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**Alexandra Goujon**

# Nationalism in the Soviet and Post-Soviet Space : the cases of Belarus and Ukraine

22/1999

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**Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts**

**der Freien Universität Berlin**

Arbeitsbereich Politik und Gesellschaft

# Nationalism in the Soviet and post-Soviet Space: the cases of Belarus and Ukraine

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# 1 Introduction[1]

Since the Perestroika period, the study of nationalism in Soviet and post-Soviet space has become increasingly important. However, Popular Fronts (PF), which were leading national events in each of the Soviet republics in the late 1980s, were not so much investigated, notably because they were not the main actors in the achievement of independence and in the nation- and state-building process which followed it. It seems important to analyse PF as political and social actors, and different aspects of their development - their organisation, their political discourses and actions, their social integration and their political participation - in order to understand not only the formation of political, national and social movements under the conditions of a totalitarian regime, but also nationalism as a modern process and the specificity of its evolution in the Soviet and post-Soviet context. Nationalist movements like PF take part in the nation- and state-building process even if, in almost all cases, they do not lead this process : the ideas they spread are part of it to the extent that national political elites use them as new political and ideological resources. In this respect, nationalism in Belarus and Ukraine can be analysed via two related aspects : the formation and development of nationalist movements on the one hand, and the construction of state and nation on the other [2]. To a certain extent, Popular fronts symbolise the transition between the Soviet regime and the post-Soviet one, as well as all the changes this transformation involved in the social, national, and institutional fields. The dialectic between historical and social development, and the actors' strategies in the evolution of the Popular Fronts in Belarus and Ukraine, explains the diverging development of political spaces of both countries.

## 1.1 Soviet Republics and Popular Fronts

Most of the studies about Perestroika focused on events happening in Russia and particularly in Moscow and lacked attention to political situations in the Soviet Republics. This lack constitutes a problem for understanding the evolution of these republics after their independence. Even if the centre played a decisive role in the collapse of the USSR, it is important to see how political actors in the Soviet republics managed their actions and

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[1] This paper was presented at the Osteuropa-Institut (Freie Universität Berlin), January 11, 1999. It presents some reflections and questions concerning a doctoral dissertation in progress. The author is a PhD Student at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, France.

[2] On the history of Belarus and nationalism in this country, see: Sanford 1996; Vakar 1956; Zaprudnik 1993; On the history of Ukraine and nationalism in this country, see: Kappeler 1997; Subtelny 1994, Wilson 1997; Kuzio 1998.

discourses in the new context of independence and how they changed or transformed their political practices and thoughts. The analysis of PF created at the end of 1980s is of interest for understanding the nationalisation of the Soviet republics and the role of intellectual and political elites in this process [3]. In Belarus and Ukraine, PF did not lead this process directly, but the conditions of their creation and their activities, as well as their relations with the leading elite can provide some explanations for the political evolution of these countries.

Popular Fronts are political and social movements created at the end of 1980s in different republics of the USSR [4]. One of their first goals was to support the Perestroika initiated by Gorbachev. Claiming to defend national culture, they progressively became autonomous political organisations which contested Soviet political practices and even the existence of the Soviet Union. In that sense, Popular Fronts participated in the transfer of political debate to the level of the republics and contributed to the transformation of these republics into national political spaces. Even if local elites played a decisive role on the road to independence, Popular Fronts participated in the disintegration by urging these elites to elaborate strategies of adaptation. Thus they are actors and symbols of the nationalisation of the Soviet republics.

After the independence, Popular Fronts became one of the most important organised political forces after the Communist Parties in Belarus and Ukraine. They took part in the process of nation- and state-building as did other national political organisations. Through their existence and activities, they contributed to the creation of distinct political spaces in the post-Soviet zone. Political parties do not play a major role at the decision-making level, but their discourses and actions and the personal networks they involve are elements of the political differentiation between Belarus and Ukraine.

## 1.2 Political culture and socialisation

Work on Popular Fronts, and more generally on nationalism in the Soviet and post-Soviet space, requires an observer to become integrated into these movements (without becoming politically involved) to perceive how people work together, how they speak, how they organise their actions. In analysing the political discourse of PF, their organisation, their social integration in factories, their demonstrations, the aim of the research is to come closer to what we can call "political culture" [5]. We understand "political culture" to be the

[3] Concerning the example of the Baltic States, see: Muiznieks 1995, Trapans 1991.
[4] On the creation of these movements, see: Hosking 1992; Sedaitis, Butterfield 1991.
[5] Badie 1993.

meanings of thoughts, words and actions of the political actors in Belarus and Ukraine [6]. When they use terms like "democracy", "nation", "State", "citizenship", "national consciousness", what are their definitions? [7] An understanding of this is essential for the study of nationalism in Belarus and Ukraine.

"Political culture" also means the citizens' political representation in these countries. In this regard, the example of demonstrations is quite significant. Because of the Soviet experience, demonstrations represent order, harmony and respect for the regime. With Perestroika, new forms of demonstration were introduced into political life which were spontaneous, disordered, and symbolised protest [8]. This type of demonstrations is not well accepted by a part of the population because it implies a lack of order in the country. In this respect, democratisation is often perceived by political actors and citizens as a threat for public order and stability, and can lead some politicians to justify the necessity of a strong power to manage the transition period.

Another question should be how we can talk about a "Soviet political culture" and how, in each of the post-Soviet republics, political actors are trying to claim the existence of a "non-Soviet political culture". Thus, this work on Popular Fronts as movements can provide an opportunity to understand the way of thinking and action of social and political actors. "Political culture" should not be seen as a permanent, homogeneous and determinant element of thinking and behaving with which we could explain the specificity of political events in post-Soviet countries, as some culturalist interpretations do. "Political culture" or "political socialization" should be perceived as a set of actors' representations which structure discourses and behaviour but change according to the social and political context.

