

HRUSHEVSKY'S CONCEPT OF UKRAINIAN STATEHOOD FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A FEDERATION

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One of the first tasks that the historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky set before himself upon his return from exile to Kyiv in the spring of 1917 was to turn the attention of the Ukrainian public to the possibilities that suddenly emerged for the restoration of Ukrainian statehood after the fall of the Romanov dynasty in March of 1917. In this endeavor he succeeded not only through his very active involvement in political developments of the day but also through a series of articles written for Ukrainian newspapers in Kyiv, primarily the *Nova Rada* and *Narodna Volia*. This discussion of Hrushevsky's conceptualization of Ukrainian statehood within the federal idea is based both on his articles written during the first year of the revolution and his political activities as the head of the Ukrainian Central Rada.

In his first article "Velyka Khvyliia" published shortly after he returned from exile to Kyiv in the early spring of 1917, the Ukrainian historian focuses on the new juridical conditions in the relationship between Ukraine and Russia—namely, the fact that the ties that had existed between the two countries for more than two and a half centuries had been irretrievably severed with the abdication of Nicholas II. For this reason, Hrushevsky explains, the Ukrainian question in the empire had formally ceased to exist and, therefore, the political possibilities opening up before Ukraine "were unfolding to their fullest extent." In his view, the biggest misfortune for the government and the public would be "not to keep pace with the demands of the moment."¹

This optimistic statement regarding the new legal status of Ukraine with its limitless possibilities for the reconstruction of statehood, sounded convincing to Hrushevsky the historian. However, Hrushevsky the politician--a role he assumed as the Head of the Ukrainian Central Rada--was well aware that the actual

¹ *Nova Rada*, March 25, 1917 published in a pamphlet, M. Hrushevskiyi, *Vilna Ukraïina* (New York, Ukraïinska drukarnia i vydavnycha spilka, 1918) pp. 3-7.

conditions of 20th century Ukraine were wrought with serious political and social complexities. So as not to disturb the Russian liberals heading the Provisional government in Petrograd and in order not to disconcert too much the large and politically active Ukrainian socialist intelligentsia as well as the influential leaders of the minorities in Ukraine, both brought up in the spirit of internationalism [and thus optimistically looking forward toward federation as a higher form of international cooperation,] Hrushevsky adopted a cautious, not always a clearly delineated path while drafting the plan for Ukrainian statehood.

In order to comprehend the existing political climate in the midst of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, especially within its youthful left wing—the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats—a political climate that Hrushevsky as a historian and politician was fully aware of, it would be useful to cite the reminiscences of a far from unsympathetic toward socialism observer, Ivan Franko: “At this time” writes Franko at the end of the nineteenth century, “the mood dominating a significant segment of the Ukrainian intelligentsia was that of indifference and even hostility toward the development of the Ukrainian nation. Under the influence of half-baked socialist theories, a segment of the most ardent and the most talented Ukrainian youth assumed a negative attitude toward any kind of “nationess,” claiming that in the Elysium of the future socialist paradise—as it was believed in those days—all national particularities will disappear. [For them] the solution of economic problems was much more important than anything else. ‘And what are you writing’ condescendingly addressed me a Ukrainian visitor [to Lviv from Kyiv]. Everything that was to be said had been already written by Marx and Chernyshevsky. Now it is only necessary to bring it to its realization.’ In the midst of this youth—and not always youth only—there was a prevalent conviction that the course of history is leading to the fusion of nationalities and that the cultivation of some kind of national particularism was a regress.”² This political view continued to dominate, stressed Ivan Franko, in spite of the fact that the father of Ukrainian socialism, Mykhailo Drahomanov, often attempted to warn “the hotheaded socialists

² Ivan Franko, *Pysannia Ivana Franka, IV. Moloda Ukrajina*. Chast persha. (Lviv: Nakladom Ukraïnsko-Ruskoji vydavnychoji spilky, 1910), pp. 2-3.

not to place too much trust in the social-democratic constructs of the future discerning in them a considerable dose of Jewish conceit.”³

In this political atmosphere one can well imagine how difficult it was for Hrushevsky to win over toward the idea of Ukrainian statehood in which, on the basis of his political writings in 1917, he strongly believed, a significant section of the Ukrainian intelligentsia, the Ukrainian Socialist Revolutionaries and Social Democrats. The majority of his numerous articles written during the first year of the Ukrainian revolution had the intent of transforming the optimistically inspired dreamers of the future international “socialist paradise “ into defenders of Ukrainian statehood.

The didactic tone permeates his entire political discourse of this period. As an example, he may begin the discussion on the question of Ukrainian statehood with an unequivocal declaration that “All of us, the entire nationally conscious community ought to be supporting [Ukrainian] statehood” but in the succeeding paragraph he will immediately plunge into a lengthy explanation: “This [the concept of statehood] may have an unpleasant sound because on the one hand, we have been accustomed to identify statehood with the bureaucratic system and, on the other, with imperialism. Therefore the socialist parties usually adopted a hostile position toward the state and state administration and in our midst, under the influence of the Russian conditions and culture, profoundly influenced by anarchistic, anti-state sentiments, it was always considered proper not to have any dealings with the state, to reduce to a minimum the state’s role in society, to live apart from its presence, and on the contrary, constructing everything with the conviction that the state’s authority is a negative, destructive force.”⁴ But in the new era, Hrushevsky continues to explain, the state will represent something different because it will be constructed by the Ukrainian democratic forces and therefore, “The Ukrainian democratic community ought to make every effort to have a state that it needs and that it desires and not to turn its back toward it, be

³ Ibid. p. 22.

