

From Exit to Take-Over: The Evolution of the Donbas as an Intentional Community

VLAD MYKHENKO*

International Policy Fellow

The Central European University & Open Society Institute

E-mail: mykhnenko@policy.hu

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ABSTRACT:

The Donbas – a large old industrial region in the Ukrainian-Russian Cossack borderland – constitutes a particular intentional community. According to earlier positive accounts, it was a space, the open steppe, a frontier land, a fugitive's paradise, where the notions of and desires for freedom and dignifying labour had been realised. According to its current negative associations, the Donbas is an allegedly realised utopia of an 'anti-modern' community, dominated by a 'criminal-political nexus' of terrorising mafia gangs and political clans. The purpose of this paper is to compare the Donbas community, the evolution of intentions of its founders and of the images produced in the process of its construction, in three very different points in time – under the Russian Empire, under the Bolshevik Rule and Stalin's Great Terror, and during the post-communist transformation.

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In both a geographical and symbolic sense, the Donbas constitutes a particular community, just as a nation, city, or village does. It is a space, a frontier land, where inner yearnings for freedom, wild exploitation, and everyday violence have competed for dominance. Like other communities, the steppe, with all its freedom and terror, was an imagined community. Like others, this imagined community enjoyed myths. The peculiarity of the Donbas was that however differently it may have been imagined by various groups of people, the Donbas lived up to its reputation of freedom and terror.

- Hiroaki Kuromiya
Freedom and Terror in the Donbas, 1998

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the historical evolution of the Donbas – a large industrial region in the Ukrainian-Russian borderland – as an intentional as well as imagined community. It follows Albert O. Hirschman's theory of exit, voice, and loyalty to uncover the dynamics of the political development of the Donbas throughout the region's history. This paper also modifies Hirschman's economic analysis of the relationship between members of organisations by adding the final 'take-over option', which may follow the 'voice option', if leaders of a political entity eventually surrender to grievances, demands and internal pressures exercised by the members of that organisation. It is contended that within some one hundred and fifty years of its history, the Donbas – both as a community and a political economy – has followed the evolutionary and consequential path of 'exit', 'loyalty', 'voice', and 'take-over'. It is maintained that these four historical junctures can be symbolically associated with four Donbas-produced national historical personages. Firstly, after defining the regional community, we examine the establishment of the Donbas as an 'exit' or an heterodox alternative to the mainstream political discourses. The association is made with Nestor Makhno (1889-1934) – the most colourful representative of that period, the legendary anarchist leader of the peasant *Revolutionary Insurgent Army* during the Civil War of 1918-1921. Secondly, we turn to the period of Stalin's Great Terror in the Donbas aimed at transforming the politically ungovernable territory into a loyal Soviet industrial stronghold. Aleksey Stakhanov (1906-1977) – a Donbas collier and the founder of the Stakhanovite output norm-busting workers' movement in 1935 – appears to be the most appropriate symbol of that epoch. Thirdly, we

examine the period of Gorbachev's *perestroika* in its terminal period, which was brought about by a massive 500,000 coal miners' strike in the summer of 1989. The late *perestroika* was symbolised by the image of an anonymous Donbas miner on strike, i.e. of the vocal leader of the first large-scale anti-Establishment protest in the country's post-World War II history. Finally, we consider the political development of the Donbas under the independent Ukraine, when a number of repeated attempts have been made by 'outsiders' to privatise and buy out the Donbas industries. It is maintained that since the second half of the 1990s, we have been witnessing a process by which the successful 'voice' strategy against the hostile privatisation bids gives its way to the final 'friendly take-over' (= re-take-over) of the Donbas from the central authorities by the local elites. It is contended that the latest return of the ownership over the region's fortune into the local hands has been a fairly positive phenomenon, associated with the name of Viktor Yanukovich (born in 1950) – one of the Donbas political leaders, the region's governor (1997-2002), and Ukraine's current Prime-Minister (since November 2002).

DEFINING THE DONBAS

The Donets Coal Basin is a large mining and industrial region at the southern end of Eastern Europe. It stretches from the Donets Hills in the north towards the Don River, and in the south across the low Azov Upland and the coastal plain to the Sea of Azov. The Donets Basin is thus surrounded by the middle and lower Donets River (a tributary of the Don River) and the Sea of Azov (see map 1). The Ukrainian form of the name is *Donets'kyi Basein*, the Russian is *Donetskii Bassein*, byname Donbas or Donbass respectively. Geographically, the Donets Basin is a relatively small area which covers about 9000 square miles (23,000 square km). This principal exploited area of the coal field is usually referred to as the 'Old Donbas'. Coal deposits also extend westward to the Dnieper River and eastward to the Don River in the greater Donbas, covering the total area of 23,000 square miles (about 60,000 square km).



Map 1. Geography of the Donbas

Adopted from F.S. Babychev et al., eds., *Ukrains'ka Radians'ka Sotsialistychna Respublika* (Kyiv: Ukrainian Soviet Encyclopaedia, 1986), pp. 16-17.

The Donbas lies in the western part of the Eurasian Steppe – a belt of open grassland that extends from Hungary in the west through Ukraine and Central Asia to Manchuria in the east. From prehistoric times, this open steppe – called by the Eastern Slavs the ‘wild field’ – formed a natural gateway to Europe for successive waves of nomadic horseman from Central Asia. As a contemporary commentator has pointed out:

A visitor to the Donbas, even today’s industrialized Donbas, will marvel at the vast, open steppe land that surrounds it. The Donbas is part of the area which is used to be called the ‘wild steppe’ (*dyke pole, dikoe pole*). In an analogy with the American expression ‘wild west,’ one might call the area the ‘wild south.’ In any case, it was so called because it was historically a theatre of continuous military operations. Its geographical peculiarities made the steppe a wild, dangerous area [...] It was here where Slavs, numerous nomadic peoples such as Pechenegs and Polovtsians (Kipchaks), and later Tartars staged long and bloody battles for many centuries. (Kuromiya 1998: 11)

From the early thirteenth century and until the late eighteenth century, the south of what later became known as the Donbas and the adjoining steppe were under the rule of the Tartar Golden Horde and its successor state – the Crimean khanate. The central areas of the Donets Basin were under control of the Ukrainian and Russian Cossack communes – the Zaporozhia *Sich* and the Don Cossack Host (see map 2). With the liquidation of the *Sich* and the annexation of the Crimean khanate to the Russian Empire in 1783, the sparsely settled southern lands (what came to be called New Russia or *Novorossia*) were colonised by migrants from other parts of Ukraine, as well as smaller numbers from Russia, the Balkans, and Germany. After the Russian Revolution of February 1917, the Donbas soon became a centre of the violent and continuous conflict between the Ukrainian independence supporters, Reds (Russian Bolsheviks), Whites (Russian monarchists), Blacks (anarchists), Greens (independent peasant self-defence), and foreign intervention forces (German and Austrian troops and Anglo-French forces). During the civil war fought from 1918 to 1921, the Donbas changed hands several dozen times. Eventually, nearly the entire region was put under control of the Soviet Ukrainian government. In 1941 and 1942, during the Nazi occupation, the Donbas was governed directly by the German military administration. After the World War II, the pre-war territorial status quo was restored.



----- The Donbas area

Map 2. Ukraine in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries

Source: Adopted from Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 13.

Besides a short period in the 1920s, the Donbas has never been a single administrative entity. On the eve of 1917, the heartland of the Donbas belonged to Katerynoslav *gubernia* (province), and its eastern part to the Don Cossack Land. In 1920, the Ukrainian and Russian Donbas territories were joined into a large single administrative unit – Donetsk *gubernia* of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. Soon afterwards, Shakhty and Taganrog counties of the Donbas, its most south-eastern part, were re-subordinated administratively to the Soviet Russia. The remainder was left in Ukraine. After a series of territorial administration reforms, in 1932, the Ukrainian Donbas was united again into Donetsk *oblast* (province). In 1938, Donetsk *oblast* was divided into Stalino (later Donetsk) and Voroshylovhrad (later Luhansk) *oblasti*. This administrative-territorial division has survived intact until the present. Thus, the oldest part of the greater Donbas forms present-day Donetsk and Luhansk *oblasti* in eastern Ukraine. Westward, the greater Donets Basin extends to Pavlohrad county of Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk *oblast* (the western Donbas). Eastward, the Donbas extends to western and northern districts of

Russia's Rostov oblast. The territorial division and borderland nature of the Donbas make statistical compilations and social analysis difficult for researchers. Since Donetsk oblast covers the heartland of the Old Donbas and is considered to be the political and economic centre of this historic area, the focus of this paper is on the historical community evolution processes in Donetsk oblast. The term 'Donbas' is used in this paper primarily to cover the territory of Donetsk oblast as well as the industrial region that has developed in this area (see map 3).

AN INTENTIONAL 'EXIT' COMMUNITY

Albert O. Hirschman in his work on the economic analysis of intra-group politics – *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* – identified 'loyalty', 'voice' and 'exit' as three basic behavioural strategies available to members of firms or organisations. If satisfied with organisation's leaders, members would remain loyal or faithful to the organisation and its principals. By contrast, members may express their dissatisfaction with leaders by leaving organisations or 'voting with one's feet' against them. Another important dimension is the 'voice option'. Where the 'exit option' is unviable or impractical, members of a political organisation will be forced to express their grievances and voice their discontent through demands and internal pressure on leaders (Hirschman 1970).

Since the very beginning of its political history, the Donbas and the surrounding steppe in general has been the place to exercise the 'exit option'. Hiroaki Kuromiya, a Japanese US-based historian of the Donbas and the politics of Stalin's industrialisation, has been the first to apply Hirschman's concept to expose major characteristics of the Donbas history. Kuromiya has argued that throughout its history 'the Donbas has always functioned as an "exit", or refuge, an alternative to political conformity or protest':

While political violence was part and parcel of the history of the Donbas, paradoxically, the Donbas, the steppe land once controlled by Cossacks, symbolized freedom both in popular imagination and in the perception of Moscow (or Kiev). I use the term freedom in its 'negative' sense, namely, 'freedom from' and not 'freedom to'. With its highly developed underground (both literal and symbolic), the Donbas collieries served as a refuge for freedom seekers (1998: 2).

