

The processes of political cultural delimitation in Russian and Ukrainian border regions

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Abstract

The paper studies how new geopolitical reality influences political-cultural delimitation in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands. The authors rely on the findings of their expert survey and a number of sociological studies on political and cultural delimitation to explore socio-cultural similarities and disparities between residents of the neighbouring regions. The authors analyse potential cooperation and prospects of integration of border regions in the post-Soviet space studying cultural-ideological and administrative-political aspects of cross-border interaction. The research tries to show how discourses and ideologies circulating in the societies shape identities in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands or result in identity simulation in socially and politically volatile border regions. The paper presents the influence of present-day forms and models of cross-border cooperation on the development of social systems in borderlands. The authors propose models of political delimitation and outline potential changes in the social systems of the border regions. One of the most important findings is that the confrontational delimitation may lead to a collapse of cross-border regional systems and their succumbing to certain initial natural states.

Key words: border regions, political-cultural delimitation, post-Soviet space, Russian-Ukrainian borderlands

1. Introduction

The disintegration of the Soviet Union (USSR) has shaken identities established in the former Soviet space. It has triggered the process of formation of new political nations, often trying to overcome the Soviet past. The newly formed geopolitical landscape remains a matter of disputes in the post-Soviet and global academia. This state prompted that after achieving relative political and economic stability, newly formed states turned to reintegration with other fellow post-Soviet nations to seek cooperation in the industrial and transport sphere, and ultimately, to consolidate markets (Chernyshev 2010: 41-51). N. I. Promskiy, for instance, names a number of sub-regional entities, including the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Union State of Russia and Belarus (the Union State), the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (GUAM) and the Common Economic Space (CES) – (Promskiy 2010: 215-223). However, the opinion makers and academia share the opinion that the CIS project is declarative and ineffective (Belkovskiy 2011; *Nacional'nyj instytut...*, 2011) as it lobbies the interests of only a part of the CIS member-states and simulates the development of the common policy and strategy for the CIS.

At the same time, interstate projects in the post-Soviet space do not necessarily promote a re-integration of the ex-USSR republics. For instance, the Eastern Partnership project between the European Union (EU) and Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia

and Belarus, aims at their future integration with the EU (Strelkov 2012). This trend may be attributed to the fact that the majority of the inhabitants of the ex-USSR countries (probably with the exception of Russia) viewed their independence as a chance to develop a new identity (European, Islamic etc.).

Nevertheless, the focus of research in the sphere of interstate relations within the post-Soviet space chiefly lies not in cultural and ideological, but rather in the institutional and political aspects of inter-state interactions.

2. Discussion

Although the post-Soviet reading is dominated by the analysis of cooperation and prospects for further integration of the post-Soviet states, an important aspect of the research is the opposite trend of disintegration and affirmation of authenticity leading to confrontation with neighbouring states.

The latter trend is characteristic of Ukraine where the elites and a large part of the citizens had set the course to political self-determination before the end of the Soviet period. The further development of Ukraine as a sovereign state was largely shaped by the rejection of the Soviet past and Russia: as the President of Ukraine Kuchma put it 'Ukraine is not Russia' (Kuchma 2003). Yet this attitude was not unanimous. As V. A. Kolosov and O. I. Vendina claim, the Russian-Ukrainian relations fall into three dominant national discourses (Kolosov, Vendyna, 2007).

The first discourse can be called *post-Soviet integrative* and it is underpinned by the idea that international law cannot be fully applied to the Russian-Ukrainian border because it hinders everyday contacts in the territory which had never been separated by a national border. Cooperation, especially between border regions, can consolidate the post-Soviet space and reconstruct the geopolitical unity (Vardomskiy 2005). Until recently, this attitude prevailed in the Russian administrative, political and academic elites' views and fitted the image of Russia's leading role in the post-Soviet space due to its economic potential, rich natural resources and geopolitical situation. This discourse originates from the need of partial reconstruction of the common social and economic space and reflects the objective dependence of eastern Ukrainian regions on Russian energy and the Russian market. In this context, the Russian-Ukrainian bilingualism and the long-lasting symbiosis of two cultures in Eastern Ukraine is interpreted as a weakness of the Ukrainian state.

