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# Ukraine and Russia: Legacies of the imperial past and competing memories

Andreas Kappeler 

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## Abstract

The legacy of the tsarist Empire and the Soviet Union is one of the crucial factors for an understanding and an explanation of current affairs in the post-Soviet space. This is especially true for Ukraine and for Russian-Ukrainian relations. Russia regards Ukraine as a part of its own strategic orbit, while many Ukrainians want to liberate themselves from the Russian hegemony and advocate a closer cooperation with the European Union. This controversy culminated in late 2013, when Russian pressure led to a re-orientation of Ukrainian policy and a rapprochement with Russia. In this paper I present some reflections on the significance of the imperial heritage for the Russian-Ukrainian relationship. I analyse the different discourses and the Ukrainian and Russian historical narratives, politics of history and competing memories. The Russian-Ukrainian

relationship was and is still characterized by an obvious asymmetry, a hegemony of Russia over Ukraine. Russia uses the Orthodox Church and the traditional dominance of the Russian language as instruments for its policy. Not only Russian historians, but also politicians and even the Russian President try to impose the imperial narrative on Ukraine. They are supported by a significant part of Ukrainians, who adhere to the ideal of a common Russia-led Orthodox East Slavic world. Other Ukrainian historians and politicians use the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian historical narrative with its national myths of liberty and of Ukraine's closeness to Europe in their struggle against the Russian hegemony. The on-going "War of memories" is of special interest. Both sides use and abuse history as a political weapon, and the controversies about the heritage of Kievan Rus', the interpretation of Mazepa, the Holodomor and WW II are not only academic, but also political issues. They reflect the struggle over the geopolitical and cultural orientation of Ukraine which is of crucial importance for the future development of the post-Soviet space and of Eastern Europe.



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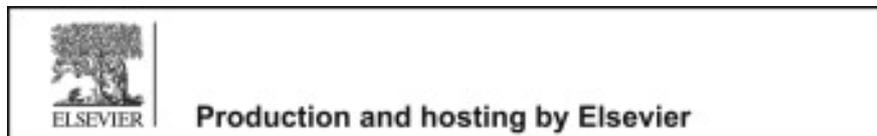


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