UKRAINE ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS



11770 (CAD) - December 2000 1219/00 Foreign and Commonwealth Office Map Series 156(2000)
 Users should note that this map has been designed for briefing purposes only and it should not be used for determining the precise location of places or features. This map should not be considered an authority on the delimitation of international boundaries nor on the spelling of place and feature names. Maps produced for the FCO Library Map Service are not to be taken as necessarily representing the views of the UK government on boundaries or political status.
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Map 3. Ukraine's current administrative divisions

Source: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Map Service (<http://files.fco.gov.uk/info/research>)

Situated at the end corner of Muscovy, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (*Rzecz Pospolita*) and the Crimean Tartar Khanate, the vast Zaporozhia and Don areas were a safe haven for many Ukrainian and Russian peasant serfs and other fugitives from political, economic and religious subjugation. It was the place ruled by the Cossacks:

The Cossacks (*kozaki*, *kazaki*, horsemen or brigands in Turkic) formed martial communities in the wild field, composed of those who fled the oppression of Polish-Lithuania and Muscovy, dreaming of a free, independent, and better life in the new land. In the free steppe, life forces them to live as 'free warriors', fighting both against enemies in the north and against the Tartars and Turks in the steppe. Being free warriors often mean in practice fighting as mercenaries, allying with this or that camp depending on political, military, economic, and other exigencies. Apart from fighting, the Cossacks made their living by a combination of fishing, hunting, commerce, agriculture, and plunder. Life itself was at once brutal, savage, ruthless, and heroic (Kuromiya 1998: 35).

The geographical location of the Donets Basin in the dangerous open steppe did not allow for an early industrial development. However, in the course of the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, as Moscow expanded its control over the steppe; the Cossack communities were either destroyed (like the Ukrainian Zaporozhia Sich in 1775 by Catherine II) or firmly integrated into the Imperial officialdom (like the Don Cossacks) to become an important military power, which the Empire used to oppress any revolutionary movement.

Coal was first discovered in the Donbas in 1721. Exploitation began in the early nineteenth century, but it did not become significant for another fifty years due to the lack of transportation. The enserfment of the peasantry in the Russian Empire also impeded migration and the formation of industrial labour force. Only 40,000 tonnes of coal were produced in the Donbas between 1796 and 1806. The major consumer of the local coal was the Luhansk state ironworks established in 1795. Iron production at Luhansk was closed soon afterwards however. After several unsuccessful efforts to establish a heavy industry in the region, a rapid growth of coal mines, ironworks, and railways came to the Donbas in the 1860s-1870s. Industrial growth in the region was stimulated by an overall expansion of private capitalism in the Russian Empire under Alexander II (reigned 1855-1881). The Emancipation of the serfs in 1861 undoubtedly stimulated the development of industry by releasing labour from the land. The Donbas was then opened to massive migration and attracted impoverished and newly-released peasants, seasonal workers, various sectarians (Protestants, Catholics, and Old

Believers), all kinds of criminals, freedom seekers, and fortune hunters from other parts of the empire (see Kuromiya 1998). The interventionist state policy, high protective tariffs, and very high prices paid by the Russian government for its military and rail purchases from the metallurgical industry encouraged an influx of French, Belgian, British, German, Swiss, and Italian capital investment to the Donbas (Shcherbinina 2000). John Hughes, a Welsh entrepreneur, founded in 1872 the first commercially viable ironworks on the headwaters of the Kalmius River. The settlement around the ironworks named Yuzivka (Hughesovka or Iuzovka), after the founder himself, was to become the major city of the Donets Basin.

The process of industrialisation generated a ‘coal fever’ from newly-established railways, sugar factories, and ironworks in the South of the Russian Empire. Absolute coal production in the Donbas increased from 250,000 tonnes in 1870 to 11,000,000 tonnes in 1900, and to 25,000,000 tonnes in 1913. This rapid expansion of Russia’s largest coal producing area was facilitated by the development of a dense railway network. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century a massive heavy industry based on the iron ore of Kryvyi Rih and the coal of the Donets Basin emerged in the area (see map 4). Between 1894 and 1900 nine new ironworks were founded in the Donbas, increasing the number of large metallurgical plants in the region to twelve. In addition to over three hundred coal mines and ironworks, there were another three hundred various industrial plants and factories operating in the Donbas by the turn of the century (*Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia*, VIII (1972), 443-46; Kondufor, I (1981), Chapters 2-4; Mykhnenko 1998, Chapters 2-3). In 1900, the Donbas produced over two-thirds of the Russian Empire’s coal output, 36% of pig iron, and 63% of soda. Within some thirty years, the Donbas was transformed from an empty field into the principal coal mining, iron and steel producing area of the Russian Empire:

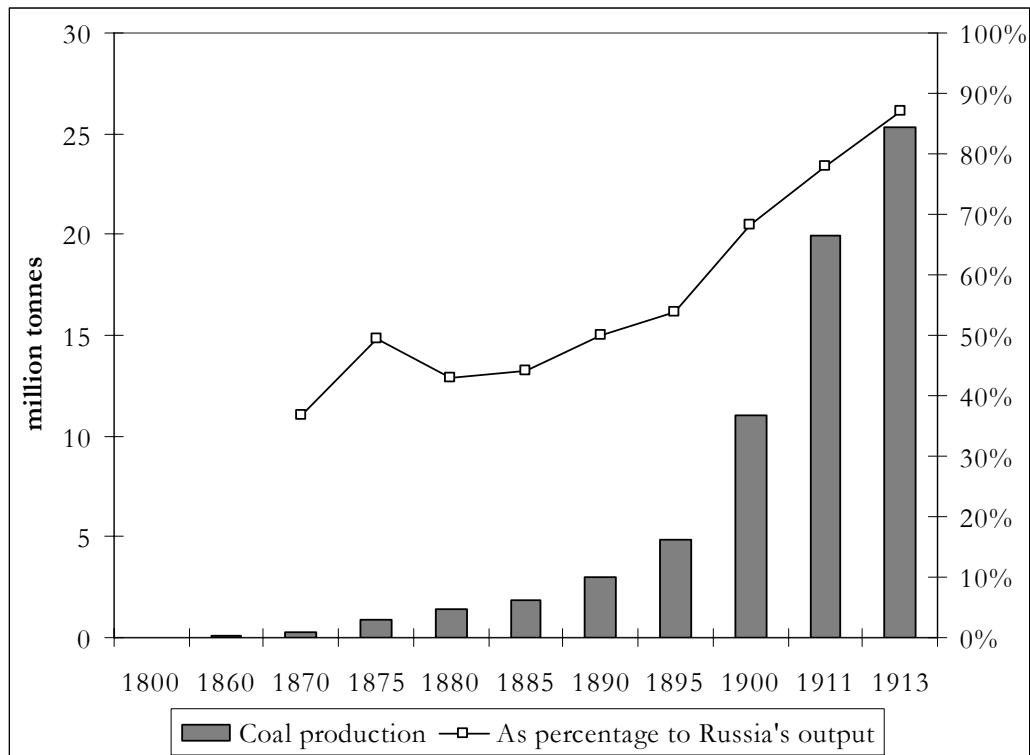


Figure 1. Industrial growth of the Donbas, 1800-1913

Source: Calculated from Theodore H. Friedgut, *Iuzovka and Revolution*, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989-1994), I (1989), p. 32; Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbas-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia, 1870-1905* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.18; A.M. Mykhnenko, *Istoriia Donbasu, 1861-1945 rr.* (Donetsk: Stalker, 1999), pp. 11-47.

The rapid industrial expansion inevitably brought with it a steady increase in population. According to Antonenko, between 1858 and 1897 the population of the Donbas had doubled from 700,767 to 1,453,109 (1994: Chapter 2). By 1906, the population of the region had increased to 1,536,852. During these first fifty years of industrialisation, over one hundred and fifty new towns, mining settlements, and villages had been founded in the Donbas. For example, the population of Yuzivka had increased from 164 people in 1870 to 57,833 in 1917 (Mykhnenko 1999: 68). This rapid population growth was largely due to the increasingly massive migration to the region. While the population of the Donbas had grown by 54.4% from 1858 to 1906, over 46% of this growth was due to inward migration. The total number of official registered newcomers and squatters in the Donbas in the early twentieth century was over 400,000 (Antonenko 1994).

According to most accounts, the main cause for the migration to the Donbas was dire poverty of peasants in the empire caused by overpopulation. The emerging heavy

industries of the Donbas were able to absorb a vast and increasing labour surplus from the Ukrainian and Russian villages. The land distribution in the southern Ukraine was more equitable and agricultural conditions more favourable than in other parts of the Russian Empire. For this reason, local Ukrainians as a whole showed much less enthusiasm for migration to the Donbas mining settlements and factory towns. Only 37% of new settlers came from the neighbouring Ukrainian province of Sloboda Ukraine, the Left Bank, and the southern Ukraine (Katerynoslav, Tauria, Poltava, Chernihiv provinces), while the remainder were from the Russian provinces of Kursk, Orel, Voronezh, Tula, Smolensk, the Don Cossack Land, and the Belarusian Mogilev gubernia. Since the late eighteenth century and until the World War I, the Donbas had also been an attractive destination for other peoples and creeds: Greeks and Tartars from the Crimea, Croats from the Austrian-Hungarian Empire, Serbs and Bulgarians from the Ottoman Empire, Germans, Austrians, Poles, and Jews came to settle in the region as well (Antonenko 1994).