The opposite *disintegrative discourse* rests on the fact that since the Soviet epoch, the economies of Russian and Ukrainian border regions have been rather loosely bound. Nowadays, with economic and political conflicts, Ukrainian reading uses the term *war* ('gas war', 'media war', 'custom war', etc.), which practically leave no room for the analysis of integration processes (Mitrofanova 2009: 179-186; Chalyy 2013). Besides, in reality such processes are hampered by bureaucratic procedures as well as by psychological motives. From this perspective, the cooperation between Russia and Ukraine is an artificial and involuntary process.

In Russia, this point of view is shared by younger middle-tier public officers. They consider the Russian and Ukrainian cooperation, especially in cross-border context, to be a relic of the previous epoch which will eventually die away as economies of both states drift apart and generations nostalgic about the Soviet Union pass away.

In Ukraine, this discourse is backed by the supporters of nation-centric and nationalist ideas. They conceptualise the Ukrainian-Russian border as an important landmark ensuring Ukrainian national safety. In their opinion, it separates not only two independent states, but also two ethical and historic communities which differ drastically. In this case, the pro-Russian vector of Ukrainian policy is counterpoised to the pro-European one (*Nacional'nyy instytut...*, 2014).

Finally, the third *pro-European discourse* is based on the concept of *Euroregions* – the structures that ensure interstate cooperation through the development of equal peer relations on all levels of society, including administration, business, social and cultural institutions, NGOs and common people (Chernomaz 2007: 112-123; Kiryukhin 2007: 58-59). Euroregions aim at creating conditions for development of the border zone on the basis of the common interests. Euroregions can promote local initiatives to resolve social problems and level out the unbalance of the territorial development.

On the one hand, the geopolitical landscape that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union has been analysed from different, often opposite theoretical and methodological perspectives; on the other hand, it provokes non-conventional challenges, e.g. the problem of the delimitation of the post-Soviet states due to changes in the geopolitical space and the search of a new balance of forces (Hughes, Sasse, 2002: 256; Surhone et al., 2010: 64).

A number of papers (Klatt 2005: 55-63; Gasparini 2014: 165-201) discuss it in terms of the peculiar nature of border regions which can be found both in 'old' regional formations (Central and Northern Europe) and in new geopolitical entities (Eastern Europe). Certain studies analyse delimitation as a political and cultural phenomenon characteristic specifically of regions that lie on the new borders of the post-Soviet space (Pileček, Jančák, 2011). At this stage, analysing relations of cross-border communities through delimitation processes is regarded as a novel approach (Prokkola 2009; Hamedinger 2011: 153-174).

The aim of the present paper is to analyse modern processes of political-cultural delimitation of Russian and Ukrainian border regions.

3. Materials and methods

Empirically, this paper rests on the results of expert interviews, which were conducted in April-May 2014. The experts were 22 Russian and 20 Ukrainian expert scholars working in the field of Russian-Ukrainian relations. The choice of experts was prompted either by their scientific publications on the relevant topic or by a relatively long (ten years or more) practical experience in the management of border regions cooperation.

Since the interviews involved the experts only from border regions, the authors cannot claim that the results represent the opinion of the whole Ukrainian or the whole Russian expert community. Nevertheless, as the article deals with the delimitation of borderlands, the received data constitute empirically and theoretically relevant findings which are sufficient for drawing conclusions. Besides, the authors make an assumption that the expert opinion represents not only their personal attitude, but is a rather accurate representation of the views prevailing among the elites of the border regions and to a lesser degree – among the citizens.

The present study rests on the theory by I. Prigozhin on the development of open dissipative structures which are capable of moving from the extreme state of entropy to steadier states. In this case, a significant heuristic potential may be attributed to the minimum dissipation principle developed by N. Moiseyev, who claims that if a system (process) can exist in more than one state, and all the states comply to the conservation laws and bounds applied to this system (process), it triggers the state with the minimum entropy growth (Moiseyev 1990). Entropy in this case is understood as the measure of the internal system disorder. Non-linear systems are characterised by interchange of energy and

matter with the ambient environment; one of the major features of their development is using the maximum of the external energy to minimise their local entropy.

The authors found it promising to analyse Russian-Ukrainian borderlands as open dissipative systems that currently undergo the bifurcation process and are influenced by a complex of attractors. One of such attractors is the political-cultural delimitation that becomes one of the socio-cultural factors influencing the development of this complex geopolitical entity, socio-cultural factors and potentially leading to its evolution, stagnation or disintegration. In this sense, the authors refer to a border region as a historically established community having a shared ethno-cultural identity and geographically located near the border with a similar community in another state. This definition goes in line with the definition of the region by N. I. Lapin:

In general theoretic sense, the region is a historically established socio-cultural community where primary settlements and individuals, who create their life-worlds, directly interact with the institutions of a larger society, such as social institutions and organisations. The region rests on the ethno-cultural identity of people inhabiting a particular area; it exists and changes in response to their activities. In terms of its structure, a region falls between society as a societal system (*die Gesellschaft*, society) and communities as primary territorial entities (*die Gemeinschaften*, communities). Being a meso-level of a larger society, the region is a socio-cultural community which includes settlements and has a sophisticated multivariate structure (Lapin 2010: 29; our translation – V.S., O.Z.).