## 2 Theoretical Approaches

The study of Popular Fronts can lead to a more complete investigation of nationalism and can reveal some significant aspects of nation- and state-building. In France, nationalism is often associated primarily with nationalist movements, whereas Anglo-Saxon studies focus more on nation-building [9]. These two conceptions are not in contradiction, they simply express different points of view on different processes. In Western countries, state-building seems less important than in the post-Soviet space, because it took place much

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[6] About Belarus, see: Bugrova 1988; About Ukraine, see: Lindheim, Ralph; Luckyj 1996.
[7] On terminology, see: Niqueux 1990; Zaprudnik 1998.
[8] This is particularly relevant on television news programs.
[9] On different conceptions of nationalism, see: Delannoi, Taguieff, 1991; Eley, Geoff; Suny, Ronald Grigor (eds.) 1996.

further in the past, whereas the development of nationalist movements (or more specifically nationalist arguments) concern both Western and Eastern Europe. In this respect, the existence of a "banal nationalism" - the daily worship of the nation that people do no longer notice - in Western Europe should persuade observers to be more cautious regarding nationalist thoughts and behaviours, which are not restricted to the actors who claim them [10].

These two approaches of nationalism (nation-building and nationalist movements) can complete one another in a global study on nationalism. The study of the links between them is a way of observing how nationalist movements influence nation-building and, conversely, how nation-building process can provide some explanations on the evolution of nationalist movements. The research project is based upon the idea of using the analysis on PF in Belarus and Ukraine to propose some reflections on nation- and state-building in these countries. On one hand, the study on PF provides an analytical framework which can be applied to other nationalist and political movements in the post-Soviet space. Popular fronts evolved according to similar principles, such as their role in the formation of political parties.

On the other hand, the study of nationalist movements can inform us about the process of nation- and state-building in Belarus and Ukraine. The aim is not to produce a complete study of this process, which would require specific investigation of economic, communication or education networks, but to engage in some reflections which can promote an understanding of it. For example, how can the difficulties of the social integration of Popular Fronts provide some explanations about the social composition in these countries, about the relations among various social groups, about the social identity of the people and the links between all these realms and national identity? Another question could concern the circulation of ideas between groups called nationalists and groups called non-nationalists. Because of their common political socialisation, actors of different groups can use similar vocabulary and concepts even if they want to show how they are distinct from each other.

Concerning nationalism in Belarus and Ukraine, numerous stereotypes exist, particularly about Belarus. Many Western observers use arguments such as weak Belarusian national identity or national consciousness to explain the difficulties concerning nation- and state-building in this country. Such explanations are not sufficient and provide a deceptively final and simple answer to the problem. This approach can also be interpreted as the reproduction of arguments used during the Soviet period, when the propaganda of internationalism and "druzba narodov" [friendship of people] produced the illusion of

[10] Billig 1995.

equal treatment of nationalities in the USSR and served to hide, in practice, the existence of a hierarchy among them. Moreover, Belarus and Ukraine are new modern states and cannot be compared with the same arguments and logic to Western countries, which have undergone a long-term process of nation-building and the construction of a coherent national identity. However, political and social actors in established Western states give the impression that this process is considered a natural fact which seems impossible to deconstruct.

Some theories of nationalism which consider nations and states to be modern phenomena do not attempt to discover some fixed and permanent roots of the nation, but rather to point out the role of social and economic dynamics in nation-building [11]. The aim is to show the constructed aspect of the nation at different levels and to emphasise its imaginary dimension. In the USSR, industrialisation and the formation of a national elite in each republic are important factors which can explain the process of nation-building. On the other hand, the persistence of a significant rural population and the different integration processes in Europe seem to be key to understanding the difficulties experienced in achieving this. On a global level, religious, culturalist and civilisation-oriented explanations based upon rational arguments appear irrelevant even if in some cases, such as Yugoslavia, they can operate [12]. These explanations can work not because culture is a natural fact but because political actors present it as natural in their discourses and actions.

The study of the economic and social bases of nationalism does not lead to an explanation of nationalism via purely social factors. The role of political actors is also decisive, and even if the social context can explain it, there still exists an uncertainty that we have to take into account in order not to produce some supposedly final explanations. We can always find causes to explain an event or a situation, but it is important not to consider these causes as the only possible ones or as something preordained. This combination of social explanations on one hand, and political and strategic ones on the other, can prevent us from analysing the success or failure of nation- and state-building as something predetermined, especially in the post-Soviet space where these processes are more recent than in the rest of Europe. In order to avoid a competitive approach between two distinct theoretical arguments - the role of actors and their choices on the one hand, and the structuralist interpretation on the other - the analysis is based on a complementary one.

To study nationalism in the post-Soviet space, it is also necessary to work on nationalism in the Soviet Union because, even though Soviet propaganda was based on internationalism and was used against the so-called "bourgeois nationalists", we can still

[11] Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Anderson 1983.
[12] Hastings 1997; Huntington 1996.

speak about the existence of a "Soviet nationalism". The works of Viktor Zaslavsky, Rogers Brubaker, Rasma Karklins or Roman Szporluk are relevant for understanding this form of Soviet nationalism because they reveal how Soviet practices contributed to the institutionalisation of nationalities [13]. Soviet nationalism was characterised by a classification of national groups into titular and non-titular nationalities, which established distinctions between them and was based on ethnic allegiance. Thus, although the aim of the Soviet leaders was to create a new form of affiliation, the "Soviet people" [sovietskij narod], based on one ideology, the conception of nation combined two distinct elements, a territorial one and an ethnic one. The existence of a Soviet citizenship did not lead to the abolition of the notion of "nationality", which was a category in personal documents as well as a census category which contributed to preserving and institutionalising ethnic affiliation. Thus, what we call ethnonationalism is not a creation of the late 1980s or the revival of old practices and beliefs, but was part of Soviet nationality policy [14]. This feature is important for perceiving some contradictory aspects of the national discourse of the Popular fronts. Nationalism also existed in the republics among leaders who worked to defend their political interests and those of the area in which they were working [15].

## 3 Nationalism : three ways of functioning

In order to integrate these different aspects of research, we propose three directions which can be apprehended as three ways of dealing with nationalism in the Soviet and post-Soviet space and more specifically in Belarus and Ukraine : nationalism and social relations, nationalism and nationality, nationalism and construction of political spaces.

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13 Zaslavsky 1990; Zaslavsky 1994 Szporluk 1991; Zwick 1983; Brubaker, Rogers 1996; Karklins, Rasma 1986.