By 1900, the greater number of colliers, metallurgical and railway workers in the Donbas were Russians (over 55%). Although Ukrainians made up a majority in the region, they constituted just one third of the industrial labour force. As a result, the emerging working class and the growing mining settlements and factory towns in the Donbas appeared to be highly Russified urban spots on a Ukrainian rural map:

I was really struck by the fact that I never heard a single word of Ukrainian in Lugansk itself. When I went around to where the workers were, as I did fairly often, no one spoke Ukrainian. But when I encountered a non-worker, peasant or petty bourgeoisie, it was sometimes difficult to make myself understood. It was a striking contrast between the town and industrial population in general, and the peasantry. (George Denike, Russian Menshevik activist in the pre-Revolutionary Donbas. As quoted in Kuromiya 1998: 42)

The 1897 first general census of the Russian Empire confirmed the multiethnic character of the Donbas:

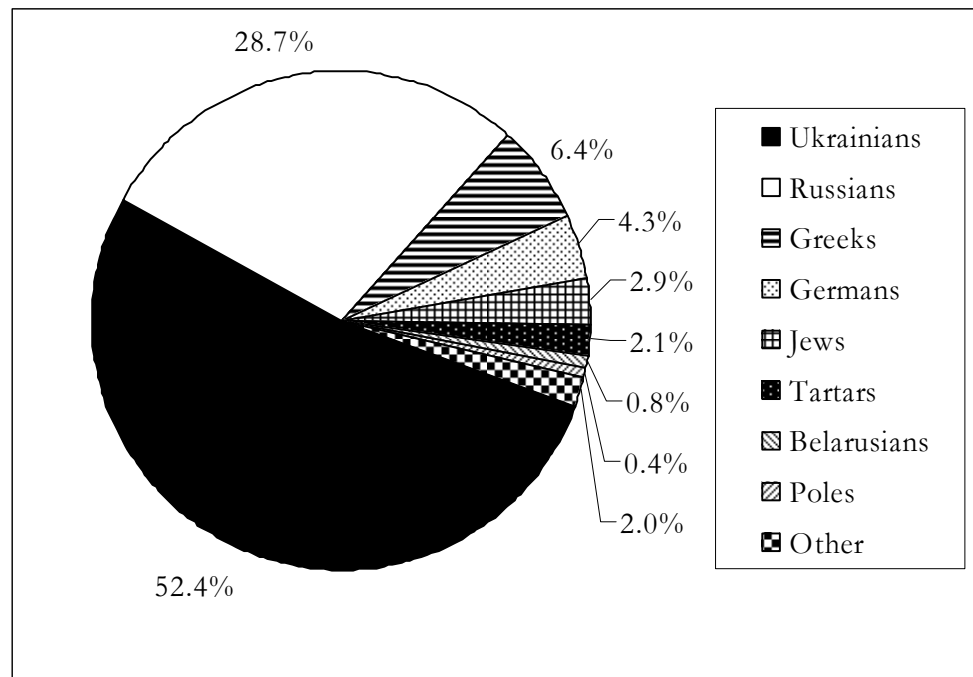


Figure 2. Ethnic composition of the Donbas population, 1897

Note: The Don Cossack Host province is excluded.

Source: Calculated from Hiroaki Kuromiya, *Freedom and Terror in the Donbas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 41.

The urban working class that began to be produced by the rapid industrial growth in the Donbas was to follow the fate of workers in the early stages of industrial revolution in Western Europe. According to historical accounts, the Donbas workers were illiterate, unskilled, badly paid, maimed and injured at work. On the eve of World War I, over 40% of Donbas colliers lived in dugouts, while the remainder were housed in peasants' huts, barns, and wooden barracks. Most travellers who had visited the Donbas during that period were shocked by both physical and moral deprivation of the local population, as well as 'awfully filthy and sickly' living and working conditions (see Kuromiya 1998: 17). Violent fatalism of Donbas workers, their attitudinal problems, perpetuated by misery and despair, common brutality, hooliganism, street fighting, drinking and wife beating were the most widely observed features of life in the wild field. Ethnic coexistence in the Donbas also led to recurring clashes. The relations between Russians and Ukrainians were rather strained in cities and workers' settlements, leading to frequent knife fights. The Tartars and Muslims were often victims of violence by Slavs. Almost every strike or other type of labour protest in the Donbas (e.g. in 1887, 1892, 1900), and especially that of 1905-07, was to end in brutal riots and large-scale anti-Jewish pogroms (Friedgut 1989; Wynn 1994).

The outbreak of World War I and its outcome had unexpected repercussions for belligerent powers. The Russian Empire collapsed in February 1917. The new highest national authority in Ukraine – the Central *Rada* (Assembly) – declared territorial autonomy for Ukraine recognised by the Russian Provisional Government. However, there emerged an unresolved dispute between the Rada and Russia's government regarding territorial jurisdiction and political authority over the Donbas and the whole Eastern Ukraine. Moreover, on the local level, the Rada had to compete with the increasingly radical *Soviets* of workers' and soldiers' deputies, whose support was strong in the Russian-speaking towns of the industrial Donbas. Following the Bolshevik coup d'état in Petrograd in November 1917, the Central Rada proclaimed the creation of the Ukrainian People's Republic and refused to accept the authority of Russia's new regime. The Bolsheviks, in turn, at the first All-Ukrainian Congress of Soviets, held in Kharkiv in December 1917, declared Ukraine to be a Soviet Republic and formed a puppet government (Subtelny 1988: Chapters 18-19).

The Donbas soon became one of the most fiercely contested territories in the emerging civil war. At the end of the Word War I, the region had been producing 87% of Russia's coal output, 76% of pig iron, 57% of steel, more than 90% of coke, and over 60% of soda and mercury (Afonin 1990: 45). In his famous phrase, Vladimir Lenin, the leader of Russian Bolsheviks, then described the Donbas as not merely 'an indispensable area' but 'a region, without which the entire construction of socialism would just be a piece of wishful thinking' (Lenin [volume 45], 107). In January 1918, the Bolsheviks launched an offensive in the northern Ukraine and advanced on Kiev. Almost immediately, the forth Congress of the Donbas Soviets proclaimed the creation of a separate Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih Republic joining the Soviet Russia. The Central Rada signed a peace accord with the Central Powers in February 1918 at Brest-Litovsk, and asked for military assistance. Facing a German-Austrian offensive, the Bolsheviks had to dismantle the Donetsk-Kryvyi Rih government and retreated from Ukraine in April 1918. The Donbas entered a phase of rebellions and partisan warfare.

The capitulation of Germany and Austria-Hungary in November 1918 led to an increasingly chaotic situation in Ukraine. The officially restored Ukrainian People's Republic was unable to cope with the mounting economic and social problems and failed to establish an effective administration. The Bolsheviks launched a new offensive in the Donbas already in December 1918. The Russian Whites, whose army had

grouped around General Denikin and the Don Cossacks, also entered the territory. The Donbas became a theatre of brutal warfare between the Bolsheviks, Ukrainian national forces, Denikin's *Volunteers Army*, later joined by the Anglo-French Entente intervention corps. However, as Kuromiya has emphasised, neither 'class' nor 'nation', the major concepts of the Age, could apply comfortably to Donbas politics: 'the Marxists had a very difficult time in the Donbas even at the time of "proletarian revolution" and civil was (or "class war") in 1917-20; so did nationalists parties at a time when they thrived elsewhere' in the wake of the Russian Empire's collapse' (1998: 335).

It was in the times of the Civil War when the 'exit' nature of the Donbas community had become self-evident: the bulk of the Donbas population did join neither the Reds nor the Whites nor the 'Yellow and Blue' (Ukrainian national colours) troops but a local guerrilla movement of the famous charismatic anarchist otaman (=chieftain) Nestor Makhno. Back in 1917, Nestor Makhno (affectionately known as *bat'ko Makhno* or father Makhno) began to confiscate gentry lands and divide them up among local peasants. Soon, he formed a peasant self-defence force – the *Revolutionary Insurgent Army* – to defend the lands from any invading troops. The declared goal of the Makhno movement was to establish a free society of peasant communes, co-operatives, mine, factory and plant workers' committees, trade-unions, railway, cable, postal and other organisations, which would voluntarily and in a 'bottom-up' manner form local and regional economic councils aimed at regulating the social and economic activities of the communes. The Makhnovites also called for the abolition of the Bolshevik decree on the nationalisation of all the property as such that provides for a forced usurpation of the land and factories by the state authority – 'a new exploiter of the free people in making'. According to the Makhnovite manifesto, 'any political authority that aspires to a forcible and violent rule shall be considered a hostile and counter-revolutionary force against which we will lead the most resolute and decisive fight to defend us and our right for a free organisation to the death' (see the 20th October 1919 Declaration by the RIA Military-Revolutionary Council in Mykhnenko 2003a: 160-61). Kuromiya has maintained that the ideals of both the Donbas rural and urban communities were very similar if not analogous:

In their struggle the Donbas workers sought to defend their own space of freedom. The workers wished to protect their freedom and independence and their sense of dignity, the actual or symbolic guardian of which was

their actual or imagined communities. The revolutionaries failed to understand that these communities were not necessarily political parties, trade unions, or other forms of their own making. Rather, these communities could be paternalistic and fluid and could as small and concrete as transplanted village communes, barracks, *zemliachestvos*, and neighbourhoods, and as large and abstract as the 'free steppe', the 'working class', and even 'Ukraine' and 'Russia'. Thus one could simultaneously be a Donbas worker from Kursk, a Russian patriot and anti-Semite, a pious churchgoer and wife-beating drunkard, a fierce defender of the free steppe and a participant in the revolutionary events of 1905. People identified themselves with a multitude of actual and imagined communities, which, in turn, constituted their moral universe [...] Yet the Donbas colliers did not have to discover their 'selves': the Cossack myth, reinforced by the open space in the steppe and the dark, yet uncontrollable underground, provided, almost by default, a community for them. There were more interested in protecting their space than in liberating it. Their struggle was more defensive than offensive. Their sense of community was akin to the peasants' view of their community, *mir*. Unlike the *mir*, however, which excluded outsiders, the open space, like the American West and Siberia, was inclusionary: the steppe did not reject those who sought freedom there (Kuromiya 1998: 64-65).

The civil war paralysed and devastated the Donbas industries and resulted in terrible human sacrifices; towns and villages were regularly plundered by withdrawing as well as capturing regiments; the local population was terrorised by countless offensives and counter-offensives. As one Bolshevik was quoted saying, the economic heartland of the Soviet Republic had been turned into a cemetery of miners, steel-workers, and peasants (see Kuromiya 1998: 114). Ultimately, by 1921, the Donbas and most of the pre-war Ukrainian territories were under firm Bolshevik control (on the turbulent and violent history of the Donbas during the revolution and civil war see Kuromiya 1998: Chapter 3; Mykhnenko 2003a: Chapter 2).

FORCED INTO LOYALTY

The Ukrainian territories under Bolshevik control were formally organized as the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (UkrSSR) and the Donbas became a constituent part of the newly-established Soviet Ukrainian state. In December 1922, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – a federation of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and the Trans-Caucasian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (i.e. Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) – was proclaimed. Although the constituent republics retained the formal right of secession, their jurisdiction was gradually limited to domestic affairs, while most authority was vested in the All-Union organs in Moscow. An initial Bolshevik policy was that of the 'shock construction of Communism' based on the nationalisation and

militarisation of all enterprises, the abolition of money, and the forcibly requisition of food. It caused economic havoc in the Donbas and a famine in 1921-1923 in Ukraine. About 500,000 suffered from famine in Donetsk gubernia alone. However, after a partial restoration of private enterprise in the course of the New Economic Policy (NEP), by 1927 the Donbas economy recovered to its pre-war level. In parallel with these relatively prosperous years, the Bolshevik government took steps to appease the non-Russian nationalities, and endorsed a decade of rapid Ukrainisation, including the promotion of the Ukrainian language, culture and literature, and the recruitment of cadres from the indigenous population (Kul'chyts'kyi 1997).

