact on the economic performance of post-war Crimea. With the generous cession the problem was passed on to the Ukrainian administration and the blame for failure in meeting the economic goals could afterwards be put on the local and regional authorities.

The inhabitants of the Crimea were not asked and had to accept this change of

status that had bitter consequences for them as Ukraine declared independence in 1991. In the new independent Ukraine the members of vast Russian minority are unwelcome citizens. As Ukraine came under pressure from the IMF to cut spending and could only comply with this demand in not paying wages and pensions in time the Russian-populated areas were more affected by this measure. In the coastal areas and in the mining districts of Eastern Ukraine the wage and pension arrears were and are much higher than in the provinces with predominantly Ukrainian population. The desire for re-unification with Russia is strong, but without perspectives.

Amelie Lanier: Jahrgang 1961, Studium der Mathematik, Geschichte und Philosophie an der Universität

Wien, dort Promotion zum Doktor der Philosophie 1988. Dissertation: „Über die Widersprüchlichkeit von Moralphilosophie am Beispiel Friedrich Nietzsches.“ Seither freie Forschungstätigkeit über die Geschichte Osteuropas und des österreichischen Kreditwesens. Publikationen zum Transformationsprozeß nach 1989 und den neueren Entwicklungen im Bankwesen. Wohnort: Zell am See. Motto: „Wenn die Pforten der Wahrnehmung gereinigt würden, würde alles dem Menschen erscheinen, wie es ist: unendlich.“ (William Blake, Die Hochzeit des Himmels und der Hölle)

License of this contribution

Copyright

© copyright the article's author