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RUSSIANS IN UKRAINE – GEODEMOGRAPHIC DYNAMICS OF THE POST-SOVIET PERIOD (RESULTS AND PERSPECTIVES)

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Abstract

The article studies quantitative and spatial dynamics of the Russian speaking population of the post soviet Ukraine. The factors accelerating the demographic shrinkage of the Russians of the country by 3 million people during 1989–2001 are analyzed. On the basis of a comparative analysis of the results of the 2001 Ukrainian census and the data of the ethnic and linguistic surveys of the Ukrainian population the conclusion is drawn that the core role in a prompt reduction of the number of the Russians belong to the assimilation. The analysis of the dynamic trends of the last several years allows affirming that within the borders of the modern Ukraine without the Crimea and the Donbas which is politically independent from Kyiv there may live about 4.1–4.5 million Russians. The study of eventual middle term prospects prove that by 2030 the given number may reduce to 3.3–3.7 million people. The important role in this process will play all three factors of the number dynamics: natural decline, outward migration flow, assimilation. But the core role in the demographic shrinkage of the Russian community belongs to the assimilation or the transition from the Russian to the Ukrainian self identity of a part of the biological and ethnic community of Ukraine.

However the number of the Russians in the country recorded by all ensuing censuses of the population was lower than the real ethnic and cultural presence of the “Russian world” in Ukraine as the above mentioned identity transfer was not accompanied by an acculturation. The Russian language and culture not only dominate in the Russian environment but also keep a weighty role within the dominant country group. Only by prolongation of several decades of tough of a severe anti Russian course Ukraine is capable of undermining the social and cultural potential of the Russian world.

Key words

Russian population of Ukraine, demographical dynamics, biological and ethnic community, middle term forecast, outward migration flow, assimilation.

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1. Introduction

By the time of the dissolution of the USSR about 25 millions of Russians were inhabitants of the Union Republics. About a half of this demographic group

accrued to the Ukrainian SSR. Thus, ethno-demographic and sociocultural perspectives of Russians in the post-Soviet Ukraine have nearly central significance in the problem of keeping of the modern Russian ethnocultural expatriate community.

Russian population in Ukraine was growing during the postwar decades, rising from 7.1 million people in 1959 to 11.4 million people in 1989 (more than 1/5 of its inhabitants). The most significant part of Russians focuses in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. Mostly there were citizens. Only in Crimea and Voroshilovgrad (Luhansk) regions Russian population was fairly wide settled in the rural areas (Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года...).

The dissolution of the Soviet Union gave birth to the new trend connected with the reduction in numbers of Russians in Ukraine and extensive reduction of their geography. This tendency was strengthened by the linguistic culture and language policy of the Ukrainian authorities, since the early 1990s successively oriented on ethnical and sociocultural «Ukrainization» of the Russian inhabitants. This policy issued from a variety of premises (Фролов, 2000):

- closeness of Russian and Ukrainian people, essentially relieving ethnical mutual transitions,
- active interethnic Russian-Ukrainian marriage rate,
- presence of a wide biethnic group of inhabitants (bi-ethnophores), that should have been motivated to the “right” national identity.

2. The end of the XX century

The results of the Ukrainian population census of 2001 demonstrated the apparent success of the state policy of Ukrainization of Russians (Всеукраинская перепись населения, 2001). The census recorded a rapid demographic squeeze of the Russian population of the country. In 1989–2001, it declined from 11.4 to 8.3 million people.

Decrease of it was all-round. In absolute terms, the maximum declines were suffered by the Russian communities of the southeast (only within the Donetsk region declines of Russians were more than half a million people, Kharkiv and Dnipropetrovsk oblasts lost 300 thousands of Russians each). But in terms of specific weight decline of the western regions proved to be more significant. Two of them (Lviv and Ivano-Frankivsk) lost more than half of their Russian population.

The scale of the reduction was much greater than the natural decline or possible migration of Russians outside Ukraine. Calculations show that of 3 million recorded demographic decline of the order of 2/3 should be attributed to the identification transition from the Russians to the Ukrainians.

The central role in this process was played not by Ukrainization of «pure» Russians, but by the

transformation of identification of bi-ethnophores. According to opinion polls, in the middle of 1990s, 20% of Russian Ukrainians had a Ukrainian mother, 10% a Ukrainian father (Савоскул, 2001), that is about 30% of the «Russian» population of the country were ethnic «semi-Ukrainians». Taking into account those who had a third/quarter of the Ukrainian «blood», the share of bi-ethnophores was even higher.

