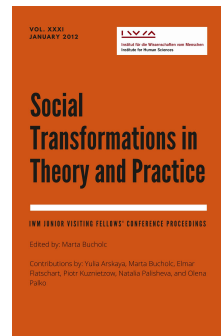


# A Bolshevik Party with a National Face Being Ukrainian among Communists

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**Abstract:** *This paper touches upon the early Soviet period in Ukraine at the beginning of the 1920s. Its main focus is the influence of Ukrainian communism on the establishment of Soviet authority in different political spheres, most notably its policy towards the various nationalities. For this reason, the historical background of Ukrainian national communism is briefly examined, and the main parties which represented that orientation and their political aspirations are described. Those parties, after merging with the Bolshevik party, are shown to be the main source of the nationally oriented policy which was launched by the party leadership in the early 1920s. Taking into account different approaches to the evaluation of Ukrainian national communism, the author distinguishes two ways of pursuing a nationally oriented position in a communist party: (1) coming from national-democratic parties after the failure of the Ukrainian revolution of 1917 – 1921 and (2) changing the ideological orientation to a national frame of reference after the disillusionment with Soviet policies towards Ukraine. This survey is mostly based on the analysis of the activity of two main representatives of Ukrainian national communism in the Soviet government, viz. Oleksandr Shumskyi and Mykola Skrypnyk, whose career paths coincide with the approaches mentioned above. Building on this analysis, some general conclusions are drawn concerning the significant role of the representatives of non-Bolshevik party members in the development of Soviet policy in Ukraine and regarding the continuity of the national orientation in the CP(b)U throughout the 20th century as well as its significance for Ukrainian history as a whole.*

Ukrainian national communism can hardly be delineated by any conventional definition. Two different approaches to understanding the way those ideas were implemented in Ukraine can be distinguished. Firstly, the term refers to a certain political orientation,

typical for communist and left-socialist parties in Ukraine before it became part of the USSR. Those political parties were founded after 1918 and fought against the Bolshevik communist party for the control of Ukraine and its representation in the international arena. At a slightly later stage, this orientation can be found among the members of the Bolshevik party, but only in the early (“pluralistic”) phase of its activity. Secondly, national communist orientation was a deviation within the Russian communist party (later, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union). That orientation could be observed during the whole history of the USSR. It was quite popular in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, and it remained a significant political force, which eventually defended Ukrainian independence in 1991.

This paper mainly deals with the history of national communism as a certain orientation within the CP(b)U. Looking at the early Soviet period in Ukraine, the author tries to prove the significant influence and impact of nationally oriented party leaders on the implementation of Soviet policies after 1923. Of the greatest interest is the policy towards nationalities launched in the USSR at the beginning of 1920s and known as *Korenisacija*.

The author distinguishes two ways of pursuing a nationally oriented communist position in the communist party, which correspond to the two approaches mentioned above. This study analyzes the activity of two main representatives of Ukrainian national communism in the Soviet government, viz. Oleksandr Shumskyi and Mykola Skrypnyk, both in charge of implementing *Korenisacija*, but in different periods.

It is divided into three sections in which, respectively, the frames and prehistory of national communism and two approaches to its evaluation are discussed.

## **Historical frames of national communism**

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Ukrainian national communism as a political orientation emerged from the revolutionary process of 1917-1922, which can be considered as the most intensive period in the history of Ukraine. After the February Revolution in the Russian Empire in 1917, nationalist tendencies and separatist movements gained strength in the borderlands. Ukraine at that time, having been part of a great empire, began to establish its own state institutions through a series of revolutionary measures inspired by different political orientations. Ultimately, this led from the formation of independent Ukraine in 1918 to becoming part of the USSR in late 1922.

The entire history of Ukrainian national communism can be divided into several periods, each of which had certain peculiar features and its own representatives. The first period should be characterized as the national orientation in the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party of Bolsheviks (RSDRP (b)). In the early phase of expansion to the territory of Ukraine, Bolsheviks were open for discussion about the future socialist order for Ukraine. Limited pluralism was allowed and even welcomed in the borderlands. At a later stage, national orientation was elaborated as a significant part of the party programs. The final period of Ukrainian national communism can be called the individualistic period, when

national orientation was pursued only by some distinguished personalities. The influence of those personalities, who are of vital importance for Ukrainian history, on Soviet policies is the main subject of this paper.

