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The Political Leaders of Ukraine, 1938-1989: The Burden of History

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Abstract

Where is Ukraine going as a newly independent state? This question has been asked by numerous observers ever since Ukraine's independence in 1991. Yet the question appears to have become even more complex in recent years than before. The present working paper attempts to answer the question indirectly by contextualizing the political thinking of the Ukrainian political leaders who preceded Ukraine's independence.

In the thinking of Westerners, the choice of a "Western" orientation is obvious, because Ukraine's geopolitical situation is obsolete. Such a choice is possible, but the historical trajectory of Ukraine suggests that Ukraine is likely to meander politically for some time between "West" and "East" (an orientation towards Russia).