“I Love Russia, and/but I Want Ukraine,” or How a Russian General Became Hetman of the Ukrainian State, 1917–1918

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Introduction

Pavlo/Pavel Skoropadsky’s memoirs, published in 1995¹ shed new light and offer historians a new perspective on the revolutionary years of 1917–18 in Ukraine and the Russian Empire. They supplement and partly challenge some of the accounts of this period and Skoropadsky’s rule that were based largely on Austrian or German sources or the memoirs of Ukrainian politicians who fought with Skoropadsky for influence over the Ukrainian cause.² Those memoirs chronicle the transformation of

¹ Pavlo Skoropadsky, Spohady: Kinets 1917–hruden 1918, ed. Iaroslav Pelensky (Kyiv: Instytut ukrainskoi arkheohrafii ta dzhereloznavstva im. M.S. Hrushevskoho NAN Ukrainy; Philadelphia: Skhidnoievropeiskyi doslidny instytut im. V.K. Lypynskoho, 1995). During the Soviet period, any objective discussion of Skoropadsky or his government was forbidden among historians as evidence of “bourgeois nationalism” and “counter-revolution” largely due to the Hetman’s resolutely anti-Bolshevik politics. For the first English-language treatment of these materials, as they were being prepared for publication, see Jaroslaw Pelenski, “Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky and Germany (1917–18) as Reflected in His Memoirs,” in German-Ukrainian Relations in Historical Perspective, ed. Hans-Joachim Torke and John-Paul Himka (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1994), 69–83.

² See the very helpful studies based on these materials by Taras Hunczak, “The Ukraine under Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky,” in The Ukraine, 1917–1921: A Study in Revolution, ed. Taras Hunczak (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 1977), 61–81; Oleh Fedysyn, Germany’s Drive to the East and the Ukrainian Revolution, 1917–1918 (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1971); Peter Borowsky,
Skoropadsky from a loyal servitor of the Russian tsar and a decorated military commander to a firm believer in the equality of Ukraine in a Russian federation and in the dignity of Ukraine’s past struggles for autonomy. In “re-inventing” the ancient Cossack state of the hetmans, Skoropadsky attempted to unite the “healthy forces” of Ukraine to combat the Bolshevik menace to the north and preserve an oasis for the subsequent resurrection of a free Russia as well. His followers in emigration, most notably the Hetmanate’s ambassador to Vienna and historian Viacheslav Lypynsky (1882–1931), developed a political theory of Ukrainian monarchy based on Skoropadsky’s failed attempts at Ukrainian statehood in 1918. The legacies of both Skoropadsky and Lypynsky have gained a new lease on life in post-Soviet Ukraine.

Skoropadsky’s memoirs can be compared with Mykhailo Hrushevsky’s, which have also been published since the end of the Soviet Union. Hrushevsky, Ukraine’s premier historian, headed the Ukrainian state before Skoropadsky, but he started and ended at very different ideological positions from the latter. Well before 1917 Hrushevsky was already


4. See, for example, the proceedings of the second international scholarly conference, Hetman Pavlo Skoropadsky ta Ukrainska derzhava 1918 roku, vol. 5, Studii z archivnoi spravty ta dokumentoznavstva (Kyiv: Holovne arkhivne upravlinnia Ukrainy, 1999). The conference commemorated the 125th birthday of Skoropadsky and the eightieth anniversary of the founding of the Ukrainian Hetman State.

5. M. Hrushevsky, “Spomyny,” Kyiv, 1989, no. 8: 102–54; no. 9: 108–49; no. 10: 122–58; no. 11: 113–55. Hrushevsky’s memoirs were written during the 1920s, after he returned to Soviet Ukraine, and were subject to Soviet censorship of the history of the Ukrainian political movement.
committed to the cause of Ukrainian national revival and some form of autonomy and independence for Ukraine.\footnote{6}

In a broader context, all these newly available views add to our understanding of the turbulent years of revolution and civil war that we have had from the influential memoirs of White generals and politicians, especially those of General Anton Denikin, who led his Volunteer Army in an invasion of Ukraine after Hetman Skoropadsky was overthrown and replaced by first the Ukrainian socialist Directory and then the second Soviet republic in 1919.\footnote{7} Skoropadsky’s recollection of his own efforts to sort out the rapidly evolving revolutionary situation in Ukraine can also be checked against other documentary records long available to scholars of this period.\footnote{8} Most of the memoirs from prominent Ukrainian activists fall into the left spectrum of contemporary Ukrainian politics.\footnote{9} His biography can also be contrasted with another prominent figure of

\footnote{6. See the biography by Thomas M. Prymak, Mykhailo Hrushevsky: The Politics of National Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).}


wartime and interwar Ukraine, Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky, another “convert” to the Ukrainian cause, albeit at a much earlier stage in his life and in the context of a very different multinational empire, Austria-Hungary.10

Finally, Skoropadsky’s memoirs bear scrutiny against the backdrop of those of several other military men who played important roles in the First World War and the postwar world. On the “Russian” side, Marshall Carl Mannerheim claimed very similar aristocratic origins and elite military training and became a founding father of the modern Finnish state.11 Curiously, Mannerheim viewed himself as a White general, despite the Russian Whites’ refusal to accept the independence of Finland after 1917. On the side of the Central Powers, we have the memoirs of Admiral Miklos Horthy, who dominated interwar Hungarian politics after a career in the armed forces of Austria-Hungary.12 The Polish socialist Józef Pilsudski, who had a very different career trajectory, also became recognized as the father of his country, the Second Republic of Poland, after leading the Polish Legion during the First World War on the side of the Central Powers.13 In the German high command Paul von Hindenburg recorded his memoirs shortly after the German revolution of 1918.14 More directly relevant to Skoropadsky’s memory of 1918 are the

10. As a teenager, Sheptytsky transferred from the Roman Catholic faith of his Polonized Ukrainian gentry family to the Ukrainian Catholic Church of his more distant ancestors, initially against the determined resistance of his parents. He did not record his own retrospective view of these events in the form of memoirs, but did leave a voluminous historical trail in his writings. See Andrii Krawchuk, *Christian Social Ethics in Ukraine: The Legacy of Andrei Sheptytsky* (Edmonton and Toronto: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1997), and Paul R. Magocsi, ed., *Morality and Reality: The Life and Times of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptyts’kyi* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1989).


memories of General Wilhelm Groener, who served as chief of staff to General Hermann Eichhorn’s Army Group in Ukraine during 1918 and with whom Skoropadsky was in frequent contact and had generally good relations. Skoropadsky’s memoirs have the virtue of being recorded very shortly after he fled from Ukraine. Prior to the 1995 edition they were published only in fragments, which were translated from the original Russian into Ukrainian. The latter subset of comparisons suggests the important role that military commanders played in state affairs after the cataclysm of world war and revolution in much of central, eastern, and southeastern Europe.

**Skoropadsky’s Life and Career (1873–45)**

Skoropadsky’s life is framed by his birth and death in Germany, a country he would fight in 1914–17 but to which he owed his brief period of rule over Ukraine. Pavlo was born while his mother was taking a cure at the famous German mineral-waters resort of Wiesbaden. He spent the first five years of his life there. His childhood governess was English, so that when he arrived at the family estate in Poltava Gubernia at age five, he spoke very broken Russian (and no Ukrainian). But he was forbidden to speak German after that and turned over to the village priest for instruction in the Russian language and religion. Even after residing in Germany for another twenty-seven years as an adult, Skoropadsky claimed he never learned the language of his host country.

The Skoropadsky family was one of the oldest Ukrainian Cossack clans, whose founder Fedir Skoropadsky came from west Ukrainian lands to settle near Uman in the seventeenth century. Several members of this distinguished family had played important roles in the political and cultural history of the country; moreover, the Skoropadsky family had intermarried over the centuries with other prominent Cossack gentry.

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17. The following biographical sketch is compiled from the main body of Skoropadsky’s memoirs, supplemented by an additional set of reminiscences of his childhood written between 1935 and 1939 in Germany, “Moe detstvo na Ukraine,” and by essays in the same volume by the editor Jaroslav Pelenski and the Hetman’s daughter Olena Ott-Skoropadsky (with the help of Pavlo Gai-Nyzhnyk), “Pavlo Skoropadsky: Korotka khronika zhyttia (1873–1945).”
families. The Skoropadskys served in the Ukrainian Cossack forces until Catherine II disbanded these units. One ancestor, Ivan Illych Skoropadsky, ruled as hetman of Ukraine (1708–22) under Peter I after the defeat of Ivan Mazepa. Following Catherine’s abolition of the Hetmanate and the dashing of any hopes of Ukrainian autonomy in the Russian Empire, his later ancestors served with distinction and at high ranks in the Russian military. The first of them, Pavlo’s great-grandfather Mykhailo Iakovych (1764–1810), entered the Imperial Noble Cadet Corps. Pavlo’s grandfather, Ivan Mykhailovych, served as marshal of the nobility for Poltava Gubernia and played an active role in the 1861 rural reforms. One of Ivan’s daughters, Ielysaveta Myloradovych, contributed a substantial sum to found the most important Ukrainian scholarly initiative of the nineteenth century, the Shevchenko Scientific Society in Lviv.