At the very beginning of its theoretical formation, national communism could be perceived more accurately as an attempt to deny or to contest the Bolsheviks' policy towards the nationalities residing in Ukraine. In effect, this was a popular way to oppose Lenin's policies in the borderlands. Until the beginning of the 1920s, Russian communists did not elaborate any common platform or coherent view on the role of the Soviet party in the borderlands and actually welcomed this kind of political pluralism. As a result, a range of political parties with national communist orientation came into existence in Ukraine after 1918. Those parties believed in the opportunity to build a socialist state on their own and to become equal partners in the international fight for world communism. The followers of this ideology or political program were the representatives of two sides, namely adherents of the newly organized Soviet party and old nationalists who believed in Lenin's slogan of national self-determination. These organizations and their leaders are of great importance for this study as their history contains the answer to the question of how the Bolshevik party and policies were formed in the early 1920s.

The first political party which introduced a national communist affiliation was the Ukrainian Communist Party of *Borot'bysts* (UCP(b)) headed by Oleksandr Shumskyi – one of the protagonists of this paper. It was formed in 1919 and soon gained popularity among the majority of the population. That solid support enabled party leaders to appeal to the Comintern to admit them as representatives of Ukrainian communism. The statutory document of this political party, the Memorandum of the UCP(b), stated that the main reason for unpopularity and hardships in building socialism was the Russification associated with that process.[1]

The main opposition to the rapid Sovietization of Ukraine resulted from the antagonism between Russian cities and workers (represented by the CP(b)U) on the one hand and Ukrainian rural areas and peasantry (with the *Borot'bysts* party in the lead) on the other. That opposition could be overcome only by strong support for Ukrainian culture and language, i.e. by an effort to establish a true Ukrainian communist party which would be able to represent the interests of the whole of Ukraine. The *Borot'bysts* were supposed to fill that gap in the political spectrum. As a result of their activity and the influence which they gained in Ukraine, Lenin was quick to enforce negotiations with the *Borot'bysts* regarding their merging with the CP(b)U in 1920.

Those party members who retained their national communist orientation after merging with the CP(b)U joined the the Ukrainian Communist Party (*Ukrains'ka Komunistychna Partia*, UCP), founded in 1920. This party became the most consistent and theoretically grounded group of proponents of Ukrainian national communism. The UCP made a claim to gather all parties of communist orientation as the central socialist party in Ukraine. It stood for a national revolution under social slogans and for the conversion of the Ukrainian national republic into a sovereign Ukrainian Soviet-style state.

In 1920 the first program of the Ukrainian Communist Party was adopted, which spelt out some main ideas for Ukrainian communism. It was proclaimed that both national and social emancipation were key questions for the party and that the proletarian revolution could be forced only by a nation state. Such a revolution, i.e. one that was to be carried out only at national level, would touch upon national and class consciousness. The main idea was that the Ukrainian revolution at first had to be a national one, since Ukraine was economically exploited by imperialist Russia. Only after that, the social revolution should follow, fighting for social equality within Ukraine. The only possible way to achieve this was to build an economically and politically independent state – a Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic maintaining close ties with other Soviet republics.[2]

After 1923, the process of dissolution within the Ukrainian Communist Party began when the “left wing” fraction within the UCP was formed, arguing for a merger with the CP(b)U. Under great pressure by the Bolshevik party and also by the Comintern, the UCP subsequently merged with the CP(b)U. The political achievements of Ukrainian national communism in such a brief historical period seemed to be rather poor. Rather than its “independent” existence, the influence of the former members of national parties within the CP(b)U should therefore be investigated. For this reason, this paper touches more precisely upon the impact of a national communist orientation after 1923. For after that year, Ukrainian communists became representatives of the CP(b)U and assumed partial responsibility for the establishment of Soviet policy in Ukraine.