Nevertheless, the biethnic variety of the country also had a second component – «Ukrainian-Russian». About 6% of Ukrainians had a Russian father, 8% had a Russian mother. In fact, ethnically «semi-Russian» in Ukraine was 14% of Ukrainians, not counting those who had a smaller share of Russian «blood» (Савоскул, 2001).

The displacement of a certain number of representatives of this wide bi-ethnic set from its Russian part to the Ukrainian (and in the opposite direction) was extensively the type of determination of the whole demographic dynamics of the Russian population of post-Soviet Ukraine.

Calculations show that even in the first half of the 1990s, this biethnic group was divided between the Russian and Ukrainian identification parts with a noticeable preponderance of the second one (40 and 60%).

By the beginning of the 21st century, according to the studies of the specialists of the Kiev International Institute of Sociology (KIIS), the mixed Russian-Ukrainian population had grown to 23% of the total population of the country (Хмелько, 2004) and amounted to more than 11 million people (contrary to 8.6 million in the early 1990s). At the same time, the «Ukraine-identical» part of this variety increased to 70% (correspondingly, the Russian one was reduced to 30%).

3. The beginning of the XXI century: 2001–2013

Due to the fact that after 2001 there were no censuses in Ukraine, ethno-demographic dynamics of its population in recent 15–16 years can be showed only in the form of expert evidence. According to the calculations of the Ukrainian demographer A. Poznyak, in 2014 the share of Russians in the population of the country was about 16.0–16.5% (Миколюк, 2014). If this figure corresponds to reality, the number of the Russian population of Ukraine could decrease during 2001–2013 by 1.0–1.2 million people (up to 7.1–7.3 million). Such a result could be considered almost the most optimistic of the real ones. However there were certain grounds for it since the migration

outflow of Russians throughout the 2000s remained very insignificant (about 10–15 thousand people in the average annual calculation), and after the socio-economic stabilization of the country, the natural decline began to reducing. It is worth taking into account the coming to power of Viktor Yanukovich's political team, which policy of cultural and linguistic Ukrainization of the Russian population was essentially softened.

According to S. Savoscul (Савоскул, 2001), in the mid-1990s, 45% of Russian families in Ukraine already had a Ukrainian wife or husband. The distribution of this variety by age group is unknown, but it is obvious that this indicator correlated with the age of married couples. Modern children's and young generation of Russian Ukrainians (natives of the 1990–2010-ies) by approximately 50% (or even more) should consist of bi-ethnophores. And taking into account all those having the Ukrainian ethnic component, we can talk about 60–70% of all Russian youth in the country.

As mentioned above, the share of bi-ethnophores in the structure of the entire Russian population of Ukraine grew in the 1990s – early 2000s from 30% to 41%. According to our estimates, by 2014 it had to rise to 44–45%. In addition, in parallel in the biethnic set of Ukraine the further growth of the share of the Ukrainian-identical population continued. From 70% at the beginning of the 21st century it increased to 76.5–77.0% by 2014 (Table 1).

If this expert evidence is correct, then the total demographic decline of Russians in Ukraine for

the period 2001–2013 really could be limited to 1.0–1.2 million people: a natural decline of the order of 0.45–0.50 million people. (with an average annual rate of natural decline within the range of 4.5–5.5 ‰), migration in the range of 150–200 thousand people, assimilation – 0.4–0.5 million people.

4. Period 2014–2016

The events of spring-summer of 2014 most significantly affected the ethno-demographic structure of the population of Ukraine. Inclusion in the Russian Federation of Crimea and Sevastopol "withdrew" from Ukraine 2.3 million people, including 1.5 million Russians. No less significant demographic declines led to the emergence of two pro-Russian republics of Donbas, whose total demographic potential is about 2.5–3.0 million people (with the possibility of growth of up to 3.5 million) (Суций, 2013).

Thus, the population of Ukraine decreased by 5.0–5.5 million people, and by mid-2016 there were about 39.5–40.0 million people. In this case, the decline of Russians (including bi-ethnophores with Russian identity), according to our calculations, amounted to about 2.6–2.9 million people, Ukrainians (also taking into account "their" bi-ethnophores) – 2.4–2.6 million. This means that the number of Russian Ukrainians in 2015–2016 could be in the range of 4.2–4.6 million people. In other words, their share in the population of the country actually decreased to 10.6–11.5% (Table 2).