Following family tradition, Pavlo’s father, Petro Ivanovych, studied in the guards’ school and became a military officer. He took part in the Caucasian campaigns and was decorated with numerous orders. In 1865 he retired from military service at the rank of colonel and took an active role in local gentry politics in Starodub. Pavlo’s mother, Mariia Andriivna Myklashevska, also descended from an ancient Ukrainian family that traced its origins to Prince Mstyslav of Kyiv and the Lithuanian prince Gedimin. The family estate Trostianets in Poltava Gubernia was frequently visited by prominent Russian and Ukrainian cultural and intellectual figures, such as the historian Petro Doroshenko, also a descendant of a Cossack gentry family and later appointed deputy minister for art and national culture by the Hetman.

At the age of thirteen Pavlo entered the Petersburg Corps of Pages and began his military career. Graduating in 1893, he was assigned to a regiment of the Cavalier Guards, where by 1897 he rose to the rank of ensign. The following year he married Aleksandra Durnovo, the daughter of Lieutenant-General P.P. Durnovo, who was a relative of Nicholas II’s interior minister. Pavlo and Aleksandra had three daughters and three sons; their last daughter born in Berlin in 1919. With the outbreak of the Russo-Japanese War, Pavlo asked for transfer to the front and departed in April 1904 for Mukden, where he served with the Third Verkhneudinsk Cossack Regiment and later with the Manchurian Army. In fall 1904 he was appointed commander of the Fifth Company of the Second Chita Cossack Regiment and then adjutant to the commander-in-chief of the Russian forces in the Far East, General N.P. Linevich.
Immediately after the war, Nicholas II promoted Skoropadsky to fligel-adjutant with the rank of colonel. With imperial patronage, he advanced rapidly: after serving in the Finnish Dragoon Regiment and the Life-Guard Cavalry Regiment, in March 1912 he became a major-general in the emperor’s regiment. After the outbreak of the First World War, Skoropadsky was transferred to the front, where he won several orders for bravery and leadership. In 1915–16 he served on the Baltic Front, was promoted to lieutenant general, and in January 1917 was given the command of the Thirty-fourth Army Corps, stationed in historic Ukrainian lands on the Southwestern Front. Here for the first time he came face to face with the Ukrainian national movement. Eventually, Skoropadsky was given the task of Ukrainianizing this corps, one of the most important steps of the Russian High Command in its efforts to use the principle of national loyalty to combat the rapidly spreading Bolshevization of the soldiers. Later in 1917 he was elected otaman of the Free Cossack movement at its congress in Chyhyryn.

The Bolshevik coup in Petrograd changed the political landscape dramatically and soon confronted the Ukrainian Rada in Kyiv with the threat of invasion from the north. Skoropadsky, despite his hostility toward the Ukrainian socialists in the Rada, chose to remain in Kyiv with his troops to defend the capital against the Bolsheviks instead of transferring to the German front to fight the original enemy. The Rada leadership, particularly its General Secretariat, nonetheless remained hostile to Skoropadsky and created obstacles to his efforts to build a Ukrainian armed force. When Bolshevik forces launched a second campaign against Ukraine, they briefly captured Kyiv but were soon displaced by the invading German and Austro-Hungarian forces, which had concluded a separate peace with the Rada delegates at Brest-Litovsk. The Rada was restored as an occupation regime of the Central Powers.

Once the Rada began pursuing its socialist policies, especially in the area of land reform and appropriation of private property, Skoropadsky decided to cast his lot with the opposition and helped found the Ukrainian Hromada (later the Ukrainian National Hromada), which worked with other organizations that united landowners and business interests in Ukraine. When the Germans lost patience with the Rada, the Hromada and its allies began to plan a coup against the left-wing government. On 29 April 1918 a congress of Ukrainian agrarians (khliboroby) proclaimed Skoropadsky hetman of Ukraine. The following night officers loyal to Skoropadsky seized the main buildings of the Rada government and
proclaimed the Ukrainian State. The new regime reversed the Rada’s socialist legislation, beginning with the re-introduction of private property in land.

Despite making considerable progress in several fields, notably education, culture, and foreign affairs, Skoropadsky did not solve more urgent matters, particularly the land question and the building of an armed force to protect Ukraine. The socialist parties he had overthrown were more hostile than ever to his policies, agitated for his removal, and organized a peasant insurgency under the aegis of a newly formed Directory. On 14 December 1918, after German and Austro-Hungarian forces had begun their retreat, the Directory’s partisan troops entered Kyiv. Skoropadsky went into hiding for a short while as he tried to assess his chances of returning to power and reluctantly decided to emigrate with his family to Berlin, where he began work on his memoirs based on the diary he kept in 1917 and extensive notes he was able to bring out of Ukraine with him. After a two-year stay in Switzerland he returned to Berlin in 1921 and took up residence in Wahnsee.

By 1920 Skoropadsky returned to political activity as leader of the Ukrainian Union of Agrarians-Statists (Ukrainskyi soiuz khiborobiv-derzhavnikiv, or USKhD), a new Hetmanite movement founded by Lypynsky and Serhii Shemet (1875–1957). In the difficult conditions of émigré politics, Skoropadsky and Lypynsky fell out over key principles of the Hetmanite movement and the movement split. Still, branches of the movement were founded not only in Austria and Germany, but also in other countries that had substantial Ukrainian communities: Czechoslovakia, the United States, Canada, France, Poland, Manchuria, and China. Skoropadsky was also successful in using his influence in German cultural and political circles to found the Ukrainian Scientific Institute at the University of Berlin in 1925. With the coming to power of the National Socialists under Hitler, Skoropadsky’s initiatives came under threat. In 1939 Skoropadsky sent his son Danylo to England to guarantee the survival of the Hetman’s line and the Hetmanite movement in the event of his death during the war, which he expected to break out shortly in Europe and to end in Hitler’s defeat. Once again Skoropadsky was forced to walk a thin line between loyalty to his German masters and defending Ukraine’s longer-term interests as he understood them. His efforts to lead the Hetmanite movement from Germany foundered on the diaspora’s split with him over his hopes for German support of a new Ukrainian state. He died at the very end of the war, in April 1945, as the
result of wounds sustained during an American bombing raid on a small town near Munich.

**The Ukrainianization of the Thirty-fourth Army Corps and the Launching of Skoropadsky’s Ukrainian Career**

In his comprehensive study of the revolution and civil war in the Russian Empire’s borderlands, Richard Pipes identified soldiers as among the most important forces in the development of the Ukrainian national movement. Indeed, by spring 1917 Ukrainian national activists, most of them military men themselves, had forcefully raised the Ukrainian cause in soldiers’ politics across the empire. In May delegates from as far afield as Vladivostok and Helsingfors (Helsinki) attended the First All-Ukrainian Military Congress in Kyiv and demanded for the first time the right of Ukrainian soldiers to form their own “national” units and to use the Ukrainian language as part of the reform the Russian Empire and its army.18 These demands, by the way, had not been part of the mainstream Ukrainian national movement before 1917, although the Revolutionary Ukrainian Party and its successor, the Ukrainian National Party, did call for a Ukrainian national army as the guarantor of the security of a future independent Ukrainian state. If anything, the socialist parties favoured some form of popular militia. The demands for national armies were, however, an important part of a broader politics of national liberation in east central and southeastern Europe.