The term *delimitation* comes from the constitutional law and stands for the ‘determination of a general direction of a boundary line between states established through negotiations between plenipotentiary representatives thereof’ (Avakyan 2001). In this research, political-cultural delimitation of border regions refers to a process of the designation and demarcation of statuses of adjacent geopolitical entities that conceptualises the peculiar nature of political and cultural border systems in the conscience of border residents.

While delimitation as a legal action results in the border determination, political-cultural delimitation underpins symbolic actions and phenomena that capture the special nature of a border region. In our opinion, these include:

- axiological self-determination, locating the region in the network of external relations and defining its specific features;

- determination of the role which the regional community plays in the historical-cultural process by finding its real or assumed position in the system of traditions;
- *Us vs Them* opposition on the basis of similarities and differences in the political and cultural spheres;
- institutionalisation of political and cultural symbols and tokens proving the peculiarity of the region.

Interpreted as a number of symbolic acts, political-cultural delimitation goes along with cultural and civilisational identification in the Russian and Ukrainian borderlands. The study follows S. Huntington in understanding cultural and – in a broader sense civilisational – identification as an individual or group self-identification with a society as a cultural and civilisational entity. Individuals can identify themselves with a particular culture, civilisation, citizenship, nationality (especially in a nation-state), which does not always provide a true and full representation of their belonging, but reveals a certain system of adopted values localised as a specific chronotopes, or a spatio-temporal unity of past, present and future (Sungurov 2003: 65). This unity creates certain axiological systems that are adopted or rejected by individuals who identify themselves with a specific set of norms and values. An identity, represented in self-reference to various groups of residents of border regions with established axiological systems, may therefore be defined as a cultural and to a certain extent civilisational identity of these communities.

The present-day geopolitical situation has created conditions for disintegration of border regions as socio-cultural systems and has introduced new cultural identification models which are not always complementary.

All the above mentioned concepts create new possibilities for cultural identification which may either favour cross-border and interstate integration or create chimerical anti-systems, damaging traditional ties and increasing mutual isolation, i.e. not only modify the political and cultural delimitation, but also influence its technical aspects, e.g. boundary demarcation.

4. Results

4.1. Axiological systems of the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands

The Russian and Ukrainian borderlands form inconsistent in their political orientation and controversial in terms of social consequences identity models based on ad hoc axiological patterns, explained below.

(1) Patterns representing values and meanings inherent to the traditional national cultures. The long-lasting close coexistence of the Russian (Orthodox Christian) and Ukrainian (also Christian, but influenced by the Uniate Church and Catholicism) cultures has melted both cultures in a rather uniform and chiefly complementary tradition. From this perspective, political-cultural delimitation is possible only if elements in the common cultural context are identified to emphasise disparities between the values and meanings, and create an opposition between *Us* (the native nation, country, or state) and *Them* (people across the border). Nowadays Ukraine witnesses this process, where the delimitation is based on political-cultural patterns inherent to Western Ukraine. Nevertheless, Western Ukrainian traditions were fully accepted by the majority of inhabitants of most Eastern border regions. In view of this, the objective of the delimitation project is to disseminate these patterns with the help of the state-of-the-art information and communication technologies.

(2) Patterns, reproducing axiological systems of the relatively recent Soviet past. They were based on the concepts of the proletarian, later socialist, internationalism and viewed Russians and Ukrainians as 'brother nations' who have nothing to divide. In this ideological context, delimitation is negatively assessed and should not influence political decisions and actions.

(3) Patterns representing various subcultures that emerge and spread in response to changes in statuses of social groups. These patterns are particularly relevant nowadays, especially in the crisis-stricken Ukraine. It may be attributed to the fact that a volatile environment increases the need for identification. As V. A. Yadov states, 'An individual's urge for self-identification with a certain community appears after a collapse of traditional practices, where the need for self-determination within the system of social relations is not realised. An individual's group (social) status is in this case determined by rigid criteria of their belonging to a community, a social stratum, as well as their age and gender. Present-day industrial societies drastically modify the standards of living and shape the need for self-identification with various groups and communities, whereas dynamic and multi-

layer social relations call for adjustment of both dominating and periphery “solidarities”. The question which groups and communities are accepted by a person and which are rejected as partly close or alien gains vital importance for understanding of social relations’ (Yadov 1994; our translation – V.P., O.Z.).