14 Connor 1994.

15 Gleason 1990.

## 3.1 Nationalism and social relations

Focusing on ideological frameworks and political actors, the study of nationalism is not so much concerned by the social basis of its development, notably regarding the post-Soviet countries. Nevertheless, the state-based historical sociology, which developed in Western Europe, provides interesting elements of thinking which can be used in the Soviet and post-Soviet context, like the urbanization and its consequences on the nation-building process. In this chapter, the aim is to analyse the linkage between nationalism and society, social issues, and to discuss three range of questions : the social basis of nationalist movements (Popular Fronts), their conceptions of the society, and the configuration of the Belarusian and Ukrainian societies and its link with nationalism.

### 3.1.1 Popular Fronts and Intellectual Networks

The Belarusian and the Ukrainian Popular Fronts emerged from the mobilisation of national intellectual networks within each republic. The formation of these networks was possible due to the existence of cultural, social or university institutions in which intellectuals could regularly meet each other and create a sort of community of values. These institutions existed within each republic and included the Writers' and Compositors' Unions and the Academy of Sciences. These organisations were a way for the Soviet leaders to guide the activities of this intelligentsia within an ideological framework. At the same time, they promoted formally and morally the formation of a national intellectual élite because they created areas of discussion and symbolic structures of belonging in which Belarusian and Ukrainian intellectuals recognised one another [16].

To a certain extent, political institutions such as Communist Party or the ministries played the same role at the political level when the Soviet Union collapsed. In 1991, a network of political elites existed in each republic and could proceed to transform the Soviet institutions into national ones. It was the official elites and not the dissidents who managed these changes even if, in Baltic countries, the role of dissent was more important[17]. As for the intellectual elite, the existence of organisations formed only by the political and administrative elite of the republics promoted the creation of social networks which are important for the relations of power in post-Soviet Belarus and Ukraine [18].

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[16] Goujon 1998.
[17] Beissinger 1992.
[18] Segbers, De Spiegeleire Stephan 1995; Lindner 1997; Kopylov 1997.

The intellectual and political networks existed in each of the Soviet republics were the basis of Popular Fronts in each country. The meetings of their leaders in the framework of informal conferences, as well as inside the Inter-regional Group of the Congress of People's deputies, contributed to put on the agenda the question of autonomy, and the independence issue claimed by the Baltic Popular Fronts. They progressively helped and supported each other in defining and in solving their political requests. The creation of national movements based on networks existing at the republican level led to the mutual recognition of the specificity of each republic and each national cultures.

The Writers' Union was composed of different branches in each region of Belarus and Ukraine and created the conditions for the emergence of Popular Fronts in the regions. Thus, the formation and organisation of the intellectual elite in the Soviet Union can explain the fairly rapid expansion of the movement within each republic, after their creation in 1988-1989, even if the role of the capital was the most important. Leaders from the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) focused their attention on Minsk and changed their strategies after 1994 when they realized that it was not possible for them to gain access to power [19]. In Ukraine, because of regional disparities, the regional branches of Rukh ["movement" - the Ukrainian Popular Front] were important for the evolution of the movement toward claiming to be a national organisation. It is also because of these disparities that the leaders created a coordination council to strengthen the existence of a single political strategy and to adapt this strategy to regional developments [20].

The PF social composition and more specifically the political socialisation and social affiliation of their members are important for understanding their functioning and decision-making and for revealing differences between the Belarusian and the Ukrainian movements. In the BPF, the existence of a presidency and the personal character of Zianon Pazniak, who has been leading the movement from the beginning, were two factors which slowed down the expression of different points of view within the movement, especially on the decision-making level [21]. Pazniak's attempt to control the membership of the movement was linked to his weak social position in the scientific or intellectual structures - compared to that of his Ukrainian counterpart - and his fear of the Soviet regime [22]. His authoritarian style of leadership - attested to by some leading members - could compromise the future of the movement because of his exile in the United States beginning in 1996. Thus, different tendencies have begun to express themselves and to contribute to the risk of disintegration of the movement.

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[19] Interviews and meetings with BNF members at the local level in 1997-1998.
[20] Meetings with Parovsky Mikola, June 19-20, 1998.
[21] On the Belarusian Popular Front, see: Goujon 1998; Viachorka 1993.
[22] Pazniak 1992.

Concerning the Rukh, the situation is different. At the beginning, the executive organ of the Rukh was collegial, including various currents, two of which were dominant : one representing people coming from the Communist Party and one involving dissidents, particularly the Helsinki Committee [23]. This type of organisation was a threat to the homogeneity of the movement but an advantage in terms of the political strategy, which could adapt to the political situation in the country. Ivan Drach, who led the movement, could cope with these contradictions because he could play the role of a compromise man. His social position as the president of the Ukrainian Writers' Union provided him the opportunity to be in contact with the Communist Party and to be aware of its strategy. At the same time, as an intellectual, he could establish good relations with the dissident circles. With the creation of parties in 1990-1992, the Rukh transformed itself into a party led by Vyacheslav Chornovil - a well-known dissident - who created a new form of leadership and adopted a more radical position towards the new leaders of the republic. At the beginning of 1999, the Rukh faced split when some Chornovil's opponents accused him of making political decisions single-handedly [24].

### 3.1.2 Popular Fronts and Social Representation

With regard to the relationship between social dynamics and Popular Fronts, an investigation of some other aspects can explain why they could not fit into the structures of power within the framework of a peaceful collapse. The intellectuals constituted a social group rather distinct from the political and administrative one. They were not highly valued within the Soviet system of representation and were considered an independent group with privileges. As Cappelli demonstrates in his article, they were under-represented in legislative institutions because of the necessity to represent above all the worker class[25]. Even if members of Belarusian and Ukrainian Popular Fronts joined the Supreme Soviets after the "open" parliamentary elections in the republics in 1990, their image did not change. Due to the influence of Soviet ideology, they still represent, for a large majority of people, a marginal and homogeneous social group which is not concerned with problems of daily life. Although PF represented the main force critical of the Soviet regime, they did not accede to power after 1991. Local leaders used independence as a way to legitimate themselves in a new context and used the poor image of intellectuals to show that they were not competent to lead the countries [26]. This latent conflict between intellectual and administrative elites is quite relevant now in Belarus and Ukraine, where some

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[23] On the Rukh, see: Haran 1993; Kovtun 1995; Kublic'kij 1996; Goncharuk 1997.

[24] Vyacheslav Chornovil was killed on 25 March 1999 in a car crash near Kiev. He spent 15 years in Soviet prisons as a dissident and had led Rukh since 1992.