In this paper, I wish to argue the case for the enormous impact of the significant amount of newcomers from different national political organizations after 1920, who determined the implementation of early Soviet policies. According to statistical data, in 1922 about 30 percent of CP(b)U members were from diverse political parties that had merged with the former for different reasons.[3] All these people, and Oleksandr Shumskyi was the best example, were allowed not only to join the party but also to hold important posts in the Soviet government.

## **From national democrat to CP(b)U leader – Oleksandr Shumskyi (1890 – 1946)**

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Oleksandr Shumskyi and his political career can be considered a typical way for a Ukrainian national leader to pursue the communist orientation after the defeat of the National Revolution of 1917 – 1921. Shumskyi was the chief representative of the significant group of former politicians from the Ukrainian republic for whom the platform of Ukrainian communism became the only possible way of promoting the idea of an independent Ukraine. Former party members who joined the CP(b)U after 1920 represented both possible reasons for this ideological change, for among them were adherents of the newly organized Soviet party as well as old nationalists who believed in Lenin’s slogan of national self-determination.

In his early youth, Oleksandr Shumskyi became member of the workers’ association of the *USDRP*. When he turned twenty, he moved to Moscow to study at the veterinary institute, but soon was called to duty in 1914. During his military service, he undertook

revolutionary agitation among soldiers. Due to this activity, Shumskyi soon became member of different committees in the army, which later led him to *Central'na Rada*. After 1917 he held important offices in the Ukrainian People's Republic, and that was the period of his most significant political activity.

Shumskyi, along with the majority of the Ukrainian elite at that time, pursued a socialist future for the newly formed Ukrainian republic. As a leader of the Ukrainian Socialist-Revolutionary Party (*Ukrainska partia socialistiv-revolucioneriv, UPSR*), Shumskyi stood for the temporary autonomy of Ukraine within the empire and equal representation in the Russian Provisional Government, an administrative body, formed shortly after the abdication of tsar Nicolas II in 1917. That party was one of the most significant in *Central'na Rada* since its members held the majority in all Ukrainian governments until the end of 1918. At the beginning of that year, having been forced into illegal activity, the *UPSR* split into two wings – a centrist and a left wing. The centrist part continued to follow the idea of autonomy, while the left wing stood for the Bolshevik model of revolution and state governance. That part, at the Party Congress in March 1919, called itself at first the Ukrainian Party of Socialists-Revolutionists-*Borot'bists* (Communists) (*Ukrainska partia socialistiv-revolucioneriv-borot'bistiv (komunistiv)*) and, later on, Ukrainian Communist Party of *Borot'bysts* (*Ukrains'ka komunistychna partia borot'bystiv, UCP(b)*).

The Ukrainian Communist Party of *Borot'bysts* is considered to be the most powerful and influential Ukrainian socialist party after 1919.[4] Headed by Oleksandr Shumskyi, it became a rival for the Bolsheviks due to its popularity. Very soon, Lenin appreciated its influence in Ukraine and successfully enforced negotiations with the *Borot'bysts* regarding their merging with the CP(b)U in 1920. Thus, Lenin not only succeeded in neutralizing a strong political force, but he also made its leaders the representatives of the Soviet state. The best example of continued activity of national communist leaders within the CP(b)U may be Oleksandr Shumskyi, who became member of the Bolshevik party after 1920.

Even though a loyal communist, Oleksandr Shumskyi represented that faction of the party which opted for distancing itself from the Russian Communist Party of Bolsheviks (RCP(b)) and for pursuing cooperation only on the platform of the Third International. Oleksandr Shumskyi held many important posts in the Soviet government, but his work as a minister of education in 1924-1927 was of the greatest significance. Eventually, Shumskyi came to play perhaps the most important role in the implementation of national policies within the Ukrainian Soviet Republic during the 1920s.

It must also be explained why such an “unimportant” field as education began to play such a significant role in Ukraine after 1923. According to a new national policy, sanctioned by Moscow in 1923 and known as *Korenisacija*, the main goals proclaimed were the development of national economics and the harmonization of relations between the Soviet regime and the local population. *Ukrainisacija* was the Ukrainian variant of that policy.