The NEP ended soon however. At the end of the 1920s, Joseph Stalin, the new Soviet leader, launched a new revolutionary programme of accelerated industrialisation and the wholesale collectivisation of agriculture. In Ukraine this led to a rapid economic and social transformation. A remarkable industrial development was spatially concentrated in the Donbas-Dnieper Bend. Before the introduction in the Soviet Union of a command economy, there were sixty one coal-mines and factories constructed or re-established in the province. Between 1928 and 1932, seventy-nine industrial plants and factories had been founded or restored in Donetsk oblast. During the second five-year plan (1933-37), sixty-two industrial enterprises had been set up in the oblast. Within the third five-year plan (which was interrupted in June 1941 by the beginning of the German-Soviet war), another forty-three industrial plants and factories had been established in Donetsk oblast. As a result of what some historians called 'Stalin's Industrial Revolution' (Kuromiya 1988), by the outbreak of World War II, industrial output in the Donbas had increased eightfold, while the number of industrial workers tripled (Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office 1967: 4; Mykhnenko 1999: 272). As Figure 3 shows, when the Bolsheviks had taken over the Donbas, the regional coal production level dropped to some 5 million tonnes per year; by the time of the Nazi invasion in 1941, the Donbas collieries' coal output approached 85 million tonnes.

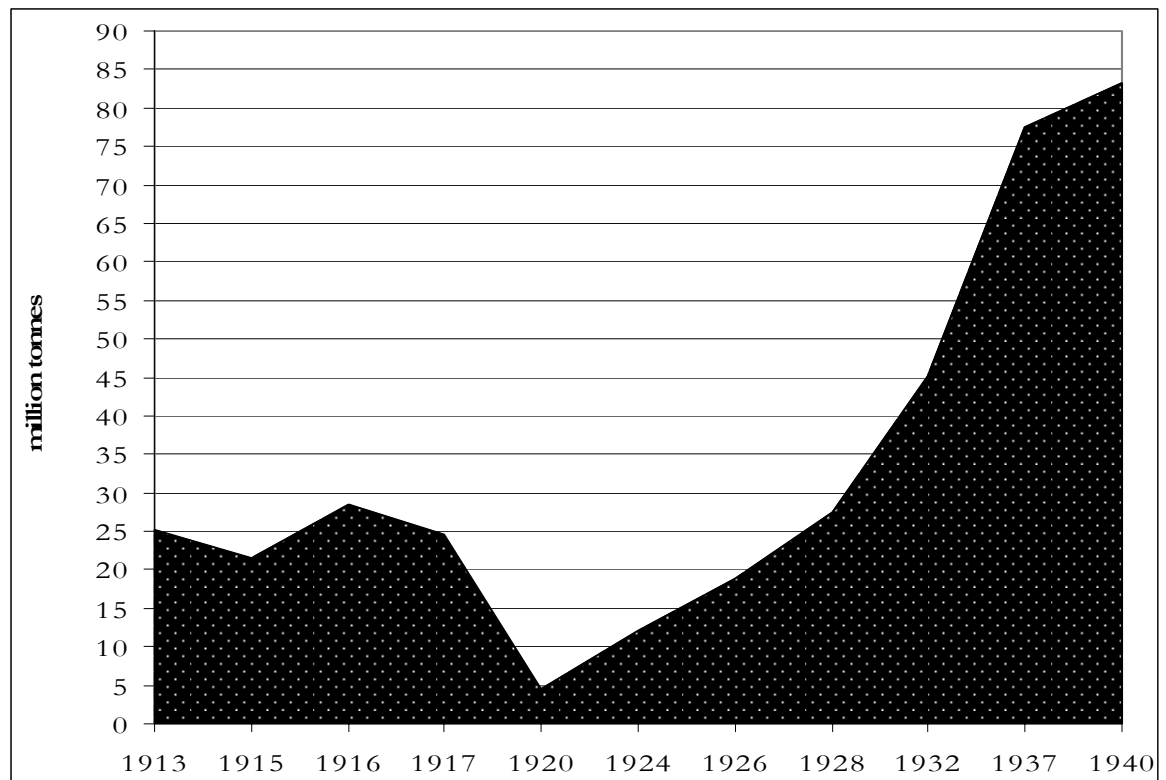


Figure 3. the Donbas coal output, 1913-1940

Source: Calculated from Charters Wynn, *Workers, Strikes, and Pogroms: The Donbas-Dnepr Bend in Late Imperial Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), p.18; Anatoly M. Mykhnenko, *Istoriia Donbasu, 1861-1945 rr.* (Donets'k: Stalker, 1999), pp. 11-265.

In the Donbas and elsewhere, the cost of the industrialisation was fully borne by the peasantry. In 1928, the Soviet regime introduced first special measures against all arbitrarily defined 'wealthy' peasants – *kulaki*. According to Stalin, the kulaks were to be 'eliminated as a class'. In 1928 and 1929, over 352,000 farms and peasant households were ruined in Ukraine (Kul'chyts'kyi 1999: 152). About 850,000 people were dispossessed of all property and deported to Siberia and Kazakhstan (Subtelny 1988). The wholesale collectivization that began in 1929 provoked mass resistance. In return, peasants were terrorised through ever increasing delivery quotas (i.e. the collection of agricultural produce by the armed authorities at a give-away price) and the eventual seizure of all foodstuffs. The result was a catastrophic famine in 1932-1933 and a loss of 4.5 to 7.5 million lives[†] in Ukraine alone (Ukraine's History Institute 1990; Kul'chyts'kyi 1999). Donetsk oblast was affected by the famine disaster as well (Troian 1989). Although there are no exact figures, local archives contain a large number of terrible accounts of starvation and cannibalism in the Donbas countryside (Kuromiya 1998: 168, 173-74; Mykhnenko 2003a: 232-53).

[†] The loss of 4.5 million lives during the Great Famine of 1932-33 in Ukraine is the most conservative estimate made in 1990 by a special Ukraine's Communist Party commission on the issue.

Nonetheless, people from all over the country tried to escape from starvation by running to the Donbas towns. To prevent a mass influx of famished people from the rural areas, an internal passport system was introduced in 1932-33 in the Soviet cities. In order to travel to any other place inside the Soviet Ukraine one was obliged to obtain a special permit. The peasant or ‘collective farmers’ were deprived of such a right. At that time, the Donbas, with its labour-hungry industries, had become an almost exclusive place in the country, where new-comers were not forced to produce formal papers before taking up the dangerous work underground. Between 1926 and 1932, the population of Donetsk oblast had grown by 39% and urban population by 129%, while the average figures for Ukraine were 10% and 34.5% respectively. In 1938 the Donbas region was divided into Stalino and Voroshylovhrad oblasti[‡]. From 1932 to 1940 urban population in Stalino oblast alone grew by another 65% (Mykhnenko 1999: 313).

	1926	1939
Total population (thousands)	1,645	3,105
Rural population (thousands)	997	683
Urban population (thousands)	648	2422
Rural population (as % of total)	61	22
Urban population (as % of total)	39	78

Table 1. The Donbas population growth, 1926-1940

Source: Calculated from *Donetskaia oblast za 70 let: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Agency, 1987), p. 163.

The trauma left by the famine was felt for a long time. Yet according to the most current accounts, the Donbas was hit even harder during Stalin’s Great Terror against the alleged ‘enemies of the people’, ‘saboteurs’, ‘Trotskyites’, ‘wreckers’, ‘spies’, ‘traitors’, ‘nationalist deviationists’, and the Orthodox Church. As it has been argued elsewhere, ‘the Donbas was imagined by the Soviet people to be an “exit”, and it functioned to a large extent as such’ (Kuromiya 1998: 336). Moscow, however, had always doubted the loyalty of this haven for the disenfranchised and, therefore, the Donbas was the prime target for the Great Terror to come. It was no accident that Stalin’s Terror campaign

[‡] In 1924 –the year of Vladimir Lenin’s death – Yuzivka, one of the largest cities of the Donbas, had to change its name for *Stalino*. In 1932, Stalino became headquarters of the large newly-established Donetsk oblast. In 1938, to celebrate the ‘20 years of achievements’ under the Soviet rule, the Donbas was divided into two parts – Stalino and Voroshylovhrad oblasti, named after Joseph Stalin and his chief Bolshevik associate from the Donbas - Clement Voroshylov

began in the Donbas, with the infamous Shakhty affair of 1928, directed against a number of coal mine technical personnel labelled as ‘bourgeois wreckers’; eleven alleged defendants out of the total number of 53 convicted were sentenced to death penalty (see Mykhnenko 2003a: 249-251). In Ukraine, in 1937 and 1938 - the peak years of Stalin’s purges – 267,579 people were arrested with political charges, and 122,237 were sentenced to be shot. The number of political victims in Stalino oblast in 1937-38 was over 40,000. Between 27,000 and 30,000 were executed. Combining similar figures from the neighbouring Donbas province of Voroshylovhrad, Kuromiya concluded that the Donbas accounted for up to one-third of the death sentences in Ukraine, whereas in 1937 only 16% of Ukraine’s population resided in the region (1998: 245-47). A large number of Bolsheviks as well as people of ‘bourgeois origin’ and ethnic minorities (Germans, Greeks, Poles, Tartars, Jews) were among the victims of the Great Terror. The vast majority of the repressed and executed, however, were non-party members; Ukrainians and Russians, most of whom were workers and peasants (Kuromiya 1998: Chapter 6; Mykhnenko 1999; 2003a).

The major outcome of Stalin’s Great Terror in the Donbas was that it had forced the region to become a loyal Soviet industrial stronghold. The famous Stakhanovite movement launched in 1935 was to epitomise the ‘loyalty option’. Aleksey Stakhanov, a Donbas collier, was to become a new Donbas-generated role model for the Soviet society. In the words of Alec Nove, this was a complex phenomenon:

It emerged out of the ‘socialist competition’ and shock-brigade campaigns, which grew rapidly in scope and intensity during the first five-year plan period. They were linked with efforts to encourage enterprises to offer to achieve more technical progress, output, cost reduction and productivity than was originally proposed ... It was in this context that a coal miner, Alexei Stakhanov, achieved output fourteen times greater than the norm, in September 1935. He did this not just by working hard, but also by intelligent use of unskilled auxiliaries. The party took this up, and ‘Stakhanovism’ spread rapidly to other branches of the economy ... The effect of all this was to use equipment more fully and to intensify and rationalize labour ... ‘Stakhanovism’ was a means of dramatizing and publicizing a necessary change. Following a series of conferences held early in 1936 work norms were sharply raised: by 30-40 per cent in engineering, 34 per cent in chemicals, 51 per cent in electricity generation, 26 per cent in coal mining, 25-29 per cent in the oil industry, and so on (Nove 1992: 235-36).