[25] Cappeli 1991 The representation of the worker class was also an illusion because of the important number of kolkhoz and sovkhoz presidents included in this category.

[26] Interview with Shushkevich Stanislav, December 23, 1996.

intellectuals from the Rukh and the Belarusian Popular Front want to portray themselves as the only respectable and honest representatives of the national culture and the national interests of their country.

The poor image of intellectuals can also explain why it was and is very difficult for PF to filter into other social groups, such as workers or farmers. At the beginning, PF were trying to prove that they were as "popular" as their name suggests. Their membership statistics were constructed - like all statistics - to indicate the high level of workers in their social composition [27]. Regarding the rural sphere, PF leaders wanted to show that they represented the "pure" national culture based on traditional rural life. All their discourses on this subject had the goal of insisting that these traditions had been perverted by Soviet methods and practices and that this perversion still existed at the rural level. Another way of proving their popularity was the PF attempt to be part of workers' and miners' strikes. By the creation of "groups of support" in factories, the Belarusian Popular Front tried to manage the April 1991 strikes in Belarus in which they played a rather important role [28]. The transformation of these groups into strike committees was the process used in this context. In Ukraine, the integration of Rukh in mines and industrial factories was more difficult, particularly in the Donbass region where strikes were common from 1989 [29]. Contrary to Belarus, the Ukrainian strikes were initiated principally by miners whose strike comittees were already well organized. Moreover, the Belarusian strikes began in Minsk where the Belarusian Popular Front was well implemented although the Rukh had some difficulties to develop itself in the Donbass region.

Even if this description of how PF represented themselves as "popular" seems to be a rational and calculated strategy, we should mention that this process was, in most cases, unconscious. Here, the point is to analyse and deconstruct political mechanisms and not to pass any normative judgements on them. The failure of PF to achieve power after independence - or even to gain positions in the government in the case of the Belarusian Popular Front - was a significant disappointment for leaders of these movements. Contrary to their actions in the previous period, they explained this defeat by blaming the population for being perverted by the previous regime. In doing so, they admitted that they were unpopular or, more precisely, non-popular. This was partly true due to the fact that they were using a political and national discourse in opposition to the Soviet ideology so well integrated into the society. The established political elites used also arguments to prove and to show that Popular Fronts were, in fact, unpopular and, above all, incompetent to lead the country.

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[27] Paniotto 1991.

[28] Interviews with BPF members who were involved in the Workers' Movements (Ivashkevich Viktor, June 11, 1998; Antonchik Seguej, June 30, 1998).

[29] Rusnachenko 1995 Interviews with Rukh members in Dnipropetrovsk.

### 3.1.3 Nation-building and Social Development

The analysis of Popular Fronts and their integration into social areas may lead to the conclusion that the Soviet Union is not a "mass society", but a society in which different social groups existed [30]. The differentiation among groups depends on profession, on salaries, on their relations to key decision-makers, on their representation within the society. As mentioned above, during the Soviet period the intellectuals had a bad image within society not only because they had some privileges but also because this kind of representation was advantageous to the official authorities. In post-Soviet Belarus and Ukraine, the social differentiation changed somewhat due to the emergence of new groups who tried to gain economic profit with the collapse of the USSR. Here, some financial and commercial networks at different levels are involved : we should for example distinguish people who are doing business at a local level and those who are managers at a national or international level. Except the study of leading social groups, it is important to analyse the changes of all the society, and the formation of a new social hierarchy. The current question is to see how social groups will change their society, in which direction, and the linkage of these social changes with nationalism [31]. Which groups are relevant regarding to decision-making, economic control over industries? Which groups are leading the countries and will they have an interest in developing a national and state discourse?

The difficulty Popular Fronts have to fit into different social areas can also provide information on the social composition of the Soviet and post-Soviet societies and its consequences for nation- and state-building. Regarding social trends in Belarus and Ukraine, we can observe an important difference which affects the development of nationalism : the existence of an urban and university tradition in Ukraine and not in Belarus within its current borders [32]. In Ukraine, there are several important towns which had a historical past (Lviv as an artistic and university town ; Kiev and Kharkiv as university and administrative towns ; Odessa as a commercial town). These towns can balance the lack of a consistent national identity in rural areas. In modern Belarus, the first university was created in 1921 in Minsk. Before the creation of a modern Belarusian state, the Belarusian élite went to universities in Vilnius, Krakow or Saint Petersburg [33]. This is one of the reasons why Vilnius is always presented by Belarusian national movements as a historical town of the former Belarusian political entity. This lack of urban and university traditions also explains why the Belarusian elites continued to go to the traditional Russian

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[30] On these questions, see: Arendt 1972; Aron 1970; Lefort 1994; Lefort 1999; Birnbaum, 1996; Brucan 1990; Matthews 1972.

[31] Segbers 1997; Segbers 1998b.

[32] On the importance of city networks, see: Rokkan 1975.

[33] On the national élite formation, see: Kappeler 1992; We should also mention the importance of the Jewish population in Belarusian cities until the 1930s. See: Guthier 1977.

universities during the Soviet period and why it was difficult to create independent and national university centres in Belarus. This factor seems more relevant than simply advocating the lack of a modern state tradition in this part of Europe.

The lack or existence of urban and university tradition is important for understanding not only the creation of national movements in Belarus and Ukraine, but also the kind of nation-building occurring in the post-Soviet space. This is all the more important because of the separation between rural and urban areas according to which society was organised in the USSR and which remains after its collapse [34]. This separation and the specific organisation of work and life in rural areas are useful for understanding the difficulty of achieving cultural homogenisation in post-Soviet states such as Belarus, where about one third of the total population lives in rural areas. The separation between towns and villages stems from control of migratory flows and from collective farms which encouraged the formation of a rural identity. This identity was strengthened by the kolkhoz and sovkhoz presidents, who played and continue to play the role of the boss in rural areas. They are responsible for payment of salaries as well as food supplies, and they transform themselves into advisers during electoral campaigns. Collective farms have created, among the rural population, the conditions for loyalty to the local boss and have contributed to the mystification of a supra-national or national leader [35]. If we take into account the role of both Belarusian and Ukrainian presidents in this field, we can see how President Lukashenka uses his image as a kolkhoz boss and the characteristics of rural identity in his speeches on state-building and democracy by trying to establish a direct link to the people. On the contrary, President Kuchma in Ukraine has a discourse on state and nation which emphasizes the importance of industrial potential and its relationship to a modern and "urban" identity.