The idea behind such an affirmative national policy was to make Soviet power, which up to 1923 had remained Russian power, more significant internationally, thus making it evident that, according to Stalin's idea, "Soviet power and her organs are the affair of their own efforts, the embodiment of their desires." [5] The main state organ which was responsible for carrying out that policy was the People's Commissariat for Education and Enlightenment (*Narkompros*), one of whose functions was to introduce the Ukrainian language to all spheres of public life. There was also another important goal of *Narkompros*, namely the coordination of cultural development. The special section of visual art was responsible for the affirmation of Soviet culture all over the USSR. It was to its merit that Ukrainian art and literature developed so strongly at the beginning of the 1920s.

Due to all its responsibilities, the ministry attained great power to implement and ensure the development of the widest sphere of public life. Its broad authority provided the People's Commissar with great influence and importance. But, at the same time, this ministry was one of those that were most dependent on state policy and support. The volatile state of affairs in Moscow became the reason why the Ukrainian government was dismissed and replaced so frequently in the 1920s.

To implement the policy of *Ukrainisacija*, the new rank and file were lacking. It was important to find the right person who would be responsible for the "great scale of obligation", a faithful communist who could be trusted in such a delicate sphere and who, at the same time, was nationally oriented so as to believe in what he did and inspire others. Oleksandr Shumskyi was considered to be the best candidate. First of all, he was a professional politician in the Ukrainian People's Republic. What is more, he was of that type of newly engaged communists whose eagerness to prove faithfulness to the new regime was doubled by their unstable position after the merger with the Bolsheviks. At the beginning of his career in the Soviet government, Shumskyi was supposed to work hard to prove his loyalty and ensure his own place in Ukrainian politics. Finally, he was a beacon of hope for all those who were still afraid of Bolshevik power.

Oleksandr Shumskyi ardently began to implement the new policy towards nationalities in Ukraine. The first task was to remove the Russian chauvinist rank and file from the party leadership. In 1924 the hater of all things Ukrainian, Emanuil Kvirning (the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine in 1921-1925), and Dmytro Lebid (the Second Secretary of CP(b)U) were recalled to Moscow. They were replaced by Lazar Kaganovych, a Ukrainian Jew who spoke Ukrainian fluently – which was considered a sufficient reason at that time – and Vlas Chubar, who was appointed chief of the Ukrainian Soviet Government. This decision subsequently turned out to be a fatal mistake for Shumskyi when he started to criticize all officials sent from Moscow for being alien to Ukraine.

The newly appointed minister of education launched a policy of promoting the broadest usage of the Ukrainian language. One of his first decrees was about the necessity for all functionaries to prove appropriate language skills in a special exam. Another innovation was the implementation of the Ukrainian language in all office documentation. As a result, the number of Ukrainians among the rank and file, or of those who admitted to be

Ukrainian, also increased.[6] The Ukrainization of the party apparatus was even more evident due to the eager activity of former members of national communist parties which joined the CP(b)U after 1922. Vasyl Blakytnyj, Panas Liubchenko, Andrij Khvyliia, Oleksandr Shumskyi – they all made the *Ukrainisacija* the major undertaking it was.

All those results were expected and desired by the Soviet tactics of *Korenisacija*. But Oleksandr Shumskyi went further. In a letter to Stalin in 1926, he wrote that Ukrainian affairs should be controlled and governed only by Ukrainian communists. He claimed that the Ukrainian government was dominated by Russian chauvinists who were assisted by “good-for-nothing maloroses”, the denominative name for Ukrainians used in Russia, whose aim was to hold a higher post without regard for the benefit of their country.[7] In making statements of this kind, Oleksandr Shumskyi exceeded his own authority. The conflict which was set up in 1926 eventually triggered a campaign against national deviation in the CP(b)U, and Shumskyi was identified as the main representative of that anti-Soviet policy.