Not surprisingly, the Ukrainian soldiers’ demands split the army high command into those who saw Ukrainianization and similar “nationalizations” as the best way to combat the demoralization that was leading to Bolshevik success among the soldiers and those who saw it as the end of the imperial army itself and as something verging on treason in an atmosphere already thick with suspicions of treason from top to bottom. Among the influential officers who were persuaded early of the possible benefits of Ukrainianization was General Aleksei Brusilov, appointed commander-in-chief in May 1917. But not only the officers and high command were split over this issue; the soldiers too fought over the competing aims of socialist and national revolutions. The Ukrainian soldiers’ congresses insisted that a Ukrainian national army was needed

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“to prevent the disorganization of the army and to raise its fighting ability.” Still, the soviets of soldiers’, Cossacks’, and workers’ deputies, dominated by Menshevik and Social Revolutionary junior officers, regularly condemned the Ukrainian military congresses and their demands as reckless acts of opportunism that threatened to split the ranks of the revolutionary forces and weaken them in their fight against the anticipated counter-revolution from the right. The Petrograd Soviet also resisted any moves to introduce federalism and local autonomy in civilian politics and administration. In the face of often fierce opposition, the Central Rada in Kyiv nonetheless gave in to the demands of the military congress and created a General Military Secretariat to oversee the anticipated transfer of Ukrainian soldiers to the Southwestern and the Romanian Fronts. Symon Petliura, who would soon become one of Skoropadsky’s most determined rivals, headed the Secretariat. Konstantin Oberuchev, commissar of the Kyiv Military District appointed by the Provisional Government, fought for a unified revolutionary army and refused to cooperate with the local Ukrainian authorities.19

All soldiers and officers found themselves in the middle of this confusing and unfamiliar world of revolutionary political conflict and intrigue. Even by the standards of traditional military politics among the imperial officers, who claimed they stood above politics, these new developments were disturbing and even alarming. To all those units with large numbers of Ukrainian soldiers and officers, the All-Ukrainian Congress sent its own commissars, who had to work out some accommodation with the commissars sent by the Petrograd Soviet and its local affiliates. Moreover, former Duma politicians and party representatives regularly visited the front lines ostensibly to raise morale and see for themselves how the war was going, but as often as not they spread propaganda among the soldiers for one or another revolutionary or

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19. Oberuchev was a Social Revolutionary activist who had been arrested and stripped of his officer’s rank for fomenting unrest in the Kyiv garrison during the 1905 revolution. He returned from exile after the February Revolution. His biography is a good illustration of the stark choices of increasingly exclusivist identities and loyalties forced by the emerging politics of 1917. In earlier times Oberuchev had considered himself something of a Ukrainophile and had contributed to the historico-cultural journal *Kievskaia starina*. In his memoir account of the revolution and civil war in Ukraine, Volodymyr Vynnychenko remembers Oberuchev in 1917 as a “hysterically violent enemy of the Ukrainian movement.” Oberuchev opposed the formation not only of Ukrainian but also of Czechoslovak units in his military district.
counter-revolutionary program. The constant deputizing of soldiers to a plethora of congresses also contributed to political polarization in the army, as did the return from exile and Siberia of thousands of revolutionaries and oppositionists emboldened by the new possibilities. It was also during these months that soldiers and officers came to dominate the Ukrainian organizations in many cities outside Ukraine, for example, in Moscow.

Whenever Ukrainians separated out from their existing units to form new “national” ones, the “Russian” party accused them and the Central Rada of being traitors and agents of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Ukrainian soldiers responded with demands that “conscious enemies of the Ukrainian liberation movement,” such as Oberuchev, be dismissed and that Russian nationalist newspapers like Kievlianin be closed for “setting one nationality against another and serving as an openly counter-revolutionary force.” Their resolutions characteristically ended with calls for a Ukrainian army and for the “territorial-national autonomy of Ukraine in a federated democratic Russia.” As the units’ names illustrate, the Ukrainianization movement styled itself as a revival of Cossack Hetmanate culture; one such name that was bound to provoke Russian national feelings was Ivan Mazepa. A society that formed in the Rostov Regiment of the Second Grenadiers demanded the restoration of Ukraine’s autonomy under the Pereiaslav Treaty (1654), which had been violated by Catherine II, and for the return of hetman rule to Ukraine.

For months the Provisional Government postponed any decision on the nationalization of the army. The military acted largely on its own initiative in a desperate attempt to take control of the “spontaneous” movement that threatened to cripple fatally the armed forces and accelerate desertion, especially after the failed July offensive demanded by Kerensky. That threat was brought home to the high command when a “spontaneously” Ukrainianized regiment, which adopted the name of a Cossack hetman, Pavlo Polubutok, seized the Kyiv arsenal in July in what was probably part of a coup to overthrow the Rada for a more radical defense of the Ukrainian people’s interests. The mutineers were arrested and the uprising was put down by another group of Ukrainian soldiers, including a Bohdan Khmelnytsky Regiment. Kerensky quickly changed

20. Ibid., 62. Skoropadsky claimed he did not know the details of this coup but presumed that it was Bolshevik-backed and against the Rada.
his mind and permitted the Ukrainianization of units with a sufficiently large Ukrainian membership.

Skoropadsky’s first impressions of Ukrainian soldiers were hostile. He encountered a group of them on their way to the First All-Ukrainian Military Congress and recalled his opposition to their idea of separate Ukrainian military units.21 He resisted as long as he could any moves to Ukrainianize his own Thirty-fourth Army Corps.22 This encounter with soldiers launched his career as a leader of the Ukrainian national movement. Skoropadsky might have had marginally more sympathy for the leftist Central Rada than he did for the Provisional Government, but that was not much in any event. He believed that the socialist “demagogues” of the Ukrainian government were better than the Bolsheviks who were threatening Kyiv, so he assumed the role of liaison between the Rada and the headquarters of the Southwestern Front. Clearly, he shared the widespread belief among imperial elites that the Bolsheviks were German agents and national traitors.

By the end of June Skoropadsky began to come around to the idea of Ukrainianization, which had the support of his immediate superior, General Aleksei Gutor, commander of the Southwestern Front,23 but he was very cautious and wanted to reassure himself that he had the firm backing of his superiors and that they would treat this experiment seriously. In a letter to the quartermaster-general of the Southwestern Front, Nikolai Rattel,24 Skoropadsky approached the problem of Ukrainianization from several points of view. At first, he made clear that the idea to Ukrainianize his army corps was not his, but Gutor’s. Then he declared that he had nothing against Ukrainianization in principle but wanted reassurance that it would be “real” Ukrainianization, with “good soldiers and genuine Ukrainian ideas, not deserters seeking to avoid the line of enemy fire.” He even complained that General Gutor did not


22. He recalls being first approached on this matter by Petro Skrypchynsky, the “moderate” Ukrainian commissar to the Southwestern Front headquarters and member of the Rada’s Military Secretariat. Skoropadsky resisted both the principle and the idea that his Thirty-fourth Regiment should be the guinea pig for this experiment (ibid., 57–8).

23. Gutor, incidentally, eventually went over the Bolshevik side and served in the Red Army, as did Brusilov, Rattel, and several other Skoropadsky’s army colleagues.

24. This letter, dated 26 June 1917, from Rossiiskoi gosudarstvennyi voiskovoi istoricheskii arkhiv, fond 2067, list 1, file 2986, fols. 1–2, is reproduced in Spohady, 329–31.
really understand Ukrainianization, reducing it to the replacement of undermanned units at the front by Ukrainian units. Skoropadsky worried that such an understanding of Ukrainianization would only worsen the poor morale in the army. Furthermore, he pointed to Commander V.V. Notbek’s unpleasant experience with Ukrainianization in a nearby army corps.

If, Skoropadsky continued, the Russian government was serious about Ukrainianization, he was ready to go to Kyiv and approach the Rada for good soldiers and officer candidates. He would then gradually replace non-Ukrainians with Ukrainians in his Thirty-fourth Army Corps, but keep this experiment limited until it proved successful. He also insisted that this corps be assigned a location not too far in the army’s rear, where everything was disintegrating, but not too close to the front either.

Skoropadsky appeared to talk himself into supporting this policy and even tried to persuade Rattel that “if we do it right, we are likely to get not only a good fighting unit but also something politically very important for Ukraine.” Moreover, he made a case for his own candidacy for the job, given his “family name and reputation.” He concluded with a reminder that not only Gutor sympathized with the general project but even War Minister Aleksandr Guchkov reportedly saw it “as a good thing.” Skoropadsky’s primary argument for the experiment he was about to undertake was that national feeling was a healthy foundation for military affairs. As hetman he would develop this argument further, but it would have little effect on actual army building. And this argument brought him much closer to the soldiers to whom he had been so hostile only a couple months earlier. Skoropadsky now argued that the only way to preserve the fighting ability of the Russian army and with it the Russian state was to recognize the national principle and national idea in the army. The continuing disintegration of the Russian army reinforced Skoropadsky’s faith in the solution of Ukrainianization. He recalled the months of July and August as “one of the worst, most repulsive periods of my military service.” Soldiers had become wild, looting, raping women, and torturing men in their mobs and mutinies. Skoropadsky held the soldiers’ committees responsible for this “revolutionary discipline,” as he sarcastically called it.25

25. Ibid, 58–68. Skoropadsky furthermore recalls the retreat of the Russian army at Ternopil from 8 to 18 July as the most discouraging military event of his career.
On his way to Kyiv Skoropadsky visited another superior officer, Vladimir Selivachev, commander of the Seventh Army of the Southwestern Front, who, while not sympathetic to Ukrainianization, tolerated the idea on account of his good relations with Skoropadsky. Selivachev’s chief of staff, Count Kamensky, by contrast, cursed General Gutor for starting this whole mess.