Nevertheless, this variant may present a single way of interaction between border zones. These political-cultural delimitation patterns apply not only to territorial entities, but also to political organisations, economic consortia and social movements. These actors have moved to the foreground in modern Russia, especially as a reaction to Ukrainian crisis which was negatively assessed by a part of politically active Russian citizens.

The danger in group-based identification lies in the fact that when self-identification rests on phenomena charged with confrontation, isolationism and intolerance, the political-cultural delimitation takes a form of a latent or open conflict.

(4) Patterns based on concepts reflecting the global processes, e.g. Euro-integration and digitalisation. In this case, the delimitation is capable of evolving into a global civilisational split with Ukraine integrating into the new ‘civilised’ community and Russia remaining either a ‘special’ civilisation or self-determining within the zone of the Eastern influence.

(5) A separate class of socio-cultural identities are quasi-identities based on intentionally or incidentally distorted images of self and external groups, and inadequate stereotyping of the *Other*.

In this case, the identification process transforms into simulation where real meanings are replaced by the formal reproduction of operations and procedures in the form of demonstration, declaration and decoration. Declaration refers to the manifestation of the desired result without a reasonable estimate of the subject’s actual capacities where the declared objectives are not supported by the available funds and resources. Decoration is viewed as a biased (and favourable for the actor) interpretation of the reality by attributing to it values that are significant for the actor. Demonstration stands for performance of actions and proclaiming ideas that comply with the formal standards but lack the real content (Babintsev 2013: 26).

Simulation of the identification process in borderlands reflects the general tendency of producing and spreading simulacra in the post-modern society, which brings to life the statement by J. Baudrillard about the loss of reality in the post-modern epoch. Reality is

substituted by *hyper-reality* and the social system continues to exist as simulation, concealing the absence of the reality (Baudrillard 1994). Simulation of identity refers to the establishment of a quasi-identical relation with an imaginary original and a public declaration of validity of this act spread by mass media.

Besides, the social situation in borderlands tends to significantly subjectify the identification process by a wilful refusal to accept historic evidence and sound arguments in the process of self-determination. This position, on the one hand, rests on the ambiguity of the identification objects in the multicultural cross-border environment, and on the other hand, on the instability of the regional space. At present, such instability is the most acute in Ukrainian regions as a result of their uncertain status, confrontation with the centre, and significant integration with Russia. At the same time, such instability easily spreads across the border to Russian regions and results in new risks and threats caused by the proximity of the crisis in Ukrainian regions.

Quasi-identities turn political-cultural delimitation into a mind game that revives seemingly forgotten political and ideological entities and creates new ones shaping the symbolic corpus of cross-border regions. Such forgotten entities for Ukraine are, for example, Donetsk-Krivoy Rog or Odessa Soviet Republics (Kornilov 2011). To a certain degree, another example of ideological entity is *Slobozhanschina*. In theory, such entities may be brought into life, but in any case they significantly complicate the delimitation process.

Intertwining and interaction of various identification models create the image of uncontrolled chaos in the minds of a part of border residents; it makes them susceptible to external manipulations. It significantly minimises chances of cultural and civilisational and political dialogue, hampers the interstate cooperation and leads to misunderstanding in interpersonal communication. It results in distrust and diminishing of social capital where the issues of increasing the competitiveness of the individual, the group and the region become greatly important.

4.2. Political cultural delimitation in expert opinions

However, in the past two decades the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands have become relatively stable and open social systems. At the same time, it means only that their future will increasingly depend upon advancements in socio-cultural regulators of different levels and complexity. In this context, regulators form a conceptually shaped and internally consistent system of views capable of influencing self-determination of the border region

and the corresponding community. Potentially, the political-cultural delimitation is able to become a vertical attractor ensuring the development of the borderlands as an integrated subject of the corresponding state and at the same time an equal partner of the adjacent regions across the border.

Nevertheless, this possibility may become reality only if identification is free from confrontation and is based on the identification models of interaction and cooperation.