⁴ Mykhailo Hrushevskyj, *Na porozi novoji Ukrajiny*, (New York: Computorprint Corporation, 1992), p. 48.

indifferent to it. On the contrary, it ought to consider state activity its obligation and ought to exert toward its construction and leadership its entire body and soul.”⁵

In order to protect this statehood for which the Ukrainian political leadership ought to be willing to offer “vsiu dushu i sylu” it was necessary to have a Ukrainian army for the upkeep of which no resources ought to be spared, because this army “will not be something foreign, alien and inimical to democracy and culture but its defender.”⁶

But to achieve this objective, it was first of all necessary to strengthen the Ukrainian nation with its inhabitants both in the city and the countryside. In an article under the title “Natsia” the Ukrainian leader not only speaks of the measures to be undertaken in this direction, but also calls attention to the obstructions that Russian imperialistic forces were bound to be preparing to block the road toward Ukrainian statehood “acting either openly to destroy our national existence or masquerading under innocent slogans of unity of the Russian revolution or an all-Russian democratic federation.”⁷

When at the end of summer 1917 these anticipated obstructions on the road toward the construction of Ukrainian separate existence became a stark reality with the decision of the Russian Provisional Government to significantly circumscribe the previously recognized political and territorial limits of Ukraine’s autonomy, Hrushevskyj, already found it necessary to calm down the fury in the Rada, especially among the now re-educated Ukrainian socialists. Addressing this issue in an article optimistically entitled “Ukraine will attain its objective” [Ukraina dizhde svoho] he explained that it was necessary to accept “Instructions” from Petrograd, but he left no doubt, as the title of the article implied, that this acceptance was temporary only for “...the national life can move only forward and never back.” He reasoned that Ukrainian nation should take advantage even of the “truncated” autonomy handed by the central authorities by creatively transforming it into a firm base for an autonomous Ukraine. At the same time it ought to develop those living

⁵Ibid.

⁶ Ibid. p. 52.

⁷ Ibid. p. 53.

forces, that creative energy which will fill in the crevices and dead spots in the life of the nation created by this restricted autonomy.”⁸ In other words, it was necessary momentarily to reconcile oneself with the existing situation but with a firm resolution to construct the firm foundations for Ukrainian statehood: to strengthen the nation both in the cities and in the countryside; to develop Ukrainian cultural institution, stimulate scientific, technological and economic potential of the country; expand international trade etc.⁹

But in the process of preparing the base for Ukraine’s separate existence--of which he often speaks and which the above mentioned steps signify--Hrushevsky occasionally reminds his readers that in the course of these efforts one always ought to keep in mind “as the final objective the world federation.”¹⁰

The idea of this world federation was not something abstract or vaguely distant for Hrushevsky. He was willing to take concrete steps in the direction of its attainment, but as the pragmatic leader of the Rada he is approaching it from the perspective of what was best at a particular time for the strengthening of Ukrainian statehood.

Thus, while in Kyiv, Hrushevsky, for his Ukrainian audience, might declare that the federal system “ought not to be based on the principle that we once were caught under various circumstances and locked up in a single prison cage”¹¹ and proposes a federation of the countries bordering on the Black Sea. At the same time, in his dealings with the Russian Provisional government he will exert pressure to accept the principle of federation as the future state structure and take concrete steps toward the convocation of a People’s Congress, which indeed will take place in September 1917 with delegates of thirteen nationalities of the empire debating the issue of the perspective federation to be raised on the ruins of the Russian empire.¹²

⁸ “Ukraina dizhde svoho” *Narodna Volia*, August 24, 1917.

⁹ These ideas are scattered in his articles, especially in *Narodna Volia*.

¹⁰ “Novi perspektyvy” in Mykhailo Hrushevsky *Na porozi novoji Ukrainy* (New York: Computoprint Corporation, 1992) p. 21.

¹¹ “Novi perspektyvy” *Na porozi novoji Ukrainy* p. 26.

¹² U Zjizdi Narodiv bulo zarejestrovano 64 ofitsijnykh delegativ: vid Bilorusiv 7, Hruzyniv 2, Esontsiv 4, Evrejev 11, Latyshiv 10, Lytvyniv 9, Moldavan 6, Tatar 10, Tiurkiv 5. Aktyvnu uchast u dyskusijakh Zjizdu braly i delegaty neofitsijni jakykh bulo pryblizno 30. *Ukrajinska Tsentralna Rada: Dokumenty i materialy u dvokh tomakh*, Tom I, (Kyjiv: Naukova Dumka, 1996) pp. 288-312; 554-555.