While spreading to across the country, the norm-busting movement produced in the Donbas a full series of popularised communist labour heroes and heroines, besides Stakhanov himself. Nikita Izotov (a coal miner), Petro Kryvonis (a steam locomotive

operator), Pasha Angelina (a tractor driver), and Makar Mazay (a steel worker) all applied the Stakhanovite breaking ground (and, at times, breaking machinery) methods in their respective sectors. The Donbas had not only been forced to be loyal but also to be exemplary.

THE DONBAS VOICE OF PROTEST

Despite some sporadic outbursts of public protest against the Soviet authorities, the Donbas community as much as the entire Soviet society had remained in the 'loyal mode' until the late 1980s. Among major developments were the twenty post-World War II years of the Donbas reconstruction, during which 627 large industrial enterprises, including 295 coal mines, were rebuilt or founded in the region. In the course of the post-war reconstruction, hundreds of thousands of workers and the Communist Youth League labour brigades had been sent from the Russian provinces to Ukraine's industrial East and, especially, to the Donbas. The population grew much more rapidly here than elsewhere across the country. As a result, the composition of Ukraine's ethnically mixed eastern borderlands was gradually transformed into a Ukrainian-Russian parity (see Figure 4). The Ukrainian-language education in the region was severely curtailed after the 1959 school education reform; almost all Ukrainian schools were closed down in the Donbas by the mid-1970s (Sarzhn 1999, Chapter 3; cf. Krawchenko 1985). The Russian 'Great-power chauvinism' and ensuing Russification policies were the issues discussed and condemned by the Ukrainian intellectuals and later dissidents. The related Soviet migration policy was attacked as well (see Dzyuba 1968). Two famous dissidents from the Donbas who protested against the Russification – Oleksa Tykhyi (a local Ukrainian school teacher) and Vasyl Stus (a Ukrainian language university lecturer) – were arrested in the 1970s and died in jail in 1984 and 1985 respectively (Baran and Danylenko 1999: 203-41). One should notice, however, that the dissident movement was the weakest in the Donbas. Among some nine hundred reported Ukrainian dissidents, there were only 7 from Donetsk oblast – the largest in Ukraine (Krawchenko 1985: chapter 5; Kas'ianov 1995).

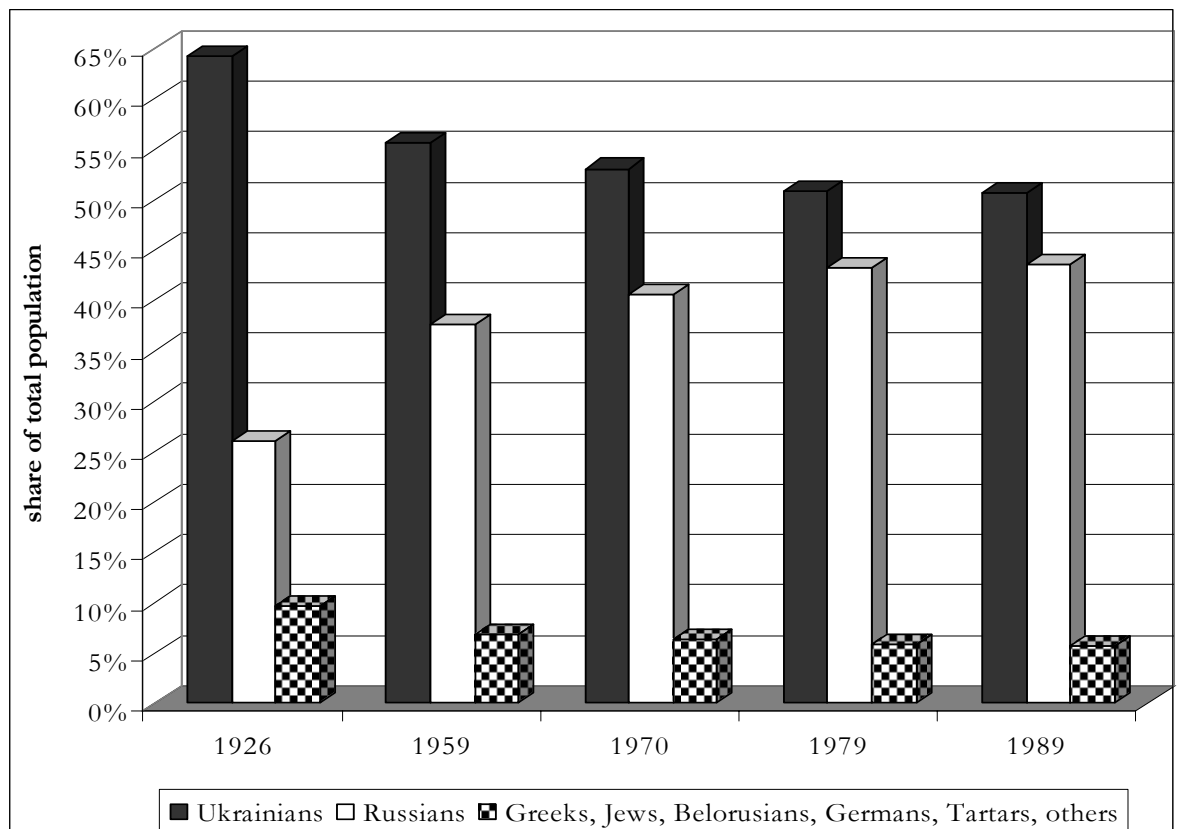


Figure 4. Ethnic composition, Donetsk oblast, 1926-1989

Source: Calculated from Donetskoe oblastnoe upravlenie statistiki, *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie Donetskoi oblasti za 1986-1990 gody* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Agency, 1991), p. 17; A.O. Sarzhan, *Novitnia istoriia Donbasu (1945-1999 rr.)* (Donetsk: Stalker, 1999), p. 223; Anatolii Mykhnenko, *Istoriia Donets'koho basynu druhoi polovyny XIX – pershoi polovyny XX st.* (Kyiv; Donetsk: Iugo-Vostok, 2003), p. 431.

Due to massive capital investments, the Donbas managed to recover from setbacks and destruction in World War II relatively quickly. Moreover, the regional coal and overall industrial production continued to grow until the 1970s (see Figure 5). Furthermore, the Donbas has generally remained the largest producing area of coal, iron and steel in Ukraine and one of the world's major metallurgical and heavy-industrial complexes. Nonetheless, in the early 1960s, there emerged several signs of the region's historical demise from its previously central economic role.

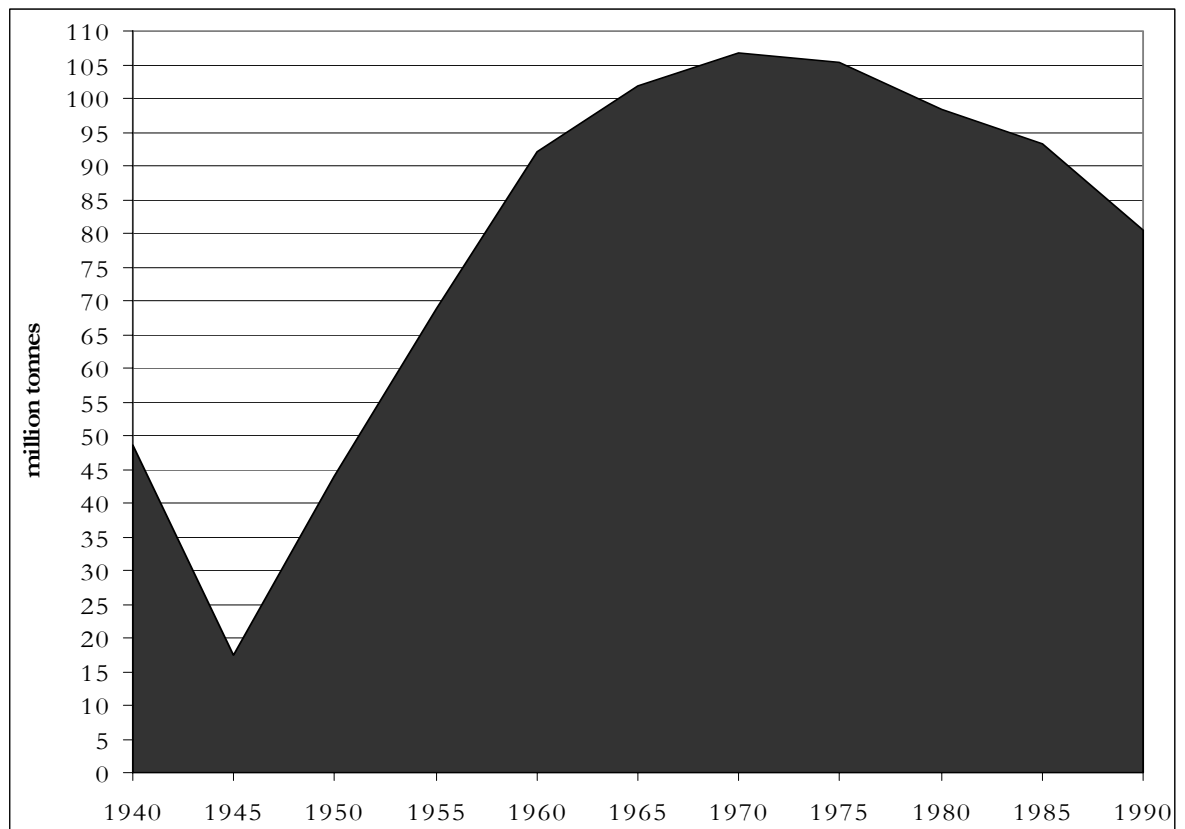


Figure 5. Coal output trends, Donetsk oblast, 1940-1990

Source: Calculated from *Donetskaia oblast z 50 let: Statisticheskii sbornik* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Agency, 1967), p. 34; *Promyshlennost' Donetskoi oblasti za gody dvenadtsatoi piatiletki* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Agency, 1991), p.20.