One of such models is the model of Euroregions implemented in the European Union, which was spread in the post-Soviet space in the late 1990s. For instance, this model became a frequent practice on the Western border of the Russian Federation. Euroregion Neman was formed in 1997 between the Hrodna region (Belarus) and 49 self-governance units of Podlasiian voivodeship, members of Association Euroregion Neman in Poland, 12 self-governance units of Marijampolė and Alytus in Lithuania, members of the Association "Bureau of Euroregion Neman", and Chernyakhovsk, Krasnoznamensk, Oziorok and Gusev regions of the Kaliningrad oblast in Russia (*Proekt...*, 2012). Euroregion Baltic was founded in 1998 between the Kaliningrad oblast (Russian Federation), Bornholm commune (Denmark), the city of Liepāja and the Liepāja district (Latvia), Klaipėda county (Lithuania), Elbląg, Gdańsk, Olsztyn and Słupsk ex-voivedeships (Poland), and Blekinge, Kalmar and Kronoberg counties (Sweden). Euroregion Karelia was created the same year and between three Regional Councils of Finland – Kainuu, Northern Karelia and Northern Ostrobothnia and the Republic of Karelia (*The Ministry...*, 2011).

Euroregion Dnepr was established in 2003 between the Bryansk oblast (Russia), the Homiel oblast (Belarus) and the Chernihiv oblast (Ukraine). In 2003 Euroregion Slobozhanshchina was established, made up of the Belgorod oblast (Russia) and the Kharkiv oblast (Ukraine). Euroregion Pskov-Livonia between five districts of Pskov oblast, for districts of Latvia and three unions of municipality governments of Estonia was formed in 2004. In 2006, the Kursk and Sumy oblasts formed Euroregion Yaroslavna, and in 2010 Euroregion Donbass connected the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts in Ukraine with the Rostov oblast of the Russian Federation.

At present, the content and prospects of the Euroregions model have become the focus of a series of research projects. A number of papers argue that Euroregions can potentially become the basis for strategic partnership in cross-border cooperation in the frame of spatial development (Baltic Euroregions Network, 2007). Still, though all cross-

border regions of the Russian Federation and Ukraine use the model of Euroregions to a certain degree, it is too early to consider it successfully implemented. The successful introduction of Euroregions in the Russian and Ukrainian borderlands is hampered by the absence of real governmental support, including financing. The Program of Interregional and Border Cooperation between Ukraine and the Russian Federation in 2011-2016 defined general directions for the development but it did not function as a real instrument of cross-border cooperation. For example, a similar programme 'European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument', which operates in Ukrainian and Russian regions bordering the EU not only grants funding but also establishes legal, design and information frames for the elaboration and implementation of joint projects and programmes within Euroregions. The lack of jurisdiction and expertise of the project partners and members remains one of the most crucial obstacles for a more effective programme implementation (Sapryka 2012: 38-43).

With no effective models of cross-border interaction and cooperation, the system might succumb to stagnation or collapse which are especially dangerous at points of bifurcation characteristic for the present time.

The political-cultural delimitation process which, on the one hand, reflects the specific nature of the cultural and civilisational identification in relatively new geopolitical entities and, on the other hand, influencing them, should be considered in this context as formation and implementation of one such regulator. Its vector will have a significant impact on the prospects of the development not only of the cross-border regions, but of the whole of Russia and Ukraine.

Therefore, the authors find it useful to expand the concept of delimitation to a broader socio-cultural content. It may be one of the most evident manifestations and consequences of trends in the cultural and civilisational identification in Russia and Ukraine and, at the same time, to be an important regulator of socio-cultural development which to a great extent defines the prospects of the given countries.

Mutual claims and complaints, both real and imaginary, as well as geopolitical factors have shaped the Russian-Ukrainian relations in the post-Soviet period as a series of crises and attempts to resolve them. The modern state of relations between two countries is the worst in the whole post-Soviet period and can be treated as a bifurcation point after which Ukraine may fall outside the sphere of political and, in part, cultural influence of

Russia. The monitoring data provided by Levada-Centre (May 2014) showed that the percentage of Russians who perceive Ukraine 'negatively' or 'very negatively' reached 49% (while the total 'positive' and 'very positive' answers made up 35%). A worse ratio was registered only at the end of the tenure of V. Yushchenko in May 2009 – 55% and 33% correspondingly (*Levada Centr*, May 2014). This public opinion of Russian citizens was a reaction to a series of gas conflicts and the anti-Russian declaration of Ukraine's elite.