Tab. 1. Structural dynamics of the Ukrainian bi-ethnophores, 1989–2015 (%)

Year	Distribution of bi-ethnophores		Share of bi-ethnophores within	
	self-identified as Ukrainians	self-identified as Russians	Ukrainians of Ukraine	Russians of Ukraine
1989	60.5	39.5	14.0	30.0
2001	69.4	30.6	20.5	41.0
2013	76.6–76.9	23.1–23.4	29.2–29.7	45–45.2
2015	81.2–81.8	18.2–18.8	26.9–27.5	47.6–47.8

Source: Own studies based on: Савоскул, 2001; Хмелько, 2011.

Tab. 2. Dynamics of the relative share of the largest ethnic varieties in the population of Ukraine, 1989–2015 (%)

Year	Share in the population of Ukraine				Share in the population of Ukraine taking into account bi-ethnophores	
	«pure» Ukrainians	bi-ethnophores	«pure» Russians	other	Ukrainians	Russians
1989	62.7	16.7	15.6	5.0	72.8	22.2
2001	62.0	23.0	10.2	5.0	78.0	17.1
2013	56.7–57.8	30.4–31.8	8.7–8.9	2.9–3.8	80–82.2	14.9–16.2
2015	62.0–62.5	27.8–29.0	5.6–6.2	3.0–3.8	84.8–86.3	10.6–11.5

Source: Own studies based on: Савоскул, 2001; Хмелько, 2011.

The geography of Russian resettlement in Ukraine has not undergone internal changes in recent years, but has been significantly transformed as a result of changes in the territorial contours of the country. After the loss of Crimea and the eastern Donbas, a number of other areas of the southeast – Kharkov, Dnepropetrovsk, and also Zaporizhia and Odessa – moved to the position of the main centers of the Russians. But Donetsk region remained in this row too, in the Ukrainian part of which still lives up to 550–600 thousand of Russian population (Table 3).

In the five areas listed, at present, there are about 65–70% of all Russian Ukrainians. If we add to them the Ukrainian part of the Luhansk region and Kiev, then seven regions that make up a third of the territory of the country concentrate about 80–85% of its Russian array. The share of Russians in the population of these regions also remains quite high: in the

Ukrainian part of the Donetsk region they account for 30–33% of inhabitants, in Kharkiv and Zaporizhia – about 1/4, in Odessa – up to 20%, in Dnepropetrovsk – in the range of 16.5–17.0%. In the rest of the country the proportion of Russians as a rule, does not reach 10%, and in 11 regions of the center and west of Ukraine it is only a few percent.

Thus, in most of Western Ukraine, the process of de-Russification of the local population has entered its final stages (local Russian communities are mostly made up of elderly people and can almost completely cease to exist in the coming decades).

Tab. 3. Dynamics of the Russian population by regions of Ukraine, 1959–2016 (thousand people)

Territory	1959	1970	1979	1989	2001	2013	2015-2016
Crime	858.3	1385.0	1461.0	1629.5	1180.4	1350–1380	***
Luhansk	950.0	1148.3	1222.0	1279.0	991.8	840–865	240–270
Donetsk	1601.3	1987.2	2225.4	2316.1	1844.4	1630–1680	550–600
Kharkiv	665.5	829.4	966.4	1054.2	742.0	660–680	640–660
Zaporizhzhya	379.1	534.0	606.3	664.1	476.8	420–435	410–420
Odesa	440.4	578.2	656.3	719.0	508.5	460–480	440–470
Dnipropetrovsk	466.0	697.2	834.6	935.7	627.5	540–570	520–550
Mikolayiv	139.2	184.9	223.9	258.0	177.5	155–165	150–160
Kherson	128.2	186.6	228.5	249.5	165.2	145–150	140–145
Kyiv	254.3	373.6	474.4	536.7	337.3	300–310	290–300
Sumy	167.6	176.6	182.3	190.1	121.7	100–105	95–100
Kirovohrad	102.2	115.8	129.4	144.1	83.9	70–72	67–70
Poltava	83.3	123.2	157.2	179.0	117.1	100–105	95–100
Kyiv region	82.4	111.5	146.7	167.9	109.3	95–105	95–100
Cherkasy	66.9	87.7	105.6	122.3	75.6	65–67	60–64
Zhytomyr	87.0	100.6	112.2	121.4	68.9	60–62	58–60
Chernihiv	61.1	73.5	87.6	96.6	62.2	50–52	48–50
Chernivtsi	51.3	53.4	59.3	63.1	37.9	33–36	30–33
Vinnitsya	93.5	102.8	109.4	112.5	67.5	55–60	55–57
Khmelnyskiy	61.6	69.1	76.3	88.0	50.7	45–47	40–43
Lviv	181.1	199.8	194.3	195.1	92.6	80–87	75–80
Rivne	39.1	44.6	51.8	53.6	30.1	25–27	23–25
Zakarpatya	29.6	35.2	41.7	49.5	31.0	27–29	26–28
Volyn	37.1	39.8	43.8	46.9	25.1	22–24	20–22
Ivano-Frankivsk	37.9	46.5	49.8	57.0	24.9	20–23	19–22
Ternopil	26.9	26.3	25.7	26.6	14.2	11–12	9–11
Ukraine	7090.8	9126.3	10471.6	11355.6	8334.1	7358–7628	4195–4440