Firstly, the relative position of the Donbas was eroded by the development of new deposits of fossil fuels in Western and Eastern Siberia. With the discovery in the 1960s of immense coal and oil fields, and gas deposits in Siberia, the Soviet government began to divert its heavy investments from the old industrial regions, especially the Donbas, to emerging industrial hubs in the Asian part of the USSR. Alongside with the increasingly influential oil and gas industrial lobbies, the role of the coal-mining Donbas was diminished by the emphasis of new Soviet energy policies on nuclear power. While in 1950, coal output comprised 66% of the Soviet fuel production (in oil equivalent), already by 1965 the coal share dropped to 43% (Lykholobova 2001: 19). Table 2 shows that during the seventy years of the Soviet rule, the region's coal output share dropped from 87 to 22 per cent of total USSR production, while the Donbas iron and steel industry's share declined from 57 to 18 per cent. It should be noted, however, that whilst the Donbas economy had been marginalised within the Soviet Union, the economic importance of the region within Ukraine remained rather stable.

	Share of the Donbas, in per cent of							
	Soviet Union's output				Ukraine's output			
	1940	1968	1975	1987	1940	1968	1975	1987
Coal	50	30	26	22	99	88	84	82
Steel	25	21	18	18	51	50	49	52
Rolled ferrous metals	25	21	19	19	51	44	49	52

Table 2. The role of the Donbas economy (Donetsk and Luhansk oblasti combined), 1940-1987

Source: Calculated from A.N. Alymov, ed., *Ekonomika Donbassa* (Moscow: Ekonomika, 1971), pp. 38, 45; N.G. Chumachenko, ed., *Ekonomika promyshlennosti Donbassa* (Kiev: Naukova dumka, 1977), pp. 18, 35; *Heohrafichna entsyklopediia Ukraïny*, Vol. 1. (Kyiv: Ukraïns'ka Radians'ka entsyklopediia, 1989), p. 355.

The economic decline led to the relative decline in wages and salaries in the Donbas since the mid-1970s. Despite celebrating miners as 'quintessential proletarians', state socialism was unable to adequately compensate them for their hard labour and human losses. The perception of social injustice and exploitation prevalent among the Donbas workers was fostered by horrifically unsafe working conditions. Being paid officially for a six-hour working day, miners worked, in fact, for ten to eleven and sometimes even sixteen hours a day (Rusnachenko 1993: 67). A large number of Donbas workers were not provided with appropriate housing accommodation and lived in poor sanitary conditions. The predominance of 'smoke-stack' industries in a highly urbanised area led to a large-scale environmental devastation. Moreover, with the beginning of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, food and goods shortages became widespread and queues appeared to be endless. The lack of consumer goods, according to one 1989 survey, headed the list of miners' grievances (Rusnachenko 1993: 66-67; Friedgut and Siegelbaum 1990: 14-16). A labour conflict was emerging:

Working deep below the surface, where temperatures and concentrations of methane gas were high, and frequently compelled to use "grandpa's methods" (that is, jack hammers and shovels) to extract coal, Donbas workers had the distinct sense that "Moscow" did not care how much hard labour they expended or how many lives were sacrificed in the process (1997: 5-6).

Working-class discontent in the Donbas became apparent at the early stage of Gorbachev's reforms. During a visit to Donetsk in June 1989, Gorbachev himself was warned about the growing local discontent (Friedgut and Siegelbaum 1990: 8). When all

the warnings had appeared to be unsuccessful, the resort to the ‘voice option’ was the only viable solution as perceived by the Donbas community.

The first wave of contention materialised in the summer strike of 1989. The strike of 1989 as well as all the consequent cases of the Donbas protest movement have been well documented (see Friedgut and Siegelbaum 1990; Rusnachenk 1993; Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995; Siegelbaum 1997; Mykhnenko 2003b). The first industrial action started in Siberia and very rapidly expanded to all other coalfields in the Soviet Union. In the Donbas, the strike was initiated on 15 July 1989 by a single coal mine. Soon, 173 out of 226 Donbas collieries went on strike. The overall number of strike participants in Ukraine exceeded 500,000 workers (Rusnachenko 1993). It was believed that the strike was triggered by frustrated expectations, arbitrariness of authorities, lawlessness and anxiety that perestroika was passing the miners by with no improvement in living standards (see Mykhnenko 2003b). A sociological survey conducted among the Donbas miners on strike reported that:

People were tired of waiting for promises to be fulfilled, that they had felt freed from ‘serfdom’ by *glasnost*, that fear had vanished, thinking awakened, and that the media had encouraged a popular rejection of the bureaucracy. Significantly, 50 per cent of respondents added that professional solidarity played a part in their motivation (as cited in Friedgut and Siegelbaum 1990: 13-14).

The massive strikes and other forms of protest which shaken the Donbas in 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1996, and 1998 clearly demonstrated that the regional community abandoned its previous behavioural strategies in favour of the ‘voice option’. The figure of a miner all covered in black coal dust sitting on the main city square in protest against the deteriorating living and work conditions has become one of the most televised images of the Donbas. The main purpose of the Donbas voice of protest was the endeavour to obtain ‘normal’ or ‘civilised life’.

According to some observers, what the Donbas workers called ‘normal life’ has been Western or American(ised) mass media, video or billboard images of affluence ranging ‘from Disneyland to Pittsburgh’ (Walkowitz 1995: 160, 174, 176; Siegelbaum 1997: 13). Nevertheless, the hazardous situation in the Donbas coal industry has made it simple what can be regarded as reasonable living and working conditions:

People live to be just thirty-eight years old ... There is no engineering input here; it's just plain physical labour ... People still work thin coal seams with shovels and picks. In this country, technology exists only on paper, at the institutes ... [Yet] people's dreams are different. My kids dream of being able to live in an apartment, in normal conditions ... We want our kids to live like human beings. We don't want luxuries or excesses, just to have some certainty about tomorrow. We want people to lead normal lives, to have acceptable, decent working conditions. This is all we are striving for. We don't want anything else (interview with the Donetsk city strike committee, May 1991, in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 122).

The opportunity to work and earn money was considered to be among the main elements of the 'normal life' (interview with the Samofalov family, 1992, in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 194). In turn, as one of the Donbas labour leaders explained, the achievement of 'normal life' was never restricted to saving jobs in the declining coal industry:

The miners pay for their wages with their blood ... We don't advocate preserving the coal enterprises of the Donbass at any cost. We submitted a request to the former government of Ukraine as well as to the present one to build new industries. We have been raising questions about ... how much coal is needed. According to the latest statistics, in Russia one man is lost per one million tons of extracted coal; in Ukraine five people are lost per one million tons of extracted coal. We object to miners working in those dangerous zones. We would agree to close down the mines, but the people who work there should have the opportunity to be retrained so that they could work in some other industry. What we won't agree to, is that all the mines should be closed down and all the miners become unemployed (interview with Yurii Makarov, 1992, in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 145).

REBUFFING THE OUTSIDERS' CONTROL

The painful collapse of the USSR accompanied by disastrous economic policies of the Ukrainian authorities in the early 1990s provoked in the Donbas the feeling of an approaching 'civil war', 'revolution' or 'social explosion' (interviews with Donbas inhabitants in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 186; 209). In 1993, when the retail price inflation in the country reached its record level of 10,156% a year, the Donbas' industrial output collapsed by 25% and the average real wage decreased by about 80% from the 1990 level, the entire regional community was determined to make its voice heard. As Yuri Makarov, one of the Donbas protest movement leaders then maintained:

The Centre has just moved from Moscow to Kiev. We didn't want that. In the past we fought for the existence of Ukraine as an autonomous state, but

we didn't want Kiev to become the Centre instead of Moscow. We wanted power to be given to the localities, enterprises, cities; we wanted the living standard of the population to improve, but not so that Kiev could concentrate the reins of government in its fist (interview with Yuri Makarov, June-July 1992, in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 144).

On 7th June 1993, the first coal mine in Donetsk stopped working. The next day, another 75 mines joined the strike. The industrial action was co-ordinated by the Donbas strike committee which put forth radical political demands: (1) regional independence for the Donbas, and (2) a country-wide referendum on confidence in Ukraine's president and the parliament (Burnosov 1995: 54-56; Rusnachenko 1995: 217-218). Up to 400 mining and major industrial enterprises in the Donbas took part in the strike (Rusnachenko 1995: 218). The June 1993 strike appeared to be the most successful contentious collective action of the Donbas protest movement. The Donbas 'voice option' also managed to become the most powerful mobilising structure and framing process for public protest in the country. According to most commentators, the scale of popular discontent turned the coal-miners' strike into not so much an economic struggle 'as a struggle between the Donbas region and the rest of the country' (Siegelbaum 1997: 18). Though the 1993 strike was initiated by the miners, it had been eventually subsumed within a larger regionalist framework:

I think that Kravchuk deceived all fifty millions Ukrainians. Kravchuk, [Prime Minister] Fokin, and the cabinet of ministers should resign. The Donbas should be granted the status of a free economic zone, a zone of joint ventures, as the first stage of transition. When we were in Kiev, the guys from the western regions tried to tear us into pieces on this point. They shouted that we were separatists, communists, that we came to divide Ukraine, and to separate the Donbas from the Ukraine. Our deputies from the Donetsk regions explained to people that over ninety countries in the world live according to the principle of a federative system, such countries as Switzerland, the USA, Germany, and Austria, and they don't live any worse than we do (interview with Valery Samofalov, June-July 1992, in Siegelbaum and Walkowitz 1995: 139).

The political demands of the miners enjoyed full support from both coal mining trade-unions, mine managers and other industrialists, all the Donbas-based political parties and movements (from the Liberals to the Communists), local government officials, mass media and the majority of the region's population:

It was therefore not simply a strike of miners and other workers, nor a "directors' strike" with workers performing the role of foot soldiers, but a regional protest against the government in Kiev, its president, and policies that had brought the Donbass to its knees. After ten days of protest, the

Donbass returned to a state of precarious normalcy, but not before Prime Minister Leonid Kuchma had agreed to the strikers; basic demands for the release of additional funds for wage increases, the granting of 'economic independence' to the region, and a republic-wide referendum on Kravchuk's presidency and the parliament. The government soon backed away from its promise to hold the referendum but, under pressure from a volatile electorate, organized parliamentary elections in March-April and an early presidential election in June-July 1994. Repeating a pattern set in Lithuania and Poland, Ukrainian voters delivered a stunning defeat to nationalists in the parliamentary elections. Three months later, Kravchuk, who had ridden the earlier wave of nationalism, was ignominiously defeated by Kuchma, the former prime minister, who received overwhelming support from the Donbass (Crowley and Siegelbaum 1995: 72).