After his first unpleasant meeting with Petliura at the Central Rada, Skoropadsky appears to have changed his mind again and asked that his corps not be Ukrainianized. Finally, at the end of July 1917 General Lavr Kornilov replaced Gutor as commander of the Southwestern Front and ordered Skoropadsky to Ukrainianize his unit. He dismissed Skoropadsky’s objections and reminded him that the main thing was the war. Any misunderstandings with the Rada, he reassured him, could be cleared up later. Skoropadsky perceived this as a very cavalier attitude toward the Ukrainian movement. Reluctantly, he began to carry out the order, Ukrainianizing first some of his weaker units so as not to risk the combat readiness of the healthier ones. In short order the Thirty-fourth Corps, which counted 60,000 well disciplined soldiers, was renamed the First Ukrainian Corps.26 Shortly after ordering Ukrainianization, Kornilov was dismissed as the army’s commander-in-chief and arrested in connection with his failed putsch in Petrograd. Skoropadsky too was arrested, but the Ukrainian Secretariat for Military Affairs secured his release and return to his unit.27 The new commander of the Southwestern Front, Lieutenant General M.G. Volodchenko, was much more favourably disposed toward the Rada, supported Skoropadsky in his negotiations with Petliura, and was generally “a new type of commander,” very comfortable with commissars and long speeches.28

Another important episode in Skoropadsky’s 1917 political transformation was the emergence of the Free Cossack movement.29 In early October 1917 Petro Skrypchynsky, the same Ukrainian commissar who

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26. Ibid., 60–70.
27. Ibid., 63–4, 74–9. Skoropadsky appears to have sympathized with Kornilov’s putsch, but deemed it premature and was troubled by what he perceived as Kornilov’s weak social and political base, which consisted mostly of Kadets. Furthermore, he defended Kornilov against the protests of the Rada’s Secretariat as sympathetic to the Ukrainian movement or, at least, to the Ukrainian army.
28. Ibid., 80.
29. Ibid., 50–1, 81–4, 94–100.
had first approached Skoropadsky about Ukrainianizing his army corps, informed Skoropadsky that he had been elected otaman of the Free Cossacks at their all-Ukrainian congress in Chyhyryn. The Free Cossack movement arose as an attempt of local communities to maintain order, which could not be guaranteed either by the Provisional Government and its local agents or by the Central Rada and its emerging administrative apparatus. This largely peasant initiative, based in the Gubernias of Kyiv, Chernihiv, Poltava, Katerynoslav, Kherson, and Kuban, was soon captured by a group of ambitious politicians and occasional adventurers, who appealed to the romantic traditions of the early Cossacks and rehabilitated old Cossack terminology for units and ranks. These leaders opposed the Rada’s efforts to transform the Cossack institutions and win the Cossacks over to the Ukrainian cause. Skoropadsky, apparently flattered by the election but somewhat unclear about its meaning, decided to attend the congress and learn more about the Free Cossacks. The major ideologue of the movement, Ivan Poltavets, shared with Skoropadsky his ideas about the Free Cossacks as the foundation for healthy tendencies that would save Ukraine from collapse. Poltavets’ strong anti-socialist politics also appealed to Skoropadsky. Visiting the Berdychiv county congress of the Free Cossacks, Skoropadsky was impressed with how much interest the local population showed in this organization. Still, he recalled that even at the first congress he attended, he saw a large gap between his ideal of the Cossacks and the reality before him. In particular, he was troubled by what he perceived as the fanaticism—often an extreme anti-Russian attitude—of some of the leading figures in the movement.

Out of these meetings, nonetheless, a utopian vision of a Ukrainian state based on the ideal of Cossack agrarians began to take shape in Skoropadsky’s mind. His faith in the patriotism of property holders was also shaped by his positive understanding of the Stolypin land reforms of the prewar years. An overnight stay with some homesteaders on his way to Kyiv deeply impressed on Skoropadsky the unrealized potential of the Stolypin plan to create a strong farming class.30 But this emerging vision of a Cossack agrarian society helped shape many of Skoropadsky’s political alliances in 1917 and during his rule in Kyiv and also ensured that land reform and attitudes toward land reform would be an important

focus of his efforts. The Free Cossacks would also serve as a base for the Ukrainian National Hromada, which was the main organizing force for Skoropadsky’s coup against the Rada. The funds of the Cossack Rada were an important financial resource for Skoropadsky, especially after his resignation from the army in the aftermath of the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd. Another important base of support for Skoropadsky were the officers of the Thirty-fourth Army Corps.

**Skoropadsky and the Politics of Russian-Ukrainian Relations**

Skoropadsky’s experience during the fall of 1917 with the Ukrainianization of his Thirty-fourth Army Corps, no doubt, shaped his emerging political views more than any other single episode in his career. He was forced to abandon the officially apolitical stance of the imperial officer corps and to take sides with the factions that emerged both in the army and the political worlds of Petrograd and Kyiv. He found himself divided between his commanders in Kyiv and Petrograd and the Provisional Government’s commissar in Kyiv, who opposed Ukrainianization. He was also caught in a fierce competition between civilian and military activists in Ukraine: some of them opposed the Ukrainianization projects, while others competed with Skoropadsky in forming their own Ukrainian national military units with a far more radical national agenda than he would accept. Skoropadsky was quickly disappointed by the turn that Ukrainianization took. He observed with alarm how each set of reinforcements he received was more and more politicized and “with a socialist inclination.” He was disappointed with the military skills of the few Ukrainian ensigns he was able to obtain for his army corps. He was very troubled by the violent conflicts that broke out between the remaining Great Russian officers and the nationally conscious Ukrainian officers who were being transferred from other parts of the army. The Ukrainians, in a new twist on revolutionary defensism, were insisting that the Ukrainianized corps only be deployed in the defense of Ukraine and that it be transferred from Bila Tserkva, Skoropadsky’s headquarters, to Kyiv to defend the city from Great Russian troops returning from the front. And he cursed the quartermaster-general’s office for failing to deliver the supplies he had been promised to outfit his new units.31

31. Ibid., 71–2.
Before long both conservative and socialist politicians in Kyiv began to resist the Ukrainianization drive in the name of either combating the revolution or, ironically, furthering its aims. The Executive Committee of Social Organizations took the former position, while the Kyiv Soviet of Workers’, Peasants’, and Soldiers’ Deputies took the latter. In response to the emerging strength of the Ukrainian national movement, a fiercely defensive Russian national movement began to mobilize its own forces to thwart the nationalization of the imperial army. In the general climate of treason that was so prevalent during 1917, Skoropadsky was frequently threatened by Russians with the direst of punishments for his act of treachery in accepting German terms. Forced to choose what parts of his Ukrainian identity he felt ready to defend against these charges, he began to “invent” his own vision of Ukraine and what Russia meant to him.

In this setting he tried to work out a compromise between the extremists of the Ukrainian left (and right) and the Russian right (and left). The Ukrainian nationalists viewed any concession to the Russian language or culture as a mask for Russian imperialist oppression, while the Russian nationalists saw any concession to the Ukrainian language or talk of autonomy or federalism as Mazepism and a threat to the unity of the Russian state. Skoropadsky moved toward a federalist reform of the Russian Empire that recognized the equality of Russia and Ukraine and granted equal rights to the Ukrainian language and culture. He found the attitude of the Russian Whites incomprehensible: many of them declared that they would rather ally themselves with the Bolsheviks than with an independent (or even autonomous) Ukraine. Skoropadsky firmly believed that he was preserving in Ukraine the best of the Russian Empire as a base for the future reconstruction of a strong, federated Russia, a Russia with a great future. Many White generals and politicians, including not a few in his own government, also viewed Ukraine as a bastion for restoring a great but indivisible Russia. Their hopes were in direct conflict with Skoropadsky’s vision. He concluded sadly that Great Russians of all parties did not want Ukraine to exist, even if it was closely linked in a federation with Russia. He made another discovery that was painful to a devout Orthodox Christian like him: that the rural clergy was against him and his vision of Ukraine and rejected any measure of church autonomy from Moscow.32 He found the attitude of

32. Ibid., 49.
the thousands of political and intellectual figures who descended upon
Ukraine after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd most difficult to under-
stand. They did all they could to undermine him and his regime, which
was their only hope for continued refuge. They foolishly hoped that the
Entente would come to their rescue and that their victory would “put an
end to this operettalike country Ukraine.” He concluded that the
intolerance of the Great Russians, and especially their leading cultural
figures, toward Ukrainian culture was much worse than that of the
Poles.33

Skoropadsky attributed the extremist Ukrainian national position to
the pernicious influence of the Galician politicians and intellectuals, but
continuously denied that the Ukrainian national movement was a German,
Austrian, or Polish plot, as many of his Russian detractors claimed. He
believed that the Galician Ukrainians spoke a substandard dialect of the
Ukrainian language. Furthermore, he insisted that Galician and “Russian”
Ukraine were two separate countries, although there were some natural
ties between them, and accused the Galicians of trying to persuade the
Entente powers that a future “reunited” Ukraine ought to be dominated
by them.34 But it was Galician POWs who hid Skoropadsky in their
barracks and helped him to escape from the Bolsheviks in Kyiv in
January 1918.35 Moreover, he acknowledged that on social questions, the
Galician politicians were much more moderate, that is, closer to his own
positions, than the “Russian” Ukrainians but, unfortunately, not on
religious and cultural matters.36