Nevertheless, the cultural and civilisational similarity of the Russian and Ukrainian societies is evident as well as the mutual inclusiveness of their political and cultural processes. To a great extent, it underpins the pained reaction of the Russian citizens and elites to the Western vector of Ukrainian policy which is frequently perceived as a treachery.

Speaking about the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands, the socio-cultural similarities of both border residents are significantly greater than in the nations' heartlands and have a higher level of cultural integration. De facto, both Russia and Ukraine are heterogeneous socio-culturally. In Russia, these differences result in controversies between three main cultural groups, including a traditionalist-Orthodox group of ethnically Russian regions, an even more traditionalist Islamic culture of ethnic republics, an 'urban' pro-Western liberal culture of large cities and numerous transient and periphery variants and more exotic subcultures. In Ukraine, the whole post-Soviet period was marked with the social-political dissociation of the South-East, Centre and West of the country. Even the recent loss of Crimea has not make Ukraine substantially more homogeneous in the socio-culturally.

Through almost the whole 20th and the early 21st centuries two models of political delimitation of border regions coexisted.

The first model was established in the Soviet period and was based on the concept of the 'Russian-Ukrainian brotherhood', which had a priority over ethnic differences. In this context, the border was considered as an insignificant formality. This delimitation model rested on the cultural and civilisational proximity of Russian and Ukrainian regions belonging to the same (Slavic) cultural civilisational type. This was the way most people on the either side of the border perceived the cross-border interaction, and it remains the same in the most experts' interpretations even after the outbreak of the interstate conflict; 71.4% of the interviewees claimed that Russia and Ukraine belong to the same Slavic civilisation; 14.3% agreed with this statement in part, and only 7.1% disagreed and the same percentage could not answer. To a lesser extent the experts agreed that Russia and Ukraine

belong to the same Slavic culture (64.3%, 21.4% partially agreed, 2.4% disagreed, 11.9% could not answer). Yet, in any case, those who were confident in the cultural and civilisational unity of Russia and Ukraine prevailed.

Nevertheless, it should not be supposed that the traditional delimitation model was purely fictional and did not induce political and cultural self-determination of Russia and Ukraine. Certain differences within this concept were still recorded in public and – more commonly – the elitist consciousness. The idea of such differences persists and naturally increases nowadays. For instance, 9.5% of experts fully agreed with the statement ‘Notwithstanding common roots, cultural-civilisational differences between Ukraine and Russia are substantial’ and 31.0% partly agreed.

Surprisingly enough, these rates were comparable for Russian and Ukrainian experts; 9.1% of the interviewees fully agreed with the given statement in Russia and 10.0% in Ukraine, and it was partly supported by 27.3% and 35.0% of interviewees correspondingly. It is a common belief that in the Ukrainian public opinion there exists a strong trend to emphasise cultural and civilisational dissimilarities from Russia. As it was mentioned, the difference between the nations was highlighted in the book by L. Kuchma, which became a certain manifesto of the cultural tendency of demarcation with Russia. In our opinion, the obtained data prove that Ukrainian experts who definitely represent the position prevailing among the political elites of the borderlands are less categorical in declaration of the cultural and civilisational singularity of their country. At the same time, their position shows a precondition for moderate political-cultural delimitation.

The second delimitation model emerged in the post-Soviet period and formally rested on the idea of the mutual constructive partnership. There were attempts to develop a mechanism for new delimitation, for instance, in the form of the abovementioned Euroregions. Still, despite numerous declarations of the necessity of interregional integration, few steps were taken to ensure the cross-border cooperation. The institution of Euroregions did not receive a proper legal status and did not become a platform for cross-border relations. When asked to give examples of decisions and actions of the Russian and Ukrainian authorities which contributed to the formation of a cultural and civilisational cross-border identity, only 16.7% of experts mentioned Euroregions.

Both models de facto ceased to function on the turn of 2013 and 2014, following the military conflict in the East of Ukraine.

The Euromaidan and the subsequent events adversely affected the political and cultural delimitation process in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands. The new nation-centred rhetoric of certain Ukrainian political figures and the military conflict in the Russian-speaking Eastern Ukraine were painful for Russians. At the same time, the ablation of Crimea from Ukraine and the ongoing conflict with Russia paired with pro-Russian views of a part of the Ukrainian borderland residents evoked numerous phobias concerning Russia.