[34] About the separation between towns and countries, see: Zaslavsky 1994.

[35] About the relationship between the state and the peasantry in Western and Eastern Europe, see: Mendras 1995; Weber 1983.

## 3.2 Nationalism and nationality

The aim of this chapter is to analyse how the relations between individuals and the nation are represented and expressed by political actors. What are the meanings of nationality and nation according to the leaders of Popular Fronts and the main political actors in Belarus and Ukraine? Is there a break or a continuity with the Soviet meanings? What are the contradictions within the Soviet ideology and the post-Soviet ones?

### 3.2.1 Popular Fronts and National Ideology

Concerning the political discourse on nation and nationality, Popular Fronts in Belarus and Ukraine use the same type of arguments and ideas, such as the important role of national language, the use of historical national symbols and the necessity to develop a "pure" Ukrainian or Belarusian culture. The development of "national culture" was and still is the main claim of the PF in Belarus and Ukraine. For them, with Russification and Sovietization the natural development of their national cultures ceased [36]. The first claims dealt with symbols of these national cultures and especially with the national language, which is an external sign and an emblem of expression [37]. Moreover, the national language is considered a concrete characteristic which can be evaluated by others [38]. For PF leaders, the use of the national language is a way for people to reveal their national affiliation and thus language and nationality should coincide. According to this conception, it is difficult to consider someone who is speaking Russian a Ukrainian or a Belarusian. Moreover, a person using the Russian language is automatically seen as a non-national or a "cosmopolitan" person, which is an offence to the PF side. On the contrary, a man using the Ukrainian or Belarusian language is considered a nationalist, which is a symbol of honour according to PF leaders.

The complex relationship between nationality and language is linked to Soviet practices which promoted the use of the Russian language while trying to insist on the nationalist meaning of national languages. Thus the laws on national languages adopted in 1990 in Belarus and Ukraine but also in other republics were a symbolic answer to the PF claims from the local authorities. However, these laws and their application still play an important

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[36] About PF's national ideologies, see their programs: Pragramnyja Dakumenty BNF "Adradzèn'ne" (Program Documents BNF "Revival"), Minsk, 1989; Mouvement national d'Ukraine pour la reconstruction. Roukh. Matériaux du Congrès constitutif, Paris, 1990; Prohramna i statut Narodnoho Rukhu Ukraïni (Program and Status of the Popular Movement of Ukraine), Kiïv, 1991.

[37] In general, see: Fishman 1975.

[38] On the BPF's national ideology, see: Goujon 1988.

role in Belarus and Ukraine because they are symbols of state policy and its orientation [39]. In Belarus, the adoption of Russian as an official language as the same level as Belarusian, by the 1995 referendum, was denounced by the Belarusian Popular Front as an attempt to halt the development of national culture in Belarus. This position should be interpreted while keeping in mind the Soviet practices of bilingualism [40]. The use of national languages is represented not only as a national but also as a political affiliation. Speaking Belarusian or Ukrainian implies political support for the PF or their allied organisations.

The national ideology of PF is based on national history and national myths which are supposed to prove the ancient nature of Belarusians or Ukrainians and the specificity of their historical development, which was stopped by the Russian and the Soviet invasions[41]. The term "revival", which was attached to the name Popular Fronts, is an attempt to express this conception of history based upon the memory of events prior to the Soviet period. PF intellectuals were advocates of national history, which had to highlight glorious events, personalities or political organisations in the country. In Ukraine, the national history proposed by the Rukh became, to a large extent, the official one promoted by the government after independence. In Belarus, this process began in 1991 but was largely reversed with the election of Lukashenka as president in 1994. From this moment on, the Belarusian Popular Front has presented a version of Belarusian history distinct from the official one. The historical origins of an independent Belarus are linked to the Belarusian Popular Republic created in 1918 [42]. Contrary to the Ukrainian government in exile, which handed over its mandate to the independent one in 1992, the government of the Belarusian Popular Republic still exists in the United States. To oppose the official policy of integration with Russia, interpreted as a threat for the existence of an independent Belarus, the Belarusian Popular Front is launching a campaign among people to establish citizenship of this Republic [43]. But, this historical event, which is an important part of the BPF national discourse, is unknown to the population, which is under the influence of Soviet political socialisation processes and Lukashenka's promotion of another version of history [44].

With regard to nation and nationality, PF have developed an ethnic conception which, in some cases, is close to a biological one. The ethnic conception of nation and nationality spread by PF does not completely break with the Soviet one. In the Soviet Union, a contradiction existed between the political discourse on nationalities and practice related to it. Under the slogan of internationalism, Soviet propaganda presented the Soviet

[39] Arel 1993.
[40] Pozniak 1988.
[41] Wilson 1997.
[42] About the history of the state in Belarus, see: Kipel 1988.
[43] On this question, see: Belaruskija Vedamas'ci (Belarusian News), n°2 (12), 1998.
[44] Makhovskij 1999.

experience as a way of establishing a new form of affiliation, the "Soviet people" [sovietskij narod], which could transcend cultural differences among people. At the same time, there was a hierarchy among nationalities, not only in the distribution of official posts in the administration or in the Communist Party, but also in the politics of culture, including the superiority of the Russian language [45]. Thus, ethnic affiliation was important for the statistics, was an obligatory entry in passports and was used as a first and primary form of belonging which was supposed to end with the construction of a Soviet people [46]. Thus the distinction between citizenship - Soviet - and nationality - ethnic affiliation - created two types of identity. Since the first one disappeared in 1991, in theory but maybe not in fact, the second one (in its Soviet meaning) is used as the main form of identity. This conception of ethnicity is quite manifest in the works of Soviet ethnologists, which can furnish interesting explanations regarding the political thought of the national movements in Belarus and Ukraine and notably their vocabulary, e.g. the use of terms such as *etnos*.

[45] Zaslavsky 1990; Brubaker 1996; Azrael 1978.
[46] About Soviet passports, see: Zaslavsky, Luryi, 1979; Karklins 1986.

