
Andrew Wilson argues that because Ukraine lacks an “established tradition” of statehood, and hence is fraught with regional differences, “the Ukrainian national movement has never developed as a continuum” (p.197). These factors have then “combined to make nationalist political mobilization in Ukraine much more difficult than in many other parts of the former communist world, such as Transcaucasia or the Baltic states. Ukraine’s unique feature is the existence of deep divisions within the titular nationality group as well as between different ethnic groups” (p.198). The reviewer must apologize for quoting so extensively; it is simply very difficult to make sufficient sense of Wilson’s argument to put it in one’s own words.

Wilson does make the crucial, if not particularly new, point that one must look to Ukraine’s past to understand its present. Wilson’s argument that regional differences have been a constant feature of Ukrainian history is also well taken, and indeed, this historical legacy is quite apparent to any one who has travelled around present day Ukraine. But, other than these two quite obvious and well established points, this reviewer found it very difficult to follow Wilson’s argument.

The basic problem seems to lie at the very foundation of Wilson’s book: his “definition” of “nationalism.” Unlike most of the important works on nationalism (Anderson, Connor, Gellner, Greenfield, Hroch, Smith, Stokes, Szporluk), Wilson spends almost no time defining his subject. His definition of “nationalism” is relegated to the second footnote of the first chapter, in which he follows Walker Connor’s definition of “ethno-nationalism” as “identification with and loyalty to one’s nation,” where ‘nation connotes a group of people who believe they are ancestrally related’” (p. 203). That Wilson does not deem it necessary to provide a more rigorous definition of nationalism in a book about “Ukrainian nationalism” is in itself problematic, but how he proceeds to use this term is still more difficult to comprehend.

Not far into the book, Wilson’s “definition” begins to slip. He claims that the Ukrainian Democratic-Radical Party (UDRP) could not be described as a nationalist party, because “the vast majority of Ukrainian populists still adhered to Drahomanov’s federal project, and, particularly in the more easterly guberniias, tended to cooperate with the Kadets” (p. 31). Thus, it would seem that Drahomanov and his followers, who certainly expressed an “identification with and loyalty to” their nation, were not “nationalists.” Wilson seems to have a different definition in mind here, which might more clearly be termed “separatist.” In Wilson’s historical discussion, there are other such examples, but since his book is focused on the present, it is fairer to turn to those chapters.

In the central chapter of the book, chapter 5, Wilson analyzes various electoral and referendum results since independence, arguing that Ukraine’s
historical legacy of regionalism continues to inhibit nationalist support. He applies the term "nationalist" to all parties and groups, from Rukh to the Ukrainian National Assembly, and provides fairly convincing data to support his argument. But, when Wilson turns to the 1994 presidential elections, he stumbles. He claims that these elections showed that even an incumbent, that is, Kravchuk, could not win an election by running on a "nationalist ticket." Kravchuk's campaign caricatured his main opponent, Kuchma, as a Russophone centrist, who wanted to reintegrate Ukraine with Russia. But, as Wilson points out, Kuchma stressed that increased ties with Russia "would strengthen rather than undermine Ukrainian independence." Wilson then comments, that Kuchma's "combination of local patriotism with the recognition of Ukraine's and Russia's common interests is as much a part of the Ukrainian national tradition as the exclusionary nationalism of Mikhnovs'kyi or Dontsov" (p. 143).

What is so strange about this quite valid statement is that it comes after Wilson has just argued that Kuchma's victory was a clear sign of the unpopularity of Ukrainian nationalism, thus implying that Kuchma's "combination" does not fit into Wilson's definition of "the Ukrainian national tradition."

In chapter 6 Wilson analyzes "the nationalist agenda" in domestic politics, focusing on those issues which have provoked intolerant statements from some Ukrainian nationalists. Wilson begins the chapter by noting Ukraine's exemplary national minorities policies: its 'zero-option' citizenship law of October 1991, declaration of the rights of nationalities (November 1991), and law on national minorities (June 1992), all showing that on paper Ukraine is one of the most tolerant countries in the world. But, Wilson argues that "the true picture is more complex. On closer examination the structure of Ukrainian nationalist argument on questions of nationhood, citizenship and ethnic 'rights' is not too dissimilar to that of their supposedly more extreme Baltic counterparts, and conforms to standard patterns observable in many other ethno-nationalist movements" (p.149). Here one must watch Wilson's footnotes very carefully to figure out just who is and who is not a nationalist. Wilson often cites the extreme statements of the more nationalist (and less popular) parties, treating their statements as representative of "the nationalist agenda" in general. Suddenly, Rukh's position on national issues becomes unimportant, at one point even leading Wilson to dismiss the most popular nationalist party's position. Discussing the unwillingness of "the nationalists" to recognize the importance of economic reform, he states that "only Rukh seemed to have deduced from the December 1991 referendum campaign that most [!] nationalists were putting the cart before the horse and that, instead of building a 'strong state' and assuming a prosperous economy would follow, institution-building would be easier if economic reform had first spread prosperity and helped win broader support for the national cause" (p. 171). Who "most nationalists" could be, if the members of Rukh are not among them, is quite beyond this reviewer to fathom, since, as one of Wilson's tables makes clear, Rukh's membership in spring 1995 was 50,000, more than three times the size of the next largest nationalist party, the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists (p. 133). In another example, Wilson claims that "many nationalists