The majority of experts participating in our poll agreed that the abovementioned events deepened of cultural and civilisational split in the cross-border regions. This fact was mentioned by 47.6% of Russian experts and by 50.0% of their Ukrainian colleagues. Yet, the expert estimation was not unanimous and reflected the complexity and contradictoriness of this phenomenon. Some experts, on the contrary, expressed opinion that the revolution in Ukraine revived the concept of the common past of two countries and emphasised the necessity of uniting. This opinion was expressed by 21.4% of Russian experts and by 16.7% of the Ukrainian participants. Consequently, a number of experts (representing opinions of various social groups) still indicate to the ineffective models of political and cultural legitimisation.

The ambiguity of the Euromaidan consequences for the formation of new cultural and civilisational identities was noted by 28.6% of experts in Russian border regions and by 31.0% in the Ukrainian borderland. On the one hand, pluralism of the expert opinions reflected the complicated and stochastic process of the development of new meanings and identities.

Most experts stressed that the cultural and civilisational differentiation in Ukraine, especially in the borderlands, is more distinct than in Russia. For instance, 36.4% of Russian and 30.0% of the Ukrainian experts claimed that due to Euromaidan the optimal way of borderlands development was to increase their cultural and civilisational autonomy within Ukraine. At the same time, Ukrainian experts were slightly less confident in the positive outcome of political and cultural integration of these regions (50% and 45% of the interviewees, correspondingly).

In their interviews, the Russian experts argued that the active political and cultural delimitation of the Ukrainian and Russian border regions will be supported chiefly by Ukrainian borderland residents because they believed that the latter were less inclined to

consider Ukraine and Russia as a single cultural and civilisational space. In particular, 63.6% of the Russian experts were confident that statements about common future of Russia and Ukraine would not be accepted by the majority of the citizens. However, this statement was supported only by 40.0% of Ukrainian experts. It gives grounds to think that the Euromaidan and the subsequent crisis significantly diabolised the image of Ukraine in the minds of the Russian elites.

Experts gave a negative evaluation of the role of governments in the borderlands integration. Their integration was chiefly determined by historical and cultural factors and the kinship. The importance of the historical-cultural tradition was emphasised by 81.0 % of experts; of kinship – by 59.5%; and of the shared Soviet past – by 47.6%. Besides, 28.6% of the experts mentioned the role of interregional economic cooperation and 11.9% – of actions of public authorities as factors contributing to integration. The experts claimed that the state adversely affected the interregional cooperation: 47.6% of the experts mentioned the state policy; 50.0% – the opposite vectors of the foreign policy; 66.7% – ill-considered actions of politicians as major disintegrating factors. The Euromaidan as well as the earlier history of the Russian-Ukrainian relations prove that the intolerance present in public and private statements of a number of politicians is frequently used for the escalation of the existing conflict.

The challenges of interstate relations have greatly influenced the interregional cooperation and socio-cultural integration of the border regions. As an answer to the question: ‘Which trends of the past decade characterise the relations of the Russian and the Ukrainian borderland residents the most accurately?’, the experts named opposite trends. This reflects not only the contradictions and ambiguity of the present-day Russian-Ukrainian relations but also the growing inter-group and even interpersonal distrust.

For instance, whilst 19.1% of the experts mentioned the ‘growth of mutual interest’ as a trend of interregional relations, 28.6% of the interviewees mentioned the ‘decrease in mutual interest’. Similarly, 21.4% of the experts talked about the ‘increase in mutual understanding’ and the same percentage – about the ‘decrease in mutual understanding’. The ‘growth in detachment’ was mentioned by 28.6% of the experts, and the ‘reduction of detachment’ by 7.1%. The Ukrainian experts gave a more positive evaluation of the public attitudes. For example, whilst the growth in detachment was noted by 27.3% of Russian experts, the corresponding percentage of Ukrainian specialists reached 35.0. The decrease

in mutual interest was mentioned by 22.7% of the Russian interviewees and by 30.0% of Ukrainian experts, which shows the general, though not very distinctive, trend of more positive attitudes.

Therefore, the anti-Ukrainian and anti-Russian sentiments on either side of the border may not prevail but are clearly present in the public opinion polls and in experts' assessments. Our interviews showed that a wide-spread occurrence of anti-Ukrainian sentiment in the Russian border regions was noted only by 4.8% of the experts and 64.3% indicated its absence. At the same time, the situation in the Ukrainian border regions differed significantly: wide-spread anti-Russian sentiment was noted by 21.4% of the experts, and its absence by 35.7%. Obviously, this fact was mainly pointed out by the Russian experts. Nevertheless, the presence of such sentiment is evident. At present, it is still marginal, but such negative mass mobilisation when confronted with a real or an imaginary enemy is very fast and radical ideas easily penetrate the public conscience.