On the one hand, this outcome was odd. Why was Shumskyi, who had successfully fulfilled all party demands according to the policy of *Korenisacija*, so severely criticized when that policy reached its highest stage of development? It was evident that the main conflict occurred not in the cultural sphere, but on a personal level. In his letter to Stalin in 1926, Shumskyi attacked Lazar Kaganovich as the First Secretary of the CP(b)U. Kaganovich was Stalin protégé and his real attitude towards Ukraine can be gauged from the fact that he was the one who had the greatest responsibility for the collective farming policy which later led to the great famine in Ukraine in 1932-1933. Shumskyi was accused not because of his performance in government, but because of his negative attitude to Stalin’s choice. His policies, which had been part of the mainstream during the early 1920s, were subjected to scrutiny after 1926, when “Shumskism” became a common way of denouncing allegedly nationalist policies and national deviations.

After 1926 the great campaign against Shumskyi began. The main prosecutor was another CP(b)U leader, Mykola Skrypnyk, one of the most ambiguous figures in the Ukrainian communist movement. At that time holding the post of General Attorney, Skrypnyk published a vast article entitled “Khvyliovism or Shumskism?” in the main party print organ “The Bolshevik of Ukraine”. Oleksandr Shumskyi was accused there of being insincere, of acting against official party policies, of concealing national deviation etc. [8] Being severely persecuted by the Party and humiliated by public opinion, Shumskyi renounced his “failed” views. The year 1926 marked the beginning of his gradual decline, which ended with his death in 1946. Soon after been dismissed, Shumskyi moved to Leningrad, where he held some unimportant posts in the party. From 1933 onwards, he was under arrest and lived in exile on Solovki. His life abruptly and violently ended on Stalin’s order in 1946. Shumskyi’s achievement and his successful policy were soon intentionally forgotten. But the degrading term “Shumskism” continued to be used until the end of the Soviet regime in Ukraine to designate national communist deviation and bourgeois nationalism.

## From *Cheka* leader to bourgeois nationalist: Mykola Skrypnyk (1872 – 1933)

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Another protagonist of this paper is Mykola Skrypnyk. Coming from the opposite end of the ideological spectrum as compared to Shumskyi, Skrypnyk replaced and succeeded the former in the implementation of policies towards nationalities. Taking into account his career path, it is very hard to believe that in 1929 Mykola Skrypnyk became a champion of *Ukrainisacija* and a promoter of the rights of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic. Born in Ukraine, Mykola Skrypnyk soon moved to Petrograd, where he became one of the most active leaders of the Bolshevik party and Lenin's trustful comrade. In 1918 he was one of the proponents of creating a Ukrainian communist party of Bolsheviks, CP(b)U, instead of supporting the regional fraction of RSDRP(b), which was formed as early as December 1917. On the occasion of its first party congress in the Russian city of Taganrog in April 1918, a self-standing separate Communist Party of Bolsheviks of Ukraine (CP(b)U) was formed. Headed by Mykola Skrypnyk (1872 – 1933) from the beginning, the political status of this party was gradually changed from an ordinary fractional organization to the sole and most influential party in Ukraine after 1920[9].

In 1919 – 1920 Skrypnyk was moved to hold a leading post in the Russian *Cheka* (The All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage) and was in charge of suppressing national movements in Ukraine in that period. After that, Skrypnyk returned to Ukraine, where he held a lot of significant posts in the Soviet government (*Radnarkom*) and General Secretariat, which was established in Kharkiv in 1919. Mykola Skrypnyk was a personal friend and colleague of Volodymyr Lenin, and his career was very much affected by events in the Moscow headquarters.

Unsurprisingly, Skrypnyk after 1924 changed his loyalty to the supreme party leadership and began to fight ardently against the pro-Russian policies implemented by Stalin. He spoke about the economic exploitation of Ukraine and the importance of the Ukrainian language and culture. Ironically, in 1927 Mykola Skrypnyk replaced Oleksandr Shumskyi and was appointed People's Commissar of Education in the Ukrainian government. The furious prosecutor of former Commissar Skrypnyk was supposed to continue the policy of *Ukrainisacija*.