And he felt that the Russophobia of the extremists was indeed fed by
Polish elite antagonisms, a position he ironically shared with many of his
detractors on the Russian right wing. Furthermore, he continued to view
Orthodox Christianity as the genuine faith of the Ukrainian people and
was hostile to the role of the Ukrainian Catholic Church in shaping
Ukrainian culture and nation. Not surprisingly, he shared the Russian
political and military elites’ suspicion of Metropolitan Andrei Sheptytsky

33. Ibid., 210, 226–7, 255. Skoropadsky described a frequent pattern of transformation:
the new arrivals from Bolshevik Russia would at first express their love for the Ukrainian
language and for Kyiv and then gradually become discontented and dismissive of
everything Ukrainian as “nonsense” and “German inventions.”
34. Ibid., 49, 184.
35. Ibid., 109.
36. Ibid., 53.
and Uniate priests. Finally, Skoropadsky “explained” the extremism of the Ukrainian nationalists as a correlate of their left-wing politics, which, in his opinion, inclined them toward populist demagoguery and conspiracy theories and rendered them as intolerant of genuine pluralism as their Bolshevik counterparts in Russia. He held these sorts of Ukrainians to be no better than the Great Russians and just as responsible for committing atrocities. He was not surprised at how many of these Ukrainian patriots went over to the Bolshevik side and later claimed that Ukraine was all along their sacred cause.37

Skoropadsky reserved some of his most bitter characterizations for two Ukrainian socialists—Volodymyr Vynnychenko and Symon Petliura. Early on in his memoirs, he recalls reports that Vynnychenko had argued that Ukraine needed a good dose of Bolshevism to consolidate its national and social liberation and revolution. He also suspected that Vynnychenko was the main conspirator against his regime in the second half of 1918. He feared that Vynnychenko’s influence with the Germans was on the rise as they adapted to the idea of their own socialist government in Berlin. Furthermore, Skoropadsky had intelligence reports that Vynnychenko had negotiated with the Bolsheviks to secure their support in the event of a coup.38 Finally, he recalled the telegram that he had received from Vynnychenko demanding “in the tone of a Napoleon” that he liquidate the Hetmanate.39

Skoropadsky’s opinion of Petliura was only slightly more favourable, because they agreed on the importance of a good fighting army. He appears to have sympathized with Petliura in the latter’s conflict—over Ukrainianization among other things—with one of Skoropadsky’s superiors, Oberuchev. Moreover, Petliura impressed Skoropadsky with his “feeling of love for everything Ukrainian.” In November Skoropadsky came into conflict with Petliura over his ordering Skoropadsky’s Ukrainianized Thirty-fourth Army Corps to the front and to Kyiv. Skoropadsky threatened to resign his command because of Petliura’s constant harassment. He recalled this period as a “sheer nightmare” (sploshnoi koshmar). In the end Skoropadsky was impressed above all with Petliura’s theatricality, which Skoropadsky traced

37. Ibid., 121.
38. Ibid., 53, 293–4, 297.
39. Ibid., 323.
to the long period when the theatre was the only legitimate arena for the Ukrainian movement.

Skoropadsky viewed most of the Rada’s pronouncements as theatrical.40 His judgment of the Rada government was harsh: that in ten months of rule the socialists, for all their sincerity, were intellectually powerless to set the country “onto a creative path.” The main obstacle was their chauvinistic Galician Ukrainian orientation. Socialism in Ukraine, he concluded, leads to Bolshevism. He firmly believed that the Ukrainian people did not support socialism and that this was a minority faith propagated by a few members of the intelligentsia who were isolated from the people. Like many military men, he despised the socialists generally for their politicization of the imperial army.41

The Central Rada and its successor, the Directory of the Ukrainian National Republic (UNR), reciprocated these feelings. They distrusted Skoropadsky for his political ambitions and suspected that he was not in the democratic camp. Skoropadsky himself acknowledged that his election as otaman of the Free Cossacks and candidacy from the Union of Landowners in the elections to the Constituent Assembly were political mistakes.42 Still, the Rada’s suspicions of his democratic credentials provoked him to define his political beliefs more clearly. He asserted that Ukraine needed a truly democratic party, because “in their soul Ukrainians were democrats,” and that Ukrainian democracy and Ukrainian culture ought not to exhibit hatred for everything Russian. Such sentiments brought him into conflict with the leaders of the landowners’ league, which helped put him into power in spring 1918. He concluded that the landowners were only interested in restoring the old regime in Ukraine, something he realized was now impossible and undesirable.43 The party to which Skoropadsky finally devoted his efforts was the Ukrainian National Hromada. Its core consisted of many officers of the

40. Ibid., 61–2, 87–9, 134, 203–6. In the end, Skoropadsky resigned his commission in late December 1917 after another conflict with Mykola Porsh, who succeeded Petliura as minister of defense. However, when the Bolsheviks began their assault on Kyiv, Petliura approached Skoropadsky to take the command of the Right-Bank forces defending Ukraine, and Skoropadsky readily agreed to do so (ibid., 99–101).
41. Ibid., 122, 124ff, 134, 146.
42. Ibid., 84.
43. Ibid., 123–6.
First Ukrainian Corps and the Free Cossack movement. One would not expect to find many democrats among them.

His belief in federalism, on the other hand, allied him with many Ukrainian socialists. Like the socialists (including the Ukrainian Party of Socialist Federalists), Skoropadsky conceived of Ukraine only in the context of a future Russian federation, but he parted ways with them when, after the Bolshevik coup in Petrograd, the socialists proclaimed the slogan “forward to socialism through federalism.” His version of federalism recognized that Russian and Ukrainian cultures were distinct and mutually enriching. Moreover, in keeping with his conservative orientation, he hoped that the idea of a decentralized Russia would appeal, among others, to the business class, which would have direct access to decision-makers in Kyiv rather than having to go through St. Petersburg. Despite the popularity of federalism among Ukrainians, Skoropadsky’s desperate bid to win the support of the Entente by proclaiming federation with Russia cost him virtually all of the remaining support he enjoyed among Ukrainian patriots. In his memoirs he admits that this was one of his most serious political mistakes.

Of course, the complicated relationships that shaped the way Skoropadsky understood Russia and Ukraine evolved against a set of other important actors. Historically, the Russian-Ukrainian relationship was often a consequence or afterthought of the more fundamental opposition of Russians and Poles (and Ukrainians and Poles). Skoropadsky shared what appears to be a widespread view among the Russian officer corps (and perhaps conservative imperial elites more broadly) that the Poles were indeed latent enemies of the Russian state. In part, this appears to be part of the civilizational rivalry in Ukraine between Roman Catholicism and Orthodox Christianity. Skoropadsky hardly distinguished the Ukrainian Catholic threat posed by Sheptytsky and his ambitions for church union from the Roman Catholic Poles and likely saw them as allies. But he also distanced himself from Polish landowners in Ukraine

44. Ibid., 138.
45. Ibid., 48, 54, 139. Interestingly, Skoropadsky concedes that Vynnychenko was right in maintaining that only through independence could Ukraine enter a genuine federation (ibid., 308).
46. Russian nationalists, particularly officers, interpreted Skoropadsky’s proclamation of federation and the start of the German retreat as signals to destroy the Ukrainian movement (ibid., 309).
whom he expected to oppose any moves toward establishing a stable, independent Ukrainian state. This antagonism toward Poles even provoked him to a rare defense of Mykhailo Hrushevsky, when in summer 1917 he overheard some “Polish pany” speaking very critically about the president of the Rada in a Zhytomyr restaurant.47

After the signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk between the Rada and the Central Powers, Skoropadsky was also forced to reassess his attitudes toward Germany and Austria-Hungary, the occupying powers in Ukraine after January 1918. A clearly defensive tone in his memoirs betrays his sensitivity to charges that he was a German puppet and that he had betrayed the allied cause by collaborating with the occupying authorities. Particularly, Great Russian parties tried to discredit Skoropadsky as a Germanophile.48 Skoropadsky even felt compelled to distinguish his program of federalism from the Germans’ designs to dismantle the Russian Empire by peeling off its western nations.49 Furthermore, together with most of conservative (and a good part of liberal) Russian imperial society, he believed that the Bolsheviks were German agents and owed their victory largely to Germany. A measure of his distaste for the Rada was his suspicion that it secretly negotiated (particularly Mykola Porsh, who became the general secretary for military affairs in December 1917) with the Germans already in late 1917.50 Not surprisingly, Skoropadsky described his attitudes toward and relations with the Germans (and Austrians) with a great deal of ambivalence. He recorded his disgust with the turn of events that made the Germans appear as the saviours of Ukraine (and Russia, by extension) from “the Bolshevik yoke.”51 He was impressed with German orderliness and compared the Germans favourably with their partners, the Austrians. His most positive characterizations are, not surprisingly, of military men in contrast to diplomats, civilian “advisors,” and economic planners from German business circles. Still, he found it difficult to understand why the German

