

Eight Reasons to Become Ukrainian

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About this blog

Window on Eurasia covers current events in Russia and the nations of the former Soviet Union, with a focus on issues of ethnicity and religion. The issues covered are often not those written about on the front pages of newspapers. Instead, the articles in the Windows series focus on those issues that either have not been much discussed or provide an approach to stories that have been. Frequent topics include civil rights, radicalism, Russian Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and events in the North Caucasus, among others.

Author **Paul Goble** is a longtime specialist on ethnic and religious questions in Eurasia. Most recently, he was director of research and publications at the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy. He has served in various capacities in the U.S. State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency and the International Broadcasting Bureau as well as at the Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He writes frequently on ethnic and religious issues and has edited five volumes on ethnicity and religion in the former Soviet space.

Patriarch Kirill's suggestion that he is ready to acquire dual citizenship in Ukraine has prompted activists of the Russian National-Democratic Movement (RNDM), a nationalist but not statist group, to conduct a survey on whether residents of Russian regions bordering Ukraine would like to take Ukrainian citizenship.

While many writers have discussed whether Ukrainian citizens might like to take Russian citizenship, this is one of the very few efforts to determine how Russian citizens might feel about moving in the opposite direction. And while the number of people polled is too small to be reliable, the reasons the activists suggested they might have for doing so are intriguing.

According to [RNDM](#), there are eight reasons "why [ethnic] Russian people might express a desire to receive Ukrainian citizenship. First, the movement says, the population of Ukraine is far more uniformly Slavic than that of the Russian Federation, thus allowing ethnic Russians to feel comfortable.

While in the Russian Federation, "peaceful and unarmed Slavic indigenous residents" are frequently attacked by "armed bands" from the Caucasus, thus creating what might be called "an inter-ethnic war," "in Ukraine, there has been only one case of such an attack," the RNDM activists say.

Second, in Ukraine but not in the Russian Federation, religious organizations can register "freely." Many religious groups, including Old Believers, find it difficult if not impossible to conduct their affairs in Russia, but the same people, RNDM activists say, would have absolutely no problem if they were in Ukraine.

Third, the Ukrainian government unlike the Russian one is not against the titular nationality. No senior Ukrainian official, the activists say, would permit himself to suggest that "Ukraine is not for Ukrainians," while nearly all senior Russian Federation officials are appalled by any suggestion that "Russia is for the Russians."

Moreover, the RNDM activists note, Ukraine lacks an article in its criminal code like paragraph 282 under the terms of which Russian Federation officials routinely seek to suppress those of their opponents who Moscow portrays as "extremist" or interested in "exacerbating" relations among ethnic and religious groups.

Fourth, the site continues, "conditions of service in the [Ukrainian] army are much more tolerable" than those in the Russian military. In Ukraine, RNDM says, there are "practically no cases of suicide or deaths of those in uniform."

Fifth, "the conditions for conducting a business [in Ukraine] are more civilized" than they are in Russia. In Russia, the RNDM says, "it is impossible to conduct a legal business" because businessmen must pay off "bandit structures that consist to a large extent of the workers of the MVD, the FSB and the senior officials of the Russian government."

Sixth, the level of crime is much lower in Ukraine than it is in Russia. Seventh, medical care is "much more accessible." And eighth, according to the RNDM activists, Ukrainian men currently live longer, an average of 62 years, compared to their Russian counterparts who now die on average at 59.

The article on the ANVictory.ru website reporting these conclusions also features a discussion of ethnic Ukrainians in Russia, a group Moscow says numbers fewer than three million but one that may be three times as large not only in the regions adjoining Ukraine itself but also in the Far East, a region Ukrainians call the "Zeleniy klin" or "Green Triangle."

After providing a brief history of how these Ukrainian communities arose on the territory of what is now the Russian Federation, the site points out that Russian officials have done everything they can to force the Ukrainians to give up their language and national identity

and become Russians ethnically as well as politically.

At present, it suggests, Ukrainian has been reduced to the status of "rare languages" by Russian state policy. "There are only a few Ukrainian-language schools in the Russian Federation now (in Moscow, Belgorod region and Krasnodar region) and only a single library of Ukrainian literature in Moscow."

The staff of that library, ANVictory.ru continues, has been subject to persecution not only for "propagandizing Ukrainian language and culture" but also "for several letters [they have written] to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the President of Ukraine."

Moreover, as Ukrainian scholars have pointed out, Russian textbooks present a highly distorted image of the history of Ukraine, one far more problematic than the distortions of Russian history by Ukrainians and others about which Russian scholars, commentators and propagandists routinely complain.

As a result, many ethnic Ukrainians in the Russian Federation also have an interest in taking Ukrainian citizenship in order to be in a position to return to their homeland, a trend very different than most analysts have assumed and yet another way in which Patriarch Kirill's recent remarks are likely to have unintended consequences in Russia.

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