In October 1994, the administration of newly-elected President Leonid Kuchma launched a programme of radical reforms of macroeconomic stabilisation, liberalisation, and marketisation. Soon, the processes of industrial restructuring were initiated as well. However, it is privatisation that has become the most extraordinary affair among the neo-liberal transition policies in the Donbas; and it is during the privatisation of the Donbas industrial assets that representatives of the regional community – the Donbas economic elites and political leaders – have moved beyond Hirschman's 'three option game' of loyalty, voice, and exit, and decided to move further and eventually to 'take-over' the Donbas from its outside control centre. During this latest stage of the Donbas intentional community's evolution, its basic values have also changed fundamentally: the notions of the Donbas as a refuge, a community of 'negative freedom' have been substituted by the notion of 'positive freedom' or 'freedom to'. Paraphrasing Milton Friedman's popular book title *Freedom to Choose*, one could argue that the basis of the new Donbas ideal has become 'freedom to own'.

By 2003, within the first decade of the post-communist transformation in the Donbas, over 9200 state-owned industrial enterprises, agricultural farms, R&D institutes, service firms, shops, kindergartens, and even unfinished construction project sites had been privatised in Donetsk oblast alone. Almost two-thirds of all the privatisation deals in the Donbas were accomplished in the first half of the 1990s, during the most chaotic period of the post-communist transformation. As one of the experts recalls:

And then the division of property has begun in this country. The process has been proceeding in an uncivilised way, since the legislative acts were long overdue and privatisation went on chaotically. Privatisation is a necessary and important development but it has been conducted with no particular

guidance. The central state was just establishing a fact of property redistribution; sometimes the state would agree with the outcomes, sometimes it would not. Therefore, the privatisation process was not proceeding according to a particular blueprint but they have been trying afterwards to portray the privatisation results as an outcome of some kind of blueprint. Yet the property is one of the leading motives of an economic agent. It is over this property all the major struggles are fought for here as well as in the developed countries. Well, here the ownership transformation was not done according to a plan but was conducted spontaneously; and I believe this has happened because of a particular ability of the individuals which were taking part in transforming the property rights (interview with Prof. Oleksandr A. Minaev, Rector of the National Technical University of Donetsk, 6 December 2000, Donetsk).

It should be emphasised that the major struggle over the formerly state-owned property has concentrated in the Donbas on the issue of 'local' v. 'outside' ownership. In November 1995, one year before being assassinated with his wife and son, Yevhen Shcherban (a leading Donbas businessman; a member of the Ukrainian Parliament and the leader of Donetsk-based Ukraine's Liberal Party) addressed his party caucus at the regional legislature with the following words:

It is getting increasingly clear that under the guise of fighting 'mafia' and 'corruption', one has been conducting a systematic campaign aimed at weakening the [Donbas] leading business structures and eliminating political and economic leaders of the Donetsk region in order to take-over the [region's] market for gas, electricity, petroleum products, etc... In a matter of little time, all the key positions in this oblast (at the police, judicial, and security agencies as well as at the provincial administration) will be taken over by representatives of other regions and, obviously, their firms will become the major suppliers of energy products as well as the major importers of highly liquid goods (as quoted in Serhiy Harmash, 'Fraktsiia 'regionov' – zavetami pokoinogo Shcherbania' *Ostrov E-Newsletter* (Donetsk), 27 May 2003).

The ouster of the Donbas governor, Volodymyr Shcherban (not a relative but a close associate of Yevhen Shcherban), by Ukraine's President Leonid Kuchma, the assassinations of Yevhen Shcherban, his family, and a number of other principal Donbas businessmen and natural gas-traders (Messrs Brahın, Momot and Shvydchenko), all almost simultaneous events, appeared to prove that the widely-held suspicions of an 'outside economic intervention' were not ungrounded. Pavlo Lazarenko (then Ukraine's Prime Minister) and his Dnipropetrovsk-based gas-trading monopoly (*The United Energy Systems of Ukraine*) were reportedly behind those assassination stories. As Kerstin Zimmer has described:

Those years were characterised by both brutal fights among different regional groups and fierce in-fighting that led to several contract killings. One of the most prominent is the killing of Alik ‘the Greek’, that is Akhat (Alexandr) Bragin, director of the company ‘Liuks’ and since 1995 president of the football club *Shakhter Donetsk*. Bragin was one of the ‘criminal authorities’ in Donetsk and in 1995, he became the victim of a bomb attack at the football stadium [...] The Donetsk elite was gradually pushed out from central government offices in favour of the regional elite from Dnipropetrovsk, Leonid Kuchma’s native region. While the Donbass elite had been fairly influential and confrontational before, it henceforth retreated to defensive measures. At the end of 1996 Kuchma (obviously under the pressure of Prime Minister Pavlo Lazarenko) ousted Governor Vladimir Shcherban and his entourage for incompetence and misuse of state funds and for having instigated the miners’ strike to secure greater regional autonomy. The dismissal was by and large the result of the conflict between the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk clans. In addition the Lazarenko government aimed to downsize the coal sector, wanted to break local resistance, and also to free resources for long term investment in their fields of activity. One event coincided: in November 1996, Evgenii Shcherban was shot, and the contract killers escaped. Shcherban’s assassination was apparently linked to the fierce rivalry between the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk clans that resulted mainly over the division of the Ukrainian gas market. Here, we come across the competitor company ‘United Energy Systems’, being under control of then Prime Minister Lazarenko. From 1996 to 1997, the Donetsk clan proved to be fairly weak. Lazarenko appointed his confidant Poliakov as governor of Donetsk oblast. In the meantime, the ‘United Energy Systems’ were able to gain access to some bigger companies in the Donbass, such as the Khartsyzk pipe factory monopoly (2002: 5-6).

To oppose the hostile bids from the outsiders and to eventually take over the power over the region’s destination, the Donbas elites have developed a specific ‘survival and expansion’ strategy based upon the conglomeration of the Donbas economy and the consolidation of the regional polity. Since the mid-1990s, a number of prominent local businessmen and public officials have been concentrating the regional industrial, agricultural asserts as well as the service sector activities into vast locally-owned conglomerate networks. Figures 6 and 7 demonstrate the extent of the *Industrial Union of the Donbas* and *System Capital Management* – region’s two largest conglomerate holding companies. The overwhelming majority of the regional firms have been privatised or newly-established by local entrepreneurs. For example, out of 50 largest Donbas companies, 35 are currently privately and locally owned, 13 remain in state ownership, and only 2 companies are controlled by private owners, who reside outside the Donbas.

Politically, different views of various Donbas regional elites have been increasingly harmonised and homogenised through newly-established regionalist party networks. In 1997, after the fall of Pavlo Lazarenko, Viktor Yanukovych, a representative of the Donbas business circle, was appointed as the region's new governor[§]. In October 1997, Ukraine's Party for the Regional Revival was established in Donetsk. In 2001, on the basis of the Regional Revival Party and a number of other Donbas political groups, a new consolidated political platform was created – Ukraine's Party of the Regions. The political and economic consolidation of the Donbas and the growing influence of local elites vis-à-vis the centre have resulted in a certain power shift: to gain support from the ambitious Donbas community, president Kuchma finally granted a status of 'free economic zone' to Donetsk oblast just before the October 1999 presidential elections. Donetsk oblast was designated for the establishment of two special economic zones with long tax and custom duty allowances. Moreover, seventeen mining towns and rural counties in the Donbas were provided with a status of 'priority development territories' (Verkhovna Rada 1999). During the 2002 Parliamentary elections, Ukraine's Party of the Regions (as a part of the 'For a United Ukraine' political bloc) claimed an overwhelming victory in Donetsk oblast and, eventually, managed to aggregate the second largest party caucus in *Verkhovna Rada* (Supreme Assembly), Ukraine's parliament.

Viktor Yanukovych, one of the founders of the Donbas largest conglomerate, formerly a local trucking firm manager and the region's long-standing governor (1997-2002), has become a leader of the Donbas political and economic forces. In November 2002, under increasing political pressures from the Donbas, President Kuchma had to appoint Yanukovych as Ukraine's new Prime-Minister. At the beginning of 2004, Yanukovych emerged as one of the most likely successful candidates for the forthcoming 31 October 2004 presidential elections. Thus, in the fourth period of its historical evolution, the Donbas community and its leaders have been able to successfully modify the 'voice option' and to exercise the newly-developed 'take-over' option through gaining political, social, and economic control over the region from the centre and outsiders' influences. Moreover, in an expansionary move, the Donbas community's representatives have travelled upward to the level of national politics, while the Donbas conglomerates have initiated a number of nation-wide and transnational enterprises.

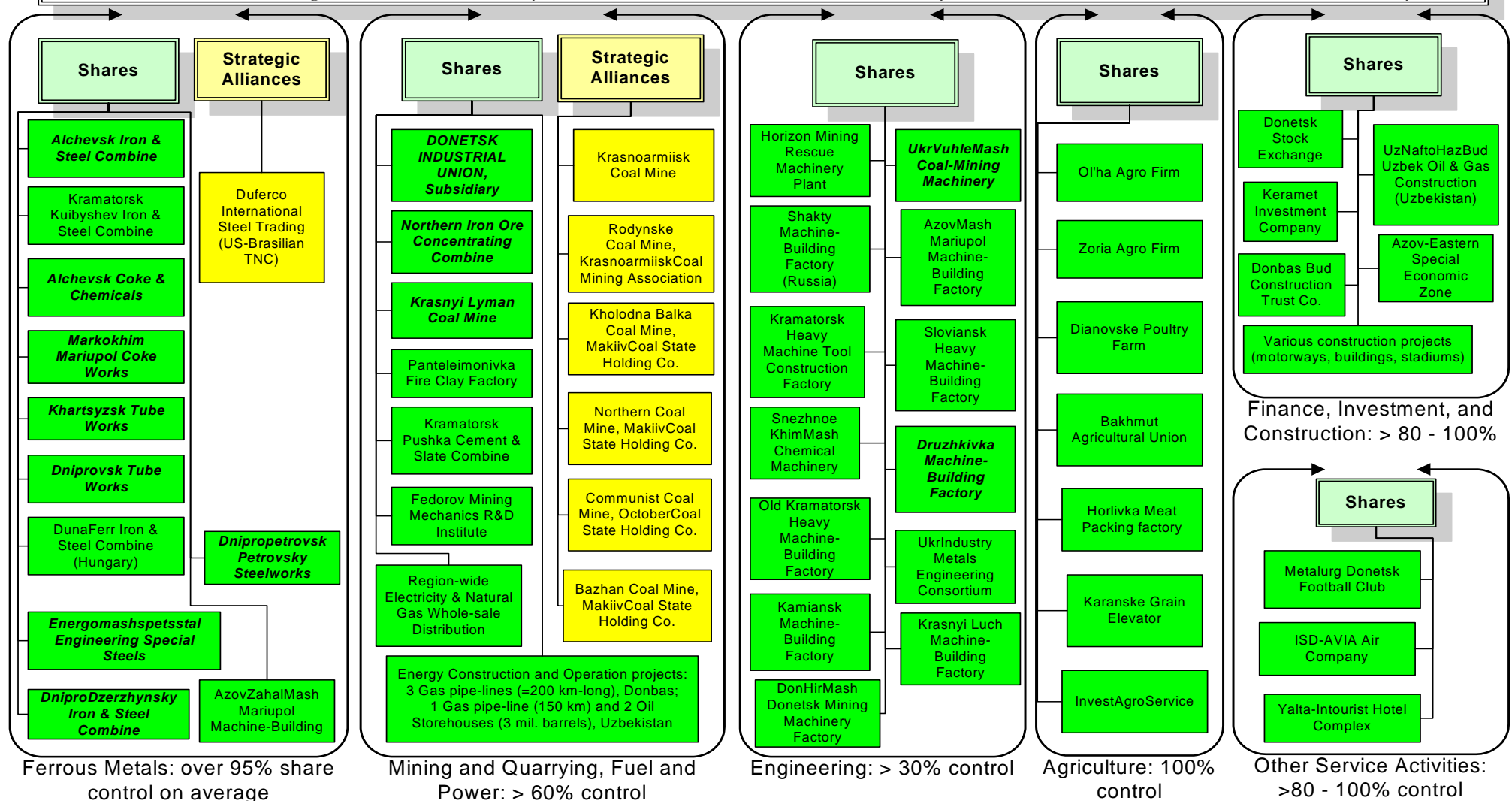
[§] Controversies concerning the difficult childhood of Yanukovych are widely known in the Donbas. After growing up at an orphan's home in a Donbas industrial town, he turned into a teen-age hooligan and was twice convicted of burglary and assault.