Judging by these answers, a new model of political-cultural delimitation in the Russian and Ukrainian border regions will rest on confrontation. It is currently formed by the new symbols and stereotypes: each opponent's newsbreak undergoes verbal and semantic interpretation which frequently transforms its meaning to the opposite. For example, the 'anti-terror operation' is transformed into 'punitive' (*Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 2014), and 'opponents of the central authorities' into 'terrorists' (*Ukrayins'ka Pravda*, 2014), etc.

The negative mobilisation and exploitation of public phobia by politicians is understandable. In this way they create conditions for putting pressure on the opponents, winning the political game and proving their legitimacy. Still, in the long run, this policy leads to the growth of the radical views. In this case, the mobilised public consciousness can view any divergence from the declared principles and values as a weakness or even a treachery. As a result, politicians are caught in the situation they have created and have to conform to the level of radicalism in society.

The rates of adopting of the new (confrontational) political-cultural delimitation model vary, but for Ukrainian the situation changes faster. If Russians, even with the spike of anti-Ukrainian public sentiment, still treat Ukraine as a country close in terms of the shared history, culture, mentality, and priorities of further relations, Ukrainians are not that positive in their evaluation of Russia. For instance, in Russia, according to data provided by Levada-Centre (April 2014) the statement 'Ukraine and Russia should be inde-

pendent but friendly states – with open borders and no visas’ was supported by 54% of the respondents (and 8% wanted them to merge into one state) – (*Levada-Centr*, April 2014). On the contrary, according to data of the Razumkov Centre (April 2014), the share of supporters of the priority of relations with Russia in Ukraine fell to 16.6%.

The interviews show a similar tendency, though smoothed due to the socio-cultural unity of the border regions of two states. Answering the question ‘To what extent would the Russian borderland residents accept the ideas of the common future of Russia and Ukraine?’, 66.7% of the experts stated that they would be accepted by the majority of the residents and only 16.7% that they would be accepted by the minority. Speaking about the Ukrainian border regions, the experts gave another estimate with a more even distribution of opinions: the statements about the common future of both states would be accepted by the majority – (40.5%) and by the minority (32.4%).

The new political-cultural delimitation is underpinned not only by political, but also by cultural and civilisational processes along with the formation of new cultural and civilisational identities in the Ukrainian (to a greater extent) and Russian border regions. In Ukraine, these identities differ from the national ones, provoking local and inter-group conflicts. The future of Ukraine as an integral society remains unclear. For a large part of the Russian society, especially for the political elites, the events in Ukraine became another factor for the legitimisation of the conservative policy and confirmation of the statement that ‘Russia is not Ukraine’.

5. Conclusions

This research has revealed that the process of political and cultural delimitation in border regions has a symbolic nature but it becomes real in case of determination and demarcation of their statuses. Its facets include the axiological self-determination of the regional communities; determination of their pace in the historical-cultural process; the *Us vs Them* opposition; institutionalisation of the authentic or accepted as authentic political and cultural symbols and signs.

The political-cultural delimitation in the Russian-Ukrainian borderlands is conditioned the newly developed socio-cultural identification processes characterised by a variety of underlying axiological patterns, new symbols and the stochastic nature. These processes are more evident in Ukraine than in Russia. The prevailing identification model reproduces the patters of ethnocentrism with the Western/Central Ukrainian mentality pat-

tern spreading over the whole territory of Ukraine. Nevertheless, border regions do not fully accept this model, though even these regions show greater confrontation in the course of the socio-cultural identification and the political-cultural delimitation on either side of the border.

The predominantly confrontational nature of delimitation in Ukrainian and Russian border regions is caused by tactical interests of both sides and is increasingly supported by the current cultural and civilisational trends. The escalation of confrontation deepens of socio-cultural gaps in Russia and especially in Ukraine. As a result, Russia can lose leadership in the post-Soviet space and abandon its hope for the 'Russian world'. Besides, the conservative policy can subdue the quest for innovation. On the other hand, Ukraine, which strives to break the cultural and civilisational matrix it shares with Russia, is in danger of strong socio-cultural marginalisation. The confrontation-based delimitation potentially leads to a collapse of border regional systems and their reset to certain original natural states. At present it is difficult to forecast the nature of such entities, hidden under centuries-old strata of hybrid cultural matrices.

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