47. Ibid., 57, 61, 105, 138.
48. Ibid., 56, 114.
49. After all, he reminded his readers, the Germans were not in favour of Ukraine’s adhering to a federation with Russia (ibid., 51). On German plans regarding the western nations of the Russian Empire, see Fritz Fischer, Germany’s Aims in the First World War (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967), esp. 120–54.
50. Ibid., 100, 113.
51. Ibid., 121–2.
military men took the socialist Rada government so seriously (at least at first) and continued to view the Ukrainian Social Democrats and Social Revolutionaries as the only influential Ukrainian parties (even after the Germans backed his coup against the Rada). He tied this German support for Ukrainian socialists to their continued support for the Bolsheviks in Petrograd, but came to realize that this pro-Bolshevik policy was the subject of some serious policy disagreements within the German government.52

Skoropadsky’s first contact with representatives of the governments he had just been fighting was in March 1918 when the Austrians announced their plans to take over the hotel in Kyiv where Skoropadsky was staying. At the time he met with the Austrian ambassador and the Austrian military plenipotentiary, Major Moritz Fleischmann, a man Skoropadsky took to exemplify Austrian duplicity. He quickly learned from these first contacts that the Germans and Austrians had many serious and frequent conflicts and disagreements over the occupation policy and the war.53 His first meeting with the German authorities resulted from his request for their help to secure the release of his wife and family, who were still behind Bolshevik lines. The Germans were able to help in this matter through their contacts in Petrograd and Moscow.54 One of Skoropadsky’s most constant contacts during 1918 was Lieutenant General Groener, who from March 1918 was chief of staff of Army Group Kyiv. During April 1918 Skoropadsky’s contacts with the Germans became more frequent and soon began to revolve around the possibility of a coup against the Rada. Interestingly, Skoropadsky kept the details of this plot secret from the Austrian Major Fleischmann. In the end, he was able to secure the Germans’ neutrality during the coup, asking them only to make sure that the Sich Riflemen remained confined to their barracks, lest they feel an obligation to defend the Rada government.55

All the while Skoropadsky insisted that he was not a Germanophile by any means, but a Ukrainophile above all. He found his alliance with the Germans troubling and tried to keep doors open to the Entente

52. Ibid., 122–5.
53. Ibid., 130–1, 239–41.
54. Ibid., 135–6; 242–3. Somewhere in late December 1917 or early January 1918 the Skoropadsky family estate in Trostianets was burned to the ground.
55. Ibid., 139–42.
powers, hoping that they would respond to his efforts in creating an anti-Bolshevik *place d’armes* for recovering Russia. But the French and British governments came to support the White cause and were thereby constrained in the support they could show for Skoropadsky or any autonomous or independent Ukrainian state. Skoropadsky claimed to prefer the Entente not only out of respect for the wartime alliance, but because he expected it to win in the end over Germany. He concluded that the Entente also bore a large measure of responsibility for the failure of his state. During 1917 Skoropadsky had good relations with French and British officers. In December 1917 France briefly established diplomatic relations with Ukraine; her mission, headed by General Georges Tabouis, had authority over the Polish and Czechoslovak troops in Ukraine, which Skoropadsky hoped might help to defend the Rada from the expected Bolshevik attack. Skoropadsky was negotiating with the French at the time the Rada sent its first peace mission to the Germans. After the Rada signed the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, however, the French mission left Ukraine. Once the Entente cast its lot with the White proto-governments around the peripheries of the former Russian Empire, it was generally hostile to Ukraine’s independence.

The focus of Skoropadsky’s greatest animus, however, was the enemy he decided was most dangerous to Ukraine’s survival, the Bolsheviks. Not only the Germans’ continued dealings with Soviet Moscow infuriated him, but he clearly viewed many, if not most, of the Ukrainian socialists through the prism of their fellow leftists. Bolshevization for Skoropadsky explained the dissolution of the army and society. He even blamed the pogroms of Jewish stores on Bolshevik influences among Ukrainians. Similarly, he saw the decline in morality among officers and soldiers and the horrible atrocities committed by the guard regiments as signs of the coming Bolshevik world. And the Bolsheviks’ demoralizing impact was not limited to Russian and Ukrainian soldiers; Skoropadsky overheard Austrian and Hungarian prisoners of war discussing plans to execute Emperor Karl. For Skoropadsky the final proof of Bolshevik vileness

56. Ibid., 47, 146. His imperial military training left him somewhat proficient in French. When Skoropadsky visited Kaiser Wilhelm in late 1918, he spoke with his German military and political counterparts in French, since he did not know German. A translator had to be provided for the German officers who did not know French.

57. Ibid., 47, 64, 67, 102–3, 105.

58. Ibid., 91–3, 115.
was their murder of 3,000 officers in Kyiv during their attack and occupation of the city in January 1918. Skoropadsky also reported countless cases of betrayal to the Bolsheviks of employers by their servants and the Bolsheviks’ search for him at the Hotel Universal in Kyiv.59 Later in his memoirs Skoropadsky conceded that one of the few major statesmen that his troubled times had brought to the fore was Lenin, “to our horror.”60

Skoropadsky as a Frustrated Ukrainian State Builder

In a career rich in paradoxes and ironies, Skoropadsky came to power with few concrete plans about the new state of which he was proclaimed hetman. But the closer he came to assuming power, the more he felt his Ukrainianness come to the fore. On the evening of the coup in late April 1918 he went dressed in civilian clothes to the monument to St. Volodymyr in Kyiv to meditate on the momentous step he was about to take. A flood of memories of his Chernihiv ancestral home overwhelmed him. He expected much nastiness from his enemies, but he also sensed the grandiose tasks before him. He received an official blessing from Archbishop Nikodim and had drafted a proclamation to “the inhabitants and Cossacks of Ukraine.” He also recalled this occasion as the first time he signed his name as the Ukrainian “Pavlo Skoropads’kyi,” rather than the Russian “Pavel Skoropadskii.” His “coronation” as hetman was celebrated by a putatively spontaneous prayer service in St. Sophia Cathedral.61

His greatest talents were in the military sphere of statecraft, but the German and Austrian occupation regime forbade him from exercising those talents until virtually the end of his rule.62 At first Skoropadsky

60. Ibid., 150.
62. Skoropadsky recalled that the Germans demanded several conditions before promising their covert support and public neutrality in the event of a coup: (1) that Skoropadsky’s new government recognize the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk; (2) that he take measures to regulate the Ukrainian currency; (3) that he improve control over the export of foodstuffs to the Central Powers; (4) that he pass a law permitting German troops stationed in Ukraine to purchase necessary food supplies at local prices; (5) that he delay the convening of the diet until the German authorities felt the situation was stable and favourable; (6) that he restore the judicial system to a measure of functioning “and remove all demagogic elements”; (7) that he restore free trade; and (8) that Germany
tried to win permission from the Germans to organize his own armed forces by offering to have those troops collect from the Ukrainian population the grain demanded by the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. The Germans refused and carried out the mission themselves with relative order and efficiency. By contrast, Skoropadsky recalled, the Austrian troops simply pillaged the countryside because they too were affected by nationalist and Bolshevnik “degeneration.” The Austrians, moreover, were thoroughly corrupt: in their occupation zone bribery flourished on a “colossal scale.” Skoropadsky was also acutely aware of Austrian plans to install their own hetman in Ukraine after their victory.

Although Skoropadsky was allowed to have an army, a naval minister, and even a chief of his general staff, he was not permitted to begin organizing an army. The Germans seized all the navy in the Black Sea except two armed carriers and only agreed in the fall to return this fleet to the Ukrainian state; they also insisted that the Ukrainians pay for some share of the former Russian fleet! His armed forces were limited to those that had been formed under the UNR and the various Ukrainianized units of the former Russian army. General Groener insisted that 2,000 troops were sufficient for keeping order in Kyiv and guarding Skoropadsky. The German and the Austrian armies, estimated at 400,000, occupied all the suitable barracks and made several attempts at organizing military units from Ukrainian prisoners of war in their camps. Though the Hetman was upset by these attitudes, the occupying powers resisted his entreaties until the bitter end of his regime; and if German opposition were not enough, his plans for building an army were opposed also by members of his own Council of Ministers. Nonetheless, his military advisors drew up plans and military codes for the day when they might have the right to acquire any surpluses beyond those already assigned for export (ibid., 148).

63. Ibid., 184.

64. Habsburg circles had been preparing one of their own—Archduke Wilhelm von Habsburg-Lothringen, a.k.a. Vasyl Vyshyvany (1896–1948)—for the throne of an autonomous Ukraine in the victorious Habsburg Empire. Wilhelm was the son of Archduke Karl. From the age of twelve he had lived with his parents on their estate in Galicia where he had studied the Ukrainian language and been exposed to Ukrainophile ideas (ibid., 208, 239–41).