Source: Figures for the years 1959–2001 obtained from the population censuses of the Soviet Union and the 1959–1989 census of Ukraine in 2001 (Всесоюзные переписи населения 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989 гг.; Всеукраинская перепись населения 2001); for 2013–2016 – own studies.

5. Medium-term geodemographic perspectives of the Russian population of Ukraine

The sharp deterioration in the relations between Ukraine and Russia (2014–2017) greatly exacerbated the question of the possible quantitative dynamics of the Russian population of the country. There is no doubt that the next Ukrainian census will inevitably record the ubiquitous and most significant reduction in the Russian ethnic presence. And in the composition of this very “wrinkled” demographic array, the share of bi-ethnophores.

If we confine ourselves only to the analysis of ethnic dynamics, the current situation of Russians in Ukraine almost mirrors the situation that existed in the south of Russia in the 1920s, when the local Ukrainian array, externally preserving the most impressive quantitative scales, is in fact already largely consisted of a mixed, semi-assimilated population. Another 10–15 years passed, and it in its majority self-determined as Russian. In addition, the South Russian Ukrainian community collapsed quantitatively, declining for 1926–1939 almost by an order of magnitude (from 3.3 million to 422 thousand people) (Суцций, 2013).

However, it seems to us that the dynamics of Russians in post-Soviet Ukraine will be different: not a rapid contraction, but a progressive demographic reduction for many decades. Does this stable trend have a certain quantitative threshold that the Russian community of Ukraine will stabilize or at least significantly slow down its further reduction? At what level (in what quantitative range) can such a zone of stability be located? It is hardly possible to give exact answers to these questions.

In our medium-term forecast, we proceeded from the calculations already carried out, suggesting that in 2015 there were about 4.2–4.6 million Russians living in Ukraine without the Crimea and the eastern part of the Donbas. Under the current conditions, all three factors of demographic dynamics will simultaneously work to reduce this number: *natural decline*, *outflow* and *assimilation*.

Natural decline in the early 2010s of local Russians (3.5–4.0‰ per year) was slightly higher than the same rate for Ukrainians (3.1–3.5‰). The crisis affected the natural dynamics of the entire population of the country – in 2014, the decline increased to 3.9‰, in 2015–2016 – up to 4.4–4.6‰. Obviously, with the overall socio-psychological depression of the Russians in Ukraine, they could have a decline rate of 5.5–6.0‰. In addition, for 2015–2020 years the number of Russians in the country can be reduced by 3–4% (by 130–180 thousand people).

The degree of the migration of Russians has also grown. The net outflow, which amounted to 5–10 thousand people a year before the crisis, most likely increased by several times in 2014 (up to 30–40 thousand people). These figures are, most likely, the lowest bar of possible migration. The outflow could be much higher, given that many activists of the Russian protest movement of the spring of 2014, crushed by the Ukrainian special services, had to leave for Russia. In 2015, migration could be reduced to 20–25 thousand. If in the second half of this decade it falls to the level of the 2000s (10–15 thousand per year), the total outflow for 2015–2020 will figure up 70–100 thousand people.

Assimilation losses will also be significant. Part of bi-ethnophores as early as 2014 self-identified as Russians, later changed (or will change to 2020) their identity for Ukrainian. Moreover, in recent years this process has most likely intensified. The rise of Ukrainian civil patriotism undoubtedly played a role, but the growth of systemic pressure on the Russian population of Ukraine was no less important. Moreover, not only the state, but also from the side of civil society, which has substantially increased the degree of its nationalism.