### 3.2.2 *Etnos* theory, Nation and Nationality

Leaders of Popular Fronts consider nation and ethnicity to be natural and primordial features and the state as representing only an artificial political form of nation. PF's statements attempt to demonstrate the importance of ethnic feeling and belonging to a nation and present this relationship as a genetic one. The development of this ethnic conception has some relation to Soviet ethnology which, in trying to present a social basis for ethnic categories, forged ethnicist concepts [47]. The *etnos* theory outlined in the 1920s and used since the 1960s in the Soviet Institute of Ethnology is a central element of this interpretation [48]. Defined as a social category, *etnos* corresponds to a primitive level of collective human being which should cease to exist with the achievement of social and economic progress. However, the scientific and common use of this term leads one to think that it is a euphemism to avoid the use of the term "race". In many of his speeches, Z. Pazniak, president of the BPF, spreads the idea of a biological link to the nation which appears in his use of the word "genocide" to characterise crimes committed during the Stalin period as well as the Chernobyl disaster [49]. The goal is to show the will of the Soviet power structures to destroy the Belarusian *etnos* as the genetic root of the nation. The expression "cultural genocide" employed to condemn Lukashenka's politics is used to denounce the moral and physical destruction of the Belarusian national culture [50]. BPF speeches interpret political events and actions not in relation to political actors' strategies and social realities, but as dependent on cultural and ethnic particularities, thus proceeding toward an "ethnicisation of social relations" [51].

The term *etnos* and ethnic conceptions are also used in Ukraine, as demonstrated by the goal of a new discipline in the Institute of State and Law called *etnoderjavaznavstvo*, or ethnostatescience [52]. A group of scholars working in the fields of philosophy, political science and sociology created this new topic of research about two years ago. They have already published several books on the subject and two encyclopaedias, among them the "Little encyclopaedia of etnostatescience" [53]. Their texts combine aspects of Ukrainian thought of the XIX-XX centuries and elements of Soviet ethnology. Even if these specialists defend themselves as nationalists, the aim presented in their books is to prove the ethnic roots of the Ukrainian modern state and to create a state memory of Ukraine.

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[47] On Soviet ethnology, see: Bromley 1974, Dunn 1974; Gellner 1980.
[48] Bromlej 1973.
[49] Goujon, forthcoming.
[50] Ne - kul'turnamu henacydu belaruskae nacyi! (No to the cultural genocide of Belarusian nation!), Zajava Sojmu BNF "Adradzèn'ne", Declaration of the Soïm of the BNF "Revival", June 13, 1998.
[51] Fourier, Vermes 1994.
[52] Goujon 1998.
[53] Mala enciklopedija etnoderzavoznavstva (Short Encyclopaedia of Ethnostatescience), Kiïv,1996.

One of the scholars published a book called "Etno- and Naciogenez" in which she represents the Ukrainian statehood by a spiral which began with the "ethnic substratum" of Ukrainians and ended with the independent state [54]. This pattern reproduces the evolutionist theories which existed in Soviet ideology and hopes to show how the Ukrainians progressively built their state. This necessity to appeal to Ukrainian ethnicity in scientific and political discourses, which is based upon an evolutionist conception of history, is a brake to the development of a civic notion of citizenship in post-Soviet Ukraine.

### 3.2.3 State-building and citizenship

Nevertheless, neither in Ukraine nor in Belarus did political leaders adopt, juridically, an ethnic conception of nation. In both countries, citizenship is based on the territory. Contrary to Soviet practice, nationality is not an obligatory line in the passport, but citizens can ask to include it if they wish to. However, the practice of using ethnic affiliation as a relevant category in social and political life is not going to disappear [55]. We can observe the persistence of this practice at the political level and in daily life when people define one another and use stereotypes in cultural representations. Even if there are some similarities between Belarus and Ukraine in this field, especially because they were part of the same political area, their state policies have been established according to different political principles. In Ukraine, nationality policy is close to an "official nationalism" based on a combination of the ideas spread by the national movements and the conceptions existing during the Soviet period [56]. In Belarus, the Lukashenka's policy is an adaptation of Soviet conceptions of nation and state to the conditions of the post-Soviet period without any consideration of the ideas propagated by national movements. The "national ideology" which Lukashenka is elaborating, inviting the academicians and writers of the country to help him in this task, refers to the supremacy of the state and patriotism [57]. In this context, the claims of the Belarusian Popular Front correspond to an "opposition nationalism" which sometimes uses such arguments as the President's supposed gypsy descent to explain his politics. This is not so different from the presidential statement concerning antisemitism in Russia, in which he explained that it was created by Jewish people working in the mass media [58]. As we can observe, the study of notions like nation and nationality can provide some explanations of the role of post-

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[54] Onishchenko 1997.
[55] Smith, Law, Wilson, Bohr, Allworth 1998.
[56] On the definition of "official nationalism", see: Seton-Watson 1977. On state-building in Ukraine, see: Kuzio, Taras 1998.
[57] Soveckaja Belorussija (Soviet Belorussia), November 26, 1998.
[58] RFE/RL Newsline, 2.243, Part I, 18 December 1998.

Soviet political actors, who use different systems of representation to legitimate themselves, as well as the persistent influence of Soviet political and cultural socialisation.

## 3.3 Nationalism and construction of political spaces

The idea of this chapter is to study the relations between nationalism and the construction of political spaces in Belarus and Ukraine. What is the role of Popular Fronts in the construction of political spaces in these two countries? What are the consequences of the non-revolutionary transition in the post-Soviet space for the processes of state-building and democratisation? In this respect, what are the links between state-building and democracy? What is the meaning of democracy according to political actors? What we can say about the political differentiation between republics about seven years after the collapse of the Soviet Union?

### 3.3.1 Popular Fronts and political changes

The creation and the modes of expression of PF in Belarus and Ukraine occurred according to common trends even if there were some differences, such as their internal functioning or their relations with the Communist Parties and local leaders, particularly due to the personal history and behaviour of the movements' respective leaders. The differences between Ivan Drach as the leader of Rukh and Zianon Pazniak as the head of the BPF are quite relevant in this respect (see above). PF were the first organised social and political movements in the republics and they created new forms of expression in the Soviet Union, organising demonstrations to express their political ideas, publishing secret newspapers, and participating in electoral campaigns. To a certain extent, they forced the established local leaders of the republics to respond to their claims, which were considered provocative, and to find some credible answers in order to remain in power. Popular fronts were visible movements because of their street actions and the authorities could not more ignore them, even if they tried to discredit them. Moreover, with the weakening of the Communist Party and the central power, the republican political élites looked for new political and ideological resources. And, at the beginning of 1990s, Popular Fronts were the main political initiators. Even if the direct role of PF in each republic is difficult to determine, the simple fact of their existence and their activities progressively transformed the political space and changed the traditions of political representation in the Soviet Union. The internal evolution of PF, their relations with the authorities and the changes within the local Communist parties are relevant elements of the differentiation between Soviet republics.