65. Ibid., 189–90. The UNR had signed an agreement with Germany in March allowing Ukrainian prisoners of war in camps in Rastatt, Wezlar, and Salzwedel to be recruited to the First Ukrainian Division, the Bluecoats (Synozhupanyky).
be allowed to create the modern army that many imperial officers had
dreamed of before the First World War. After the rout of Bolshevik
forces in January, intelligence reports about Bolshevik units forming in
Chernihiv and Kursk suggested that a new offensive would be launched
in spring 1919, so time was running short for organizing conscription and
some minimal training of the new Ukrainian army.

Despairing over this situation, Skoropadsky pressed the German
occupation authorities in Kyiv to arrange an invitation for him from
Emperor Wilhelm to visit Germany. Among other matters, Skoropadsky
wanted to counter what he saw as the pro-Bolshevik orientation of the
German Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He believed that German military
leadership had already seen the dangers of this policy and concurred with
him in opposing it. Finally, the emperor was persuaded to receive
Skoropadsky and a Ukrainian delegation on an official visit at the
beginning of September. The visit began with a reception by the Foreign
Ministry in Berlin, those Germans most supportive of the Bolshevik
orientation of their government, and with the Chancellor. Then Skoropad-
sky’s party visited the emperor at his headquarters in Kassel, where
Emperor Wilhelm bestowed the Order of the Red Eagle on the Hetman
and in an official speech recognized Ukraine’s independence. As
Skoropadsky recalled, the emperor inquired about the fate of his Russian
in-laws, the Romanovs, who by then had been murdered by the Bolshe-
viks. From Kassel Skoropadsky proceeded to the headquarters of Field
Marshal Paul von Hindenburg and General Erich Ludendorff in Spa,
Belgium. He was relieved to learn, for what it was worth, that both high
commanders were against the Bolshevik orientation and favoured his
efforts to build a Ukrainian army. Skoropadsky’s experience with the rise
of socialism in Russia in 1917 made him wary of the increasing influence
of leftist forces in Germany. He realized that before long he might have
to deal with a new German government and asked his deputy foreign
minister to ascertain which of the German socialists were “worth getting
to know.” Then he visited the naval residence of Prince Henry of Prussia,
the emperor’s brother, in Kiel. He was troubled by the restive mood of
the German sailors, which evoked unpleasant memories of 1917.

67. Ibid., 241–2, 269–71. Skoropadsky reported that General Groener kept trying to get
his government to break off relations with the Bolsheviks.
68. Ibid., 273–82.
Surprisingly, the Ukrainian parties saw Skoropadsky’s trip to Germany as a sign of international recognition for Ukraine and greeted it as a victory. Predictably, the Russian parties viewed it as further evidence of Skoropadsky’s crimes against Russia. In any event, whatever concessions he might have won for Ukraine’s autonomy and self-government proved to be short-lived in the wake of the November revolution in Germany and the signing of the armistice.

Skoropadsky’s frustration in military matters was compounded by the ever larger presence in Ukraine of Russian officers who had fled Bolshevik sovdepiia and were being recruited to the Volunteer Army. In the meantime, these idle officers and their families joined the ranks of tens of thousands of displaced persons in all the major cities of Ukraine (15,000 in Kyiv alone). Many of these officers were openly hostile to Ukraine and attracted to right-wing parties. As a fellow soldier, Skoropadsky urged the Council of Ministers to take up their plight, but the only thing to come of it was a financial scandal: corrupt officers embezzled the funds they had raised. Skoropadsky felt betrayed by thousands of Russian officers whose lives he had saved.

Skoropadsky turned his political and organizational skills to state building. As a military leader he realized the importance of institutions, procedures, and personnel, and he was determined to undo the damage inflicted on institutions by his socialist predecessors in the Rada government. Despite his professed preference for a future democratic (but monarchical!) Ukraine, Skoropadsky believed that in the short term the country needed a firm dictatorship, and he tried to move the Hetmanate in that direction. But he firmly rejected the proposal to accept the title of president of the Ukrainian State and never summoned any parliamentary body during his eight-month rule.

Because Skoropadsky’s rise to power was not carefully planned and happened quite suddenly, he did not have people around him with whom he felt he could really work or whom he could trust. In his memoirs he regrets one or another appointment after observing an appointee on the job. He frequently had to appoint people who were hostile to the

69. Ibid., 172–3; 177–8, 180–1, 188, 200.
70. Ibid., 299–300.
71. Ibid., 160, 172–3, 185, 204–5. Plans for elections to a Ukrainian state diet were worked out by the fall of 1918, but Skoropadsky and his government fled Kyiv nearly two months before the planned elections were to be held on 15 February 1919.
Ukrainian cause but had the necessary technical skills. He had to change his cabinet three times during his brief term in power. He appointed a remarkable number of political notables from the Old Regime to his cabinet so that it looked like a Ukrainian version of the first Provisional Government coalition. He drew on Kadet professors and moderate socialists, business leaders and landowners, and people who had served in various public organizations like the Union of Towns and Zemstvos and the Tatiana Committee for Refugees during the war. These appointments showed his determination to reach compromise and to balance the Ukrainian national and Russian state elements in his government.

Almost from the start Skoropadsky assigned great importance to diplomatic relations and international recognition for his new government. Here he had modest success. Germany recognized the new regime in August, following the ratification of the Peace Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in Vienna. Germany’s allies—Austria-Hungary, Turkey, and Bulgaria—followed her example. Newly independent states or proto-states that were once part of the Russian Empire—the Don and Kuban regions, Georgia, Finland, and Poland—also recognized his government. Despite his misgivings about the Germans and the Central Rada, the two sides that negotiated the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, he never thought of renouncing it. He realized that he needed the good will of the Germans and Austrians. The German and Austrian ambassadors to the Rada government in Ukraine remained after the coup. During the first days of his hetmancy Skoropadsky had frequent contact with the German supreme commander, Field Marshal Hermann Eichhorn, the German ambassador Baron Philip Alfons Mumm von Schwartzzenstein, and his Austrian counterpart, Ritter von Herwilt Princig. The historian Dmytro Doroshenko became foreign minister over German objections, Skoropadsky’s future court historian and political theorist Viacheslav Lypynsky.

72. Ibid., 158–9.
73. Ibid., 161.
74. Ibid., 265–6.
75. Ibid., 171–2.
76. Ibid., 162. German objections forced Skoropadsky to appoint Mykola Vasylenko, his minister of national enlightenment and a prominent Kyiv Kadet professor, as acting minister of foreign affairs for the first few weeks of the Hetmanate.
became ambassador to Austria-Hungary, and Baron Teodor Steingel became ambassador to Germany.

On the basis of first-hand observations Skoropadsky divided the Germans in Ukraine into three large categories. The first was the “military class,” whom he recalled as honest, in many cases democrats by conviction. They did not want Ukraine’s ruin and tried to understand Ukraine, “but relied on books published in Lviv” and were at the mercy of Ukrainian chauvinists. He also observed the lamentable decline in the German officer corps very soon after the November revolution in Germany and drew obvious parallels to what he had observed more closely in the Russian army. The second group consisted of diplomats, who, “like all diplomats, adapted to their ministry, the emperor and his circle, the Reichstag, and eventually even the socialists.” The diplomats arrived with all sorts of experts in finance, industry, and trade to explore Ukrainian resources. Finally, the third group included representatives of German culture and scholarship—various specialists, scholars, and journalists. Having held German science in high esteem, Skoropadsky was disappointed by the “firm prejudices” and “little regard for reality” he found among them.\footnote{Ibid., 245–8.}

By the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and his assurances to his German protectors, Skoropadsky had to appoint a delegation to negotiate with the hated Bolshevik regime in Moscow. General consulates were established in Moscow and Petrograd and four consulates in Samara, Saratov, Kazan, and Omsk; an important border treaty was signed with Russia; and Moscow released a “state train” of scholars and scientists to Kyiv. But Skoropadsky admitted that he pushed forward on the border negotiations largely under German pressure and for their promise to allow him to outfit eight army corps. And he was exasperated by the German refusal to move their troops up to the new demarcation lines, thereby leaving thousands of civilians “stranded in sovdepiia.”\footnote{The head of the delegation to the RSFSR was Serhii Shelukhyn, a lawyer, poet, moderate Ukrainian socialist-federalist from Odesa, and justice official in the UNR. His deputy was Ihor Kistiakovsky, lawyer and member of a prominent liberal Ukrainian family (ibid., 234–5, 241–2).} These negotiations also involved representatives from the Don and Kuban Cossacks; Skoropadsky supplied arms to both proto-governments in the name of their joint anti-Bolshevik struggle, although ardent members of the
I Love Russia, and but I Want Ukraine