It is of interest to note that one of the smallest delegations at the congress was the Russian consisting of three delegates only while, as it was noted in the minutes, only one of them was an ethnic Russian.¹³ The absence at the Congress of the more prominent leaders of the Russian political parties is partly explained by the negative attitude all Russian parties adopted toward the principle of federation, including the left wing of the political spectrum. The Congress was viewed by the Petrograd politicians as Hrushevsky's clever political maneuver to strengthen Ukraine's position, as well as the position of other nationalities in the struggle with Russian centralism. For the Russian politicians in Petrograd it was clear that this gathering of prominent leaders of the empire's national minorities could on the one hand placate national minorities who consistently opposed Ukraine's separation from Russia and were suspicious of Hrushevsky's moves in that direction, and on the other, the direct contacts established with the leaders of the non-Russian nationalities, could considerably strengthen Ukraine's position in the struggle with the central authorities. The Congress took place exactly a month after the humiliating Instructions were issued by the Central government in Petrograd. Furthermore the coordination of activities among the leaders of the nationalities could have been especially advantageous for the preparation of a common front to be presented at the meeting of the future Constituent Assembly.

From this same perspective, from the perspective of defending the achievements in the construction of Ukrainian statehood can be viewed Hrushevsky's alarming appeal to save the Russian federation appearing in *Narodna Volia* shortly after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd.¹⁴ As in the middle of March, during the first Russian revolution of 1917, Hrushevsky was quick to comprehend the historical moment that needed to be taken advantage of in order to restore Ukrainian statehood, so in November of the same year he perceived the dangers emanating from the inevitable struggle with a new, potentially more dangerous

¹³Ibid. Tilky K. Sukhovykh po natsionalnosti buv rosianynom. Druhi dva, I. Sklovskyj buv evrej a H. Teslenko-Prykhodko ukrajinets. Vsi buly prynalezhni do Rosijskoji Partii Sotsialistiv Revoliutsioneriv i ostanni dva na tij pidstavi predstavlialy rosijan.

¹⁴ *Narodna volia* November 23, 1917

adversary than the anemic, hesitant Provisional government. A coordinated action of all nationalities, including the now considerably weakened Russian non-Bolshevik forces under the slogan of “Let’s save the Russian federation” could have proven effective in dislodging the Bolsheviks from power.

From this same perspective of preserving Ukrainian statehood one could view the proclamation of the Ukrainian People’s Republic within the framework of the future Russian Republic in the Third Universal. In addition to the considerations outlined above, the usefulness of continued enunciation of the principle of federation, one should note the possibilities that were opening before Ukraine with the fall of the Provisional government in the international sphere, namely the possibilities of establishing formal diplomatic contacts with the Entente representatives many of whom after the Bolshevik *coup* established their residence in Ukraine. The Entente states were still formally allies of Russia interested above all to reinvigorate the Eastern front which was inconceivable without the participation of non-Bolshevik Russia. Only formal adherence to the principle of federation on the part of the Ukrainian government could assure the cooperation of the Entente.¹⁵

The above discussion inevitably leads to the question: was federation for Hrushevsky exclusively a means which he expertly used in the struggle for Ukraine’s separation from Russia? The answer is yes and no. If one speaks of a federation with Russia as the nucleus of the future federation, then Hrushevsky’s efforts in this direction could be viewed as only a clever maneuver of a consummate politician. This is exactly how he was viewed by the Russian politicians in Petrograd. As an example, one may cite the observations of a highly respected member of the Russian liberals, Baron Boris Nolde. For this eminent scholar-jurist Hrushevsky represented “an old European activist educated in the school of refined political formulas and intricate political struggle” who during the revolution

¹⁵ Pro polityku dyplomatychnykh predstavnykiv Antanty dyvys Arnold D. Margolin *Ukrajina i polityka Antanty*. (Berlin: Z. I. Grzhebin, 1923); Anna Procyk, *Russian Nationalism and Ukraine: The Nationality Policy of the Volunteer Army during the Civil War* (Edmonton-Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1995), passim, osoblyvo pp. 83-118.

towered over the young political dilettantes both in Kyiv and Petrograd.¹⁶ Of very similar opinion was the historian Pavel Miliukov, the leader of the Russian liberals.¹⁷

On the other hand, if one speaks a concept of federation in the broad sense of the word, in the sense of a pan-European or world federation, than Hrushevsky was in favor of this idea following in the footsteps of the nineteenth century Italian political thinker, Giuseppe Mazzini, the founder of Young Europe which envisaged a union of all liberated European nationalities, a union of independent states more or less in the pattern that this union is evolving in Europe today. The ideology of Young Europe was influential in Eastern Europe, including Ukraine where it found expression in the middle of the nineteenth century with the formation of the Cyril and Methodius Society. It is not surprising that Hrushevsky during this period not infrequently made references to this society.

¹⁶ Official Kadet party paper, *Ryech*, July 20, 1917 cited in Khrystiuk.

¹⁷ Paul N. Miliukov, *The Russian Revolution. Vol. I. The Revolution Divided: Spring 1917*. (Gulf Breeze, FL: Academic International Press, 1978), p. 125.