The question of language, rather than that of economics, was one of the most important issues for the new Commissar. He thought that the main dividing line for Ukrainians was not the level of economic development, but linguistic difference. In an article from 1920 entitled "Donbas and Ukraine" ("*Donbas i Ukraina*"), he wrote that the Ukrainian peasantry could gain equality with the proletariat by means of using the same language[10]. For him, building socialism was impossible without creating a common proletarian consciousness, which he described as the main purpose of the ministry he headed. "The important task is to combine the education and industrialization of our economy, the raising of our country. To reach high economic indexes is possible only together with organized consciousness, and this is the main purpose for all educational and cultural authorities".[11]



During his tenure, Skrypnyk was very concerned about the educational and cultural development of Ukraine. He was not expected to continue the political line of his predecessor, but Skrypnyk so ardently began to protect Ukrainian culture that, during the whole history of the Ukrainian Soviet Republic, he came to be considered “the father of *Ukrainisacija*”, and all the achievements of that policy were counted as his own contribution.[12] However, it must not be overlooked that by 1927, the year Skrypnyk was appointed to that post, *Ukrainisacija* had already advanced very far in all spheres concerned.

One of the greatest achievements of Skrypnyk, which may still be underestimated, was the establishment of the first official Ukrainian spelling at the end of 1928. The fact is that until the end of the 1920s there were no approved rules for the Ukrainian language. The goal set at that time was to rectify the language and to establish common rules for the whole country. Despite being imperfect and soon to be replaced by another spelling, “*skrypnykivka*” was the first real attempt to create an official language and to establish Ukrainian as the only language for the whole territory. Consequently, Ukrainian received the status of national language. That project was rejected soon after 1933, but even now the spelling is still in use in the Ukrainian diaspora, and from time to time some popular scientific papers about the 1920-1930s appeared which adhered to these rules in writing. [13]

Beyond this, there were a lot of other developments which may be attributed to the policy of *Ukrainisacija*, namely an incredible growth in writing, publishing, and studying in Ukrainian in 1923-1932. This was the result of the resolute activity of two Ukrainian politicians, Oleksandr Shumskyi and Mykola Skrypnyk, who were both finally betrayed and accused of being “too Ukrainian” in their policies. Skrypnyk, who had earlier charged Shumskyi with nationalist inclinations, after 1929 became a victim of Stalin’s terror himself. In effect, it became impossible to be Ukrainian and communist at once. Ukrainian leaders were condemned not for lacking skills and insufficient communist beliefs, but for their nationality and origin.

After the great u-turn in Soviet policy in 1929, *Ukrainisacija* began to be curtailed. Stalin changed the main lines of the policy towards nationalities; the aim was no longer to ensure Bolshevik power in the borderlands, but to strengthen the centralized state by creating a firm hierarchy in government. Being an influential politician, Skrypnyk was in a position to criticize these new tendencies in Soviet policy towards Ukraine. Thus, he addressed the issue of intensified Russification in his communication with Stalin. Ironically, the minister of education at the same time was in charge of the first show trials of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, which began in 1929. Skrypnyk, who worked to raise Ukrainian science to a more professional level, in 1930 headed the trial of the Union for the Freedom of Ukraine (*Spilka vyzvolennia Ukrainy*), a fake organization of “Ukrainian nationalists” consisting of 45 members, all of whom were either adherents of *Ukrainisacija*, former Ukrainian communists, or just nationally oriented prominent scientists and intellectuals.

The exercise of Soviet control turned out to be more and more severe in Ukraine. Skrypnyk strongly disagreed with the new policy of collective farming (*kolektyvisacija*), which was launched in Ukraine and caused the greatest famine ever in its history. The decline in all national programs was obvious. What is more, the new party line was articulated in the tendency to fight against “hidden nationalism” in the CP(b)U.[14] Very soon, Mykola Skrypnyk was proclaimed the leader of that nationalist deviation. But before being suspected of this anti-Soviet crime, Skrypnyk was dismissed from his post. Gradually, he was accused concerning all achievements of the policy of *Ukrainisacija*, for which he had earlier been praised. At the Politburo meeting in June 1933, Skrypnyk was finally asked to admit his supposed mistakes and harshly to criticize himself in order to make that position public.[15]