Russians who are not ready to put up with an increasingly tangible “Ukrainization” of social life, are more likely to prefer to leave for Russia, and among those who remain, masking strategies will necessarily dominate. If about 10–20% of modern Russian bi-ethnophores changed and change their identity to Ukrainian by 2020 (quite probable value), this will result in the loss of another 200–400/440 thousand people. As a result, for the period 2015–2020 the total number of Russian Ukrainians may decrease by 400–700 thousand and by the beginning of the third decade will amount to 3.7–4.1 million people, of which about 1.8–2.0 million may be accounted for by biethnophores.

If for the forecast of the demographic dynamics of the Russian population of Ukraine in the 2020s as the basic parameters take an annual natural decline of 3–4‰ (pre-crisis level of the 2000s), an annual net outflow of 8–10 thousand people and assimilation into amounting to 10–15% of the total number of biethnic Russians, the total demographic loss of the Russian array in this decade will be about 350–550 thousand people, and its total population will decline by 2030, to 3.3–3.7 million people. And in this variety, bi-ethnophores will already dominate quantitatively (Table 4).

The post-Soviet demographic dynamics of Russian Ukraine, it would seem, fully confirms the conclusion that the proximity of the two East Slavic peoples significantly facilitates the process of mutual

Tab. 4. The demographic dynamics of the Russian population of Ukraine and the structure of growth / decline in 1959–2030 (million people, %)

period	Growth/decline of Russians (million people)	Structure of growth / decline (%)		
		Assimilation	Migration	Natural dynamics
1959–1970	2.04	20–30	35–42	33–35
1970–1979	1.34	15–20	40–55	30–35
1979–1989	0.89	5–12	25–35	60–65
1989–2001	–3.0	63–70	17–20	13–17
2001–2013	–1.0–1.2	35–45	15–20	35–45
2013–2015	–2.7–2.9	Reduction in connection with the loss of the Crimea and the eastern Donbass		
2015–2020	–0.4–0.7	50–60	14–17	26–33
2020–2030	–0.35–0.55	47–53	18–22	29–31

Source: Own studies based on: Всесоюзные переписи населения 1959, 1970, 1979, 1989 гг.; Всеукраинская перепись населения 2001; for 2013–2030 – own studies.

assimilation, allowing gradually to “dissolve” even powerful ethnic arrays, whether they are Ukrainians in the south of Russia or Russians of southeast of Ukraine.

Yet, the processes of assimilation of Soviet Ukrainians in the 1930s and Russians in post-Soviet Ukraine have very significant differences. Complex assimilation implies a certain graduality. The first is the period of acculturation (change of language and culture), after which the stage of assimilation (change of national self-identification).

This is how, in particular, the “transformation” of the Kuban Ukrainians into Russians took place in the 1920s–1930s. The 1926 census recorded a very significant scale of Russian-speaking local Ukrainians (1/2–3/4 of their total number in various districts of Kuban). Thus, the massive change in ethnic identity was preceded by a large-scale cultural and linguistic Russification.

The Ukrainianization of the Russian population of modern Ukraine proceeds in a different way. The number of Russians in the country is steadily declining, but this process is practically not accompanied by linguistic Ukrainianization of the population. Moreover, data from sociological polls indicate that the Russian language in the 1990s and the first half of the 2000s was not only not lost by local Russians, but even strengthened its position in the titular nationality of Ukraine (Хмелько, 2004).

“Former” Russians, self-determined themselves as Ukrainians, remained faithful to their native language and culture, “assimilated” without preliminary acculturation. However, the reliability of such an ethnic metamorphosis is not large enough and overall is a conjuncture, since a stable Russian-speaking and “Russian culture” preserves for its bearer the possibility of returning to its former identity. Therefore, the

number of Russians registered by all future Ukrainian censuses will be less than the real ethno-cultural presence of the “Russian world” in Ukraine.

Hypothetically, in case of change in the socio-political situation in the country and the normalization of relations with Russia, the flow of bi-ethnophores can go in the opposite direction, and some of the “new” Ukrainians will become Russian again decades later.

The modern Ukrainian government understands this perfectly and will do everything in its power to maximize the cultural and linguistic distancing of Ukrainian society from Russia. It is almost impossible to hope for an early change of this course. Obviously, the “Russian world” of Ukraine is doomed to a prolonged existence in the conditions of strict targeted pressure. If not for years, then over a number of decades this pressure can significantly reduce the sociocultural potential of the Russian (Russian-speaking) set. Moreover, the loss of this potential will further accelerate the demographic contraction of the Russian massif of the country will make this process completely irreversible. Although the issue in this case should be a very remote perspective, which goes far beyond the first half of the 21st century.

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