PF also changed the system of political representation in Belarus and Ukraine. Traditionally, demonstrations in the USSR provided an opportunity for the regime to show the discipline, union and harmony of the people. However, demonstrations organised by PF expressed disorder and protest. Participation in elections was the first attempt to contest the power of the political élites in the country and the entry of Popular Fronts, as the only opposition forces, into the Supreme Soviets was the first indication of a different organisation of political life and the first calling into question of the legitimate power [59]. The creation of parliamentary factions and their progressive multiplication was a characteristic of the new forms of political representation in each republic [60]. The PF participation in the Supreme Soviets characterised a new era for these parliamentary institutions, whose role had been to confirm the decisions made by Communist Parties. The sessions of Supreme Soviets became longer, with many draft laws being initiated by PF factions which were more independent than Communist ones. The role of the Supreme Council in Ukraine, whose attributes changed beginning with the Perestroika period, is significant in this respect. Some laws were adopted as a result of PF claims, such as the law on national languages. The role of PF was important at different moments, first of all during the vote on independence and during the first steps of the nationalisation process in the republics.

The elections in 1989 and 1990 created the conditions for a political differentiation within the Popular fronts but also within the Communist Parties. This political differentiation led to the formation of various currents in these two political organisations and to the creation of political parties starting in 1990 [61]. The first open elections and the possibility of taking part in the work of the Supreme Soviets encouraged the creation of parties because of their future opportunity to participate in political processes. Political parties emerged due to political, ideological or strategic differentiation inside PF and immediately after 1991 within Communist Parties due to their initial prohibition. Some other organisations, such as the Ukrainian Helsinki Committee, created their own party (Ukrainian Republican Party - URP). The URP was part of the Rukh until 1992, when the Rukh became a party without the possibility of "associated members" which had existed previously [62]. Throughout the post-Soviet space, parties do not play an important role because, as young political organisations, they are not integrated into various social spheres and they frequently undergo splits because of personal ambitions. While personal and social networks seem to be more significant, parties nonetheless participated and participate in the construction of new national and political spaces in the region. In Ukraine, this is relevant because of the

[59] Urban 1990.
[60] Arel 1990/91.
[61] On the formation of political parties in the USSR, see: Tolz 1990.
[62] On political parties in Ukraine, see: Politichni partiï Ukraïni (Political Parties of Ukraine), Kiïv, 1998.

1997 electoral law and the 1998 parliamentary rules, which promote the institutionalisation of political parties [63].

By initiating new movements, organising political actions and participating in republican parliaments, Popular fronts contributed to the democratisation of the Soviet society. In this respect, one of their first claims was to denounce the leading role of the Communist Party in this society and to create all the possibilities to oppose it. To set an example, the concept of "Popular Fronts" was based on democratic principles with open membership and discussions, even if, as we told above, such approaches were difficult to implement because of the existence of some authoritarian or radical tendencies. As for other political organisations, the difficulty was to combine the efficiency and the democratic will. According to the PF's ideology, the democratisation of the Soviet political system was intrinsically linked to the support to national interests, and later, to the question of independence. Someone who supports the Belarusian language, the Ukrainian culture, the national economic and social interests is perceived as a democratic person, principally because he/she defends political ideas opposed to the Soviet ones, judged as undemocratic. This conception of democracy relies on the PF's national ideology, we presented above, and which is based on an inherent linkage between national affiliation and human rights.

During the Perestroika period, PF used the political instability to promote their ideas, as the adoption of national symbols testified. After independence, neither movements joined executive and governing institutions, even if this is less true for the Rukh because some members went to work in the presidential and local administrations and in ministries. The point is, however, that they did not control the process of post-Soviet political management and change. The traditional political elites organised themselves, institutionalising a political system which combines old practices and new realities.

### 3.3.2 Popular Fronts in new political systems

The Rukh and the BNF are significant political forces in their respective countries and they are part of the opposition. The differences between them are important because of the political situation in each country and the internal organisation and conflicts of each movement. In 1992, the Rukh transformed itself from a movement into a political party, becoming the second largest party of the republic with branches in each region, even if it lost a lot of members due to the elimination of the institution of associated members. From 1990 on, the Rukh has had a faction in the Supreme Council of Ukraine (about 10% of the seats after the 1998 elections) and has some influence on politics. The opposition in which

63 Woronowycz 1998.

it is working has a political role in the country, especially inside the Parliament. The Rukh has relations with the administration, where some of its members work, and with the President, who is a man of compromise trying to combine the ideas of different parliamentary factions. Even though radical nationalist groups in Ukraine exist, the Rukh still has an image of a party supporting Ukrainian "national interests" and independence, particularly at a time when some political actors are raising the question of integration with Russia or the implementation of Russian as a second official language.

In Belarus, the BPF, which is one of the largest political organisations, exists in two forms: as a political movement beginning in 1989 and as a party from 1993 to the present. According to BPF leaders and contrary to Ukrainian ones, a movement which unites different political and social groups is still a necessity to oppose the Communist nomenklatura, who is still in power in Belarus. The BPF, like other political parties, is working within a sort of parallel political framework represented by the opposition, which is not politically recognised by the authorities. Lukashenka's authoritarian regime does not allow the opposition to take part in decision-making or to participate in legal institutions[64]. Since 1995, the BPF has no deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the 13th session, which became the only legitimate parliament recognised by European organisations after the adoption of a new Constitution by referendum in 1996. According to this new Constitution, which was initiated by Lukashenka, the Supreme Soviet was dissolved by decree and replaced by a bicameral Parliament where there is no faction and no representative from the opposition [65]. Since 1996 and after massive arrests in April 1996, the president of the BPF Z. Pazniak was granted political asylum in the United States. This situation creates some problems inside the movement where different political ideas and strategies are being expressed and where his legitimacy is decreasing. Although the foreign policy of Lukashenka is oriented toward the East, with the project of an economic, monetary, military and political integration with Russia initiated by the creation of a common union in 1996, the BPF represents, as it did in the late 1980s, the Belarusian national movement supporting the independence of Belarus.