Finally, after a long period of secret prosecution under the former Bolshevik leader, Skrypnyk wrote in a letter: “My mistakes, which were Trotskyite and nationalist in character, have grown to the reconciliation with nationalist trends and nationalism; they constituted a retreat from Lenin’s methodology and a misrepresentation of Lenin’s theory. [...] For all those faults, I am responsible before the Party. [...] My mistakes also enable the enemies, both international and domestic, to use my words and actions as a weapon against the Party and its main policy. [...] I declare that the relentless Bolshevik critique is not only the precondition for improving all my faults, but also a class influence for me to understand my fallacy and to help me to turn back to the true Bolshevik path”.[16]

These words can be considered a mark of despair on the part of a loyal communist, who, just before the campaign was launched against him, had celebrated the 35 th anniversary of his Communist Party membership. He became the victim of Stalin’s effort to replace all party leaders from Lenin’s generation. Skrypnyk was insulted; he was attacked in the press and during all party meetings. Although his confession had been so humiliating, the attacks continued. Mykola Skrypnyk chose the only possible way to stop that mockery by himself instead of being executed: he committed suicide on the 7 th of July, 1933. With his death, the whole romantic and ambiguous period of visible Ukrainian communism and the Ukrainian state came to a tragic end.

## Conclusion

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Shumskyi and Skrypnyk introduced policies towards nationalities along the same lines. But the reasoning for both was different. Shumskyi considered his post at the ministry of education as an opportunity to fulfill all the demands of former national parties under Soviet rule. The early 1920s were marked by a great belief in Lenin’s claims and Soviet slogans of national self-determination. Still, the national policy element was very mild. Perhaps Ukraine was the only Soviet republic where some political pluralism was allowed. The Ukrainian Communist Party (UCP), the successor of the *Borot’byst* party, existed along with the Bolshevik party until late 1925. Ukraine remained an autonomous entity after being officially recognized as a state in 1918.

From above, on the level of Bolshevik authority, the position of the party itself was also quite unstable both in the newly created USSR and in Ukraine. A common Soviet identity was only about to be created,[17] and Bolsheviks still were not considered to be an omnipotent authority within the former empire. Another important reason for such ambiguity was the generational shift in the political elite which occurred at that time in Russia. A lot of former revolutionary authorities that had been involved in the October Revolution were about to be replaced by a younger generation of Stalin and his comrades. [18] It was a struggle for influence within the party, usually masked by ideological differences.

The same process of eliminating competitors occurred with Mykola Skrypnyk. For him, responsibility for the cultural and educational sphere was the opportunity to carry out the party policy. A loyal communist from the very beginning of Bolshevism, Lenin's attorney in Ukraine appeared to be unfit for a new regime. His activity had always been determined by what he was expected and supposed to do. The problem was that the Party did not need professionalism anymore, but could rely exclusively on loyalty to the degree of implicit and unconditional obedience to orders. Skrypnyk represented another generation, which is why he had to be replaced by the new party leadership.

However, this whole story is not only about those two communists themselves, who were removed from politics in such a violent way. A lot of other party members were dismissed or annihilated in the same way all over the USSR. All of them were used to some extent and then replaced by another cohort of party representatives. Ukrainian communism was also critical in terms of Bolshevik political tactics. As long as moderate political pluralism, as epitomized in the existence of other political parties, was helpful, *Ukrainisacija* was acceptable for the Bolshevik party; hence a national orientation was allowed and welcomed. From a Ukrainian perspective, national communism could be considered an attempt to defend the right to be Ukrainian in a multinational empire, or a “communal apartment”, as the USSR has once been called.[19] But from the Bolshevik point of view, *Ukrainiasacija* turned out to be no more than an appropriate method to gain power in Ukraine, a game about national connivance with the only aim of ensuring a firm and eternal link within a newly created empire.