Ukrainian movement in his government, not to mention his German protectors, who, at least officially, had to maintain good relations with the Bolsheviks, did not want to hear anything of Ukraine’s alliance with the autonomous Cossack governments. Skoropadsky, however, saw the Cossacks as allies in his quest for a federal, decentralized Russia.79 Finally, Skoropadsky tried to keep all his options open by maintaining unofficial and partly clandestine contacts with the Entente powers, hoping that they might rescue him. He appeared to understand that Ukraine’s treaties and cooperation with Germany and Austria-Hungary, who were still at war with Britain and France, complicated any improvement in relations with the Entente powers. Even here he achieved a certain measure of success, although only on the eve of his ouster from power. He appointed ambassadors to the United States, Romania, and France.80

Skoropadsky was proud of setting up two universities and several Ukrainian gymnasia, launching the Academy of Sciences, a state theatre, a state orchestra, a kobzar school, a national film studio, and a national museum. His minister of public enlightenment, the Kadet professor Mykola Vasylenko, devoted particular attention to higher education and scientific institutions, although he clashed with more ardent Ukrainian nationalists because of his insistence on the importance of Russian culture. An old family friend and supporter of Ukrainian culture, Petro Doroshenko, launched the state theatre. In the tradition of his ancestors, the Hetman saw himself as a supporter of Ukrainian culture: he opened a meeting of the Ukrainian Club in Kyiv, attended concerts, and appeared publically with prominent Ukrainian writers.81 Still, he lamented in retrospect that his government had failed to get its message

79. Ibid., 236–8. Skoropadsky claimed that he even sent aid to the Whites, but the Germans kept him under close surveillance and made this very difficult. He frequently corresponded with Alekseev, who sought his intervention to help free officers arrested by Germans on suspicion of being Allied agents in Ukraine. Skoropadsky compiled a list of all officers of the Volunteer Army on Ukrainian territory and did not harm them, naively believing that he and they were fighting a common cause. When Alekseev died, Skoropadsky ordered a special memorial mass served in Kyiv. But relations with Alekseev’s successor, Anton Denikin, soured quickly. Skoropadsky accused Denikin of agitating the officers of the Volunteer Army against him.

80. Ibid., 264–5, 291, 301.

81. Ibid., 134, 165–6, 213, 228–31. During the hetman period there was a surprising cultural revival in large measure thanks to the thousands of actors and artists who had fled Bolshevik Russia to Kyiv.
out in an effective manner. No serious newspaper in the Ukrainian language appeared until nearly the end of his rule. After eight months of determined culture building, Skoropadsky concluded that his efforts were stymied by Kyiv’s provincial character. The shortage of Ukrainian scholars in several fields forced him to turn to Russia, ironically, to develop Ukrainian science: he negotiated with the Bolshevik government the release of a special train of hundreds of Russian scholars and scientists to Ukraine in the hope that they would help build a Ukrainian Academy of Sciences. Skoropadsky’s defense of these policies against criticisms from Ukrainian political and intellectual circles contains some of his harshest attacks on Galician Ukrainians: “there is really no culture [in Galicia]. Galicians live off the leftovers dropped from the German and Polish table. Even their language reflects this clearly, when four out of every five words is Polish or German!” Galicians, he charged, would force on Ukrainians their narrow-minded and shallow culture, supplanting the great music, literature, art, and scholarship created jointly by Russians and Ukrainians over the centuries. “Would Shevchenko,” he challenged his critics, “agree to turn his back on Pushkin, Gogol, and others” for this pathetic Galician culture?

In religious matters, Skoropadsky, who claimed to be a profoundly religious Orthodox Christian, ran into considerable opposition when he tried to reschedule the church council that had been interrupted by the Bolshevik occupation of Kyiv in January 1918. The opposition came from the recently appointed metropolitan of Kyiv, Nikodim, who warned Skoropadsky that summoning such a council then would provide a screen for the Uniates to further schism in Ukraine. Skoropadsky’s federalist sympathies extended to ecclesiastical matters: he favoured decentralization and some measure of autonomy, if not autocephaly and moves toward Ukrainianization. Still, he was prepared to accept two churches, one loyal to Moscow and one to Kyiv. He was very disappointed in the conserva-

82. Ibid., 219–21. The newspaper that Skoropadsky deemed “decent and serious” was Mir.
83. Ibid., 233–4. Volodymyr Vernadsky headed the committee that organized the academy. Vernadsky had lived in Ukraine since June 1917 and, eventually, became the first president of the Ukrainian Academy of Science.
84. Ibid., 233. And yet he follows this outburst in his memoirs with a contrasting and balancing declaration of his great respect for Galicians and their devotion to their native land and for their genuine democracy.
tive Orthodox priesthood and hierarchy and suggested they learn from the example of their archrival, Metropolitan Sheptytsky.\footnote{Ibid., 196–200. Skoropadsky appointed Vasilii Zenkovsky, a Kadet and a professor of philosophy, as minister of religious affairs.}

The Hetman’s finance minister, Anton Rzhepetsky, devised a new tax system, set up a State Bank and a Land Bank to support the land reform, and introduced a new currency in mid-June 1918.\footnote{Ibid., 193–4. Rzhepetsky had been head of a Kyiv credit society and advisor to the Kyiv City Duma. A Kadet, he chaired the electoral commission for the State Duma.} Land reform was urgent to begin building the healthy farmer nation that Skoropadsky envisioned in his Ukrainian utopia. As a one-time landowner himself, Skoropadsky fancied himself a specialist in agrarian matters. His ultimate ideal was to see Ukraine covered with small highly productive farms selling beets to sugar factories, which would offer shares to wealthier peasants. His government repealed the Third Universal and thereby restored the principle of private land ownership. He insisted, however, that any parceling of the large estates be carried out by legal means and not threaten the interests of landowners, especially Right-Bank Roman Catholic ones. He thought that he had found common cause with the Ukrainian Democratic Agrarian Party because of its “healthy” national and social agendas. The Union of Landowners resisted the Hetman’s land reform and insisted on an outright buyout of large estates.\footnote{Ibid., 136–8, 221, 282–7.}

\section*{Conclusion}

In the end, the German and Austrian occupation regime created the conditions of relative order and stability in which Skoropadsky could attain some important successes, but at the same time guaranteed his ultimate defeat by denying him an army with which to defend his state after the withdrawal of the German and Austrian forces. Grain requisitioning by the Germans proved just as erosive to the Hetman’s authority as it had to the Central Rada’s. But Skoropadsky was also aware that his own government, with its constant quarrels and intrigues, had undermined his (and its) authority.\footnote{Pressed by the increasingly vocal Russian officers, during his final days in power Skoropadsky reluctantly appointed new people to key government posts. The new commander-in-chief, General F.A. Keller, abolished all the new codes that had been devised by the ministry of defense and restored the imperial regulations in what the Hetman decried as a military counter-reform. At the end Skoropadsky’s entourage was} The Directory that succeeded Skoropadsky’s
rule overturned many of his achievements, just as he had done with the Rada’s innovations. He interpreted the Directory’s acts as destroying Ukraine’s “stateness (gosudarstvennost) in every sense.” Hence, in his eyes his successors were little better than the Bolsheviks.

When Skoropadsky turned to the causes of his failure, he blamed the lack of political culture in Russia and the mutual mistrust and demoralization of all classes. This situation was exacerbated by the war and Ukraine’s complete isolation from the outside world under the military occupation.89 He placed almost equal responsibility on the Great Russians, who viewed his rule all along as a transition from the Rada to the Old Regime, which had been overthrown in Petrograd, and on the Galicians and Ukrainian socialists, who incited class hostility and engaged in demagoguery at the expense of genuine social reform and democracy. Certainly, the Ukrainian people were not to blame for the horrors that were visited upon them. This was a people far more capable of demonstrating “profound Christian love and renunciation than any west European [people].” The intelligentsia lacked any genuine knowledge of this people and strove blindly to imitate the West. Skoropadsky’s “Ukrainian” or “Little Russian” Slavophile ideas shaped his view of the Bolsheviks not only as crazy idealists from the alienated intelligentsia, but also as infiltrated by a large number of foreigners and criminals.90 He believed, it appears to the end, that Ukraine was the most likely launching platform for defeating the Bolsheviks and restoring Great Russia and could not understand why the anti-Bolshevik forces could not unite against their obvious enemy. In Skoropadsky’s opinion, the anti-Bolshevik forces failed to understand that national feeling was the only force capable of resisting Bolshevism.91

split between supporters of Petliura and supporters of General (and Prince) Aleksandr Dolgorukov, the leader of the Russian right-wing forces (ibid., 313, 317).
89. Ibid., 54–5.
90. Ibid., 211–12.
91. Ibid., 291, 298. For the Hetman’s relations with the White governments, see Anna Procyk, Russian Nationalism and Ukraine.