### 3.3.3 Belarus and Ukraine : two distinct political spaces

After eight years of independence, Belarus and Ukraine have their distinct national symbols, their different national histories, their own money, their foreign policies and their national armies. They have adopted distinct constitutions, they are producing their own legislation and developing mechanisms of power. They form two separate political spaces

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[64] Lindner 1997.
[65] Sahm 1997.

even if they function under some common political principles and modes of organization. Such institutions as the Presidential Administration or the Security Council exist in both countries, in which the Constitutions have established presidential regimes, even if the Ukrainian parliament has more power than the Belarusian one [66]. In both countries, political parties play a minor role in comparison to old political networks which are still functioning and in which some leading personalities have power. Differences between these two political spaces are to be found, above all, in their political practices and in the actors who are leading the countries. Even if in both countries the Presidents use decrees to implement their politics, the Ukrainian Parliament forces President Kuchma to take its decisions into account, which causes conflicts between the two institutions and illustrates the difficulties of regulating the separation of powers in the Newly Independent States. Such conflicts, which have also existed at particular moments in Western Europe, demonstrate the significance of the debate concerning presidentialism and parliamentarism in these countries [67]. Because of the lack of a stable majority in the Ukrainian Parliament and its difficulties in functioning, Kuchma proposed to modify the Constitution and to give more power to the President [68]. He also mentioned the possibility of extending his power to issue decrees on economic questions which are not regulated by law. The Ukrainian president received this privilege when the Constitution was adopted in 1996 and it is scheduled to end in June 1999. In January 1999, a majority of Ukrainian deputies supported a motion initiated by the Communist faction to amend the Constitution by suppressing the institution of the presidency [69]. These conflicts between political institutions and, within them, among different personal networks, express the tension between two different notions : the idea of democracy and the concept of order. This tension or contradiction, which is not specific to the post-Soviet space, is particularly relevant for understanding the state-building processes and political changes in this region. It reveals the difficulty of the democratisation and institutionalisation of power structures.

In Belarus, the establishment of an authoritarian regime by Lukashenka involves suppressing possibilities of expression and protest within the legal political space. According to the new Constitution (1996), the Supreme Soviet was dissolved and replaced by a bicameral Parliament whose Chamber of representatives (lower chamber) was not elected. It is composed of 110 members who were selected from the 260 deputies of the Supreme Soviet elected in 1995. This Parliament, in which political affiliation is not important, has no power compared to the Presidential Administration, which is the primary institution to initiate or revise draft laws. Arguing the necessity of "direct

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66 On constitutions, see: Konstitucija Respubliki Belarus' (Constitution of the Republic of Belarus), Minsk, 1994; Kanstytucyja Rèspubliki Belarus' (Constitution of the Republic of Belarus), Minsk, 1997; Konstitucija Ukraïni (Constitution of Ukraine), Kiïv, 1996.

67 On presidents, see: Taras, 1997. On parliaments, see: Remington 1994.

68 RFE/RL Newsline, 2.241, Part II, 16 December 1998.

69 RFE/RL Newsline, 3.10, Part II, 15 January 1999.

democracy", Lukashenka uses populist arguments to implement his policy, in which the referendum mechanism plays an important role [70]. The 1995 and 1996 referendums were a way for him to strengthen his popularity and his power [71]. Different social spheres are progressively being brought under state control via the creation or rehabilitation of professional and social organisations such as the Lawyers' Union or the Union of Patriotic Youth. Some institutions are used for political aims, such as the Writers' Union or the National Academy of Sciences, whose president is elected by the academicians and confirmed by the Belarusian president, and who automatically becomes a member of the Council of Ministers [72]. In November 1998 some members of the National Academy of Sciences met with Lukashenka, who asked academicians to work on the concept of a "national ideology" [73]. The political control in various social spheres does not mean that there are no more spaces of discussion and discord, even in political circles close to Lukashenka, but they are marginalised and neglected by a system of representation whose major vector is television and the main principle of which is to generate order.

# 4 Nationalism and Globalization

The fall of the Soviet Union provides an opportunity to study the nation-building process and to analyse whether social, economic and political reasons developed to explain state-building in Western Europe are relevant for the post-Soviet space. What facilitates or hinders the formation of new states in the globalization as a new social, economic and communication context at the regional and international levels? Some authors have been defending for several years the decline of nationalism and of nation-state as a universal reference point. According to this thesis, the nation-state model would lose its validity due to the multiplication of supra-national economic and communication links and the formation of local and sub-state identities[74]. Is the period of nationalism over? In this respect, Russia is often considered an example of the diversity of actors and the weak role of the state as a legitimate representative of national interests [75]. At the same time, the concept of nation is used by all Russian political actors in order to implement their power and to strengthen it, even if this concept is often more part of an imagined construction than a social reality. But, in the imaginary realm, the nation-state seems to operate as a reality for the people because their official affiliation is established by their belonging to states. The emergence of local identity is often used as an argument to strengthen the hypothesis of the end of nation-state. Often presented as a new form of affiliation, local identity is ancient and did not disappear with the nation-state age.

[70] Lukashenko 1998.
[71] Kuchma threatened also, several times, to use the referendum as a political instrument.
[72] Goujon 1998.
[73] Soveckaja Belorussija (Soviet Belarussia), November 26, 1998.
[74] Habermas 1998; Appadurai 1996; Badie 1999.
[75] Segbers 1997, 1998b.

This is quite relevant in Soviet and post-Soviet society where, as mentioned above, various forms of identity existed and continue to exist [76]. Moreover, the economic globalisation mechanism provides some arguments for the emergence and the development of nationalist movements by minority groups as well as inside established states, e.g. in Western Europe, where some radical-nationalist parties exist. These reflections could encourage us to adopt a complementary approach to analyse the relationship between globalisation and nationalism rather than a competitive one [77].

[76] For the example of Ukraine, see: Pirie 1996.
[77] Bahador 1999. To show this complementary approach, the author uses the concept of "neo-nationalism".

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