Although *Ukrainiasacija* turned out to be a disaster for the Ukrainian intellectual and cultural elite after 1933, and from the current perspective must be regarded as a failure or even a betrayal of the Ukrainian cause, in the decade after 1923 Ukrainian communists were instrumental in promoting national development, economic growth, and cultural and artistic achievements. Ukraine quickly gained the status of one of the most developed republics in the USSR. To be sure, there were certain objective reasons for that growth. But it was the Ukrainians – or, more precisely, the Ukrainian communists – who guided that process and strove to safeguard national interests on the broadest scale. The success of Ukrainian communists in 1920s was followed up by a new cohort of Ukrainians who headed the CP(b)U until 1991, and thanks to their efforts Ukraine to some extent managed to remain Ukrainian in the Soviet Union.

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Notes:

1. “Memorandum Ukrains’koi Kommunistychnoi partii Borot’bystiv”, in Taras Gunchak and Roman Solchanyk (eds.), *Tysiacha rokiv ukrains’koi suspil’no-politychnoi dumky*, Kyiv, 2001, vol. 7, p. 396-404.

2. “Programa U.K.P., uhvalena Perwym ustanivchym Z’izdom U.K.P. 22-25 sichnia 1920 roku” in Taras Gunchak and Roman Solchanyk (eds.), *Tysiacha rokiv ukrains’koi suspil’no-politychnoi dumky*, Kyiv 2001, vol. 7., p. 405-407.

3. Jurij Borys, *The Russian Communist Party and the Sovietization of Ukraine: a Study in the Communist Doctrine of the Self-Determination of Nations*, Stockholm, 1960, p. 265.

4. Ivan V. Majstrenko, *Borot’bism: A chapter in the history of Ukrainian communism*, New York, 1954, p. 26.

5. Martin Terry, “An affirmative Action Empire”, in Ronald Grigor Suny and Terry Martin (eds.), *A State of Nations: Empire and Nation-Making in the Age of Lenin and Stalin*, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 74.

6. Jurij Borys, *The Russian Communist Party and the Sovietization of Ukraine: a Study in the Communist Doctrine of the Self-Determination of Nations*, Stockholm, 1960, p. 114-115.

7. Quoted in Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, University of Toronto Press, first ed. 1988, p. 393.

8. Mykola Skrypnyk, “Shumskizm chy khvyliovism?”, in idem, *Statti ta promovy v 5 tomah*, v. II (Natsionalne pytannia), part 1., 1929, p. 146-164.

9. For a detailed account of the history of the Bolshevik party in Ukraine see M. Ravich-Cherkasskij, *Istoriya Kommunisticheskoy partii (B-ov)*, Kharkov, 1923. This book, written shortly after the revolutionary events and not influenced by the official party ideology, presents a largely unbiased view of the achievements and losses of the CP(b)U in its early history.

10. Mykola Skrypnyk, “Donbas i Ukraina”, in idem, *Vybrani tvory*, Kyiv, 1991.

11. Mykola Skrypnyk, *Statti ta promovy v 5 tomah*, v. IV, part 1., 1930, p. ?. 3-17.

12. Ivan Koshelivets , *Mykola Skrypntk* , Munich , Suchasnist , 1972, p. 202-203.
13. For reading in “skrypnykivka” see Igor Bondar-Tereshchenko, *U zadzerkalli: 1910-1930s*, Kyiv, Tempora, 2009.
14. Valeriy Soldatenko , *U poshukah social ’ noji ta nacional ’ noji garmoniji : Eskizy do istorii ukrains ’ kogo komunizmu* , Kyiv , 2006, p. 356.
15. Ib idem , p. 388.
16. Quoted in Valeriy Soldatenko , *U poshukah social ’ noji ta nacional ’ noji garmoniji : Eskizy do istorii ukrains ’ kogo komunizmu* , Kyiv , 2006, p. 389 (author’s translation).
17. In his book *National Bolshevism: Stalinist Mass Culture and the Formation of Modern Russian National Identity, 1931 – 1956*(Harvard University Press, 2002), David Brandenberger argues that Russian identity started to be formed only at the beginning of 1930s. Until that time, there was a lack in understanding what is supposed to be called Russian.
18. Adam B.Ulam, *Stalin: the man and his era*, New York, The Viking Press, 1973.
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