The Industrial Union of the Donbas (ISD)

Chairman of the Board: Mr. Serhiy Taruta (aged 48); CEO: Mr. Oleh Mkrtchian (aged 36)

Conglomerate headquarters: Donetsk, Ukraine; Conglomerate total revenues: US\$ 5.1 billion (2003)

Founded December 1995; reportedly by Messrs Akhat Brahyn (a.k.a Alek 'The Greek', assassinated 1995), Yevhen Shcherban (assassinated 1996), Vitaliy Hayduk, Serhiy Liovochkin, Viktor Yanukovych; formal institutional founders: Vis-a-Vis Close Joint-Stock Co; AzovInTex Ltd; Ukrainian Technological Sciences Academy; Ukrainian Economic Sciences Academy; Donbas Chamber of Commerce and Industry

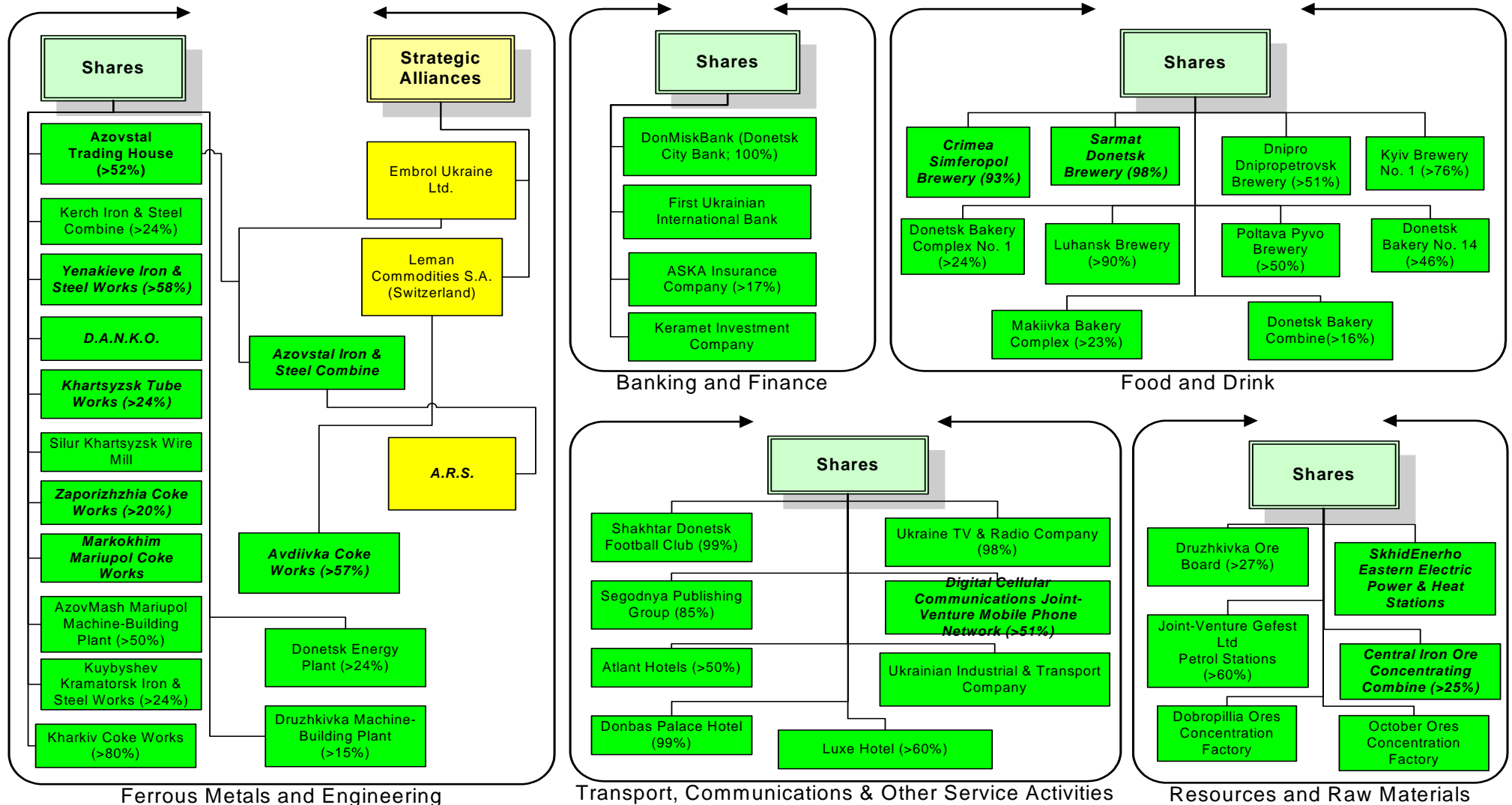


System Capital Management

President: Mr. Rinat Akhmetov (aged 38; over 90% of shares); CEO: Mr. Ihor Prasolov (aged 42)

Founded November 2000 by Mr. Akhmetov, formerly one of the principal ISD's share-holders

Conglomerate headquarters: Donetsk, Ukraine



Figures 6-7 Organisational structure of the Donbas largest conglomerates, ISD and SCM, 2004

Note: Data in *italics* indicates that the firm belongs to the list of top 100 largest companies of Ukraine or to the sectoral list of largest companies.

Source: Author's construction of the basis of the *ISD corporate profile* (Donetsk: ISD, 2004; available at <http://www.isd.donin.com>); *Reiting luchshykh kompanii Ukrainy: Top 100. No. 1* (Kyiv: Ukrainian Investment Newspaper, June 2003); *Korrespondent Kyiv Post Weekly*, 10 January 2003; *Top 100: Luchshie top-menedzhery Ukrainy* (Kyiv: Ukrainskaia Investitsionnaia Gazeta, 2003); various periodical publications.

'THE DONBAS DOESN'T SEND EMPTY TRUCKS'^{}: EVALUATING THE TAKE-OVER OPTION**

The apparent power shift towards more local ownership over the political, social, and economic transformation of the Donbas under post-communism has had several major consequences for the regional community. A number of observers (Zimmer 2002, 2003a, 2003b; Van Zon 2003; Swain and Van Zon forthcoming 2004) have claimed that the 'region capture' by the local elites or the 'Donetsk clan' produces the inevitable loser – region's population at large – which is said to suffer from the economic decline, rising corruption and predatory business climate. According to Hans van Zon, the Donbas is a clan-based typical stagnating Third World economy, while the defining moment in its economic behaviour is rent-seeking and short-term horizon. It is the Donbas' specifically 'neo-patrimonial' society and 'mafia gangs' which are claimed to be directly responsible for the allegedly 'locked-in' developmental path:

The regional economy of the province of Donetsk, accounting for 19 per cent of industrial production and 10 per cent of the population of Ukraine, is monopolised by a coherent group of financial-industrial enterprises that has also 'privatised' regional and local public authorities and that is controlling remaining state-owned industries. The dependence of Donetsk upon value subtracting industries, such as steel and coal, has been strengthened during the 1990s, while industrial production has declined by approximately 75 per cent. Insight into the dynamics of clan politics provides the key to understanding the social and economic predicament of Donetsk ...The economic system is embedded in a neo-patrimonial polity. Clan loyalty is more important than formal rules. Clan rule is perpetuated by a neo-patrimonial belief system and related social practices. [...] Donetsk stands out among Ukrainian regions because modern tendencies in the polity are even more marginalised than in Ukraine at large. There is a lock-in situation in which adherence to practices and belief systems of the past hampers a break through towards a new development trajectory (2003: 1).

^{**} 'The Donbas doesn't send empty trucks!' [Donbas porozhniak ne honyt'!]: the final exclamation remark made by Viktor Yanukovych, while receiving 'The Governor of the Year' national award, Kyiv, 2001.

It appears, however, that the real performance of the Donbas political economy, since its ‘take-over’ by the locally-based businesses, has been such as to allow one to reject the highly normative claims of the ‘neo-patrimonialist’ commentators. First of all, according to Figure 1, whilst the Donbas industrial output had collapsed by over 50% in the first half of the 1990s, by 2004, the level of the regional industrial output recovered to some 70% of its 1990 level. The discrepancy between the industrial growth and electricity consumption decline has also indicated the growing efficiency of the Donbas energy-intensive economy.



Figure 1. Donetsk oblast: industrial and electricity consumption growth, volume index, 1990-2003

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Donetskaia oblast v tsifrakh* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1993, 1994, 1995); *Donetskaia oblast v 1999 godu* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoï oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2002, 2003).

Furthermore, Figure 2 demonstrates that the Donbas industries have returned to growth at least two years earlier than Ukraine's industrial sector in general, where the first annual recovery began only in 1999. The Russian financial crisis in 1998 has had a detrimental effect on the Donbas export-oriented businesses. Nonetheless, the following year the regional economy returned to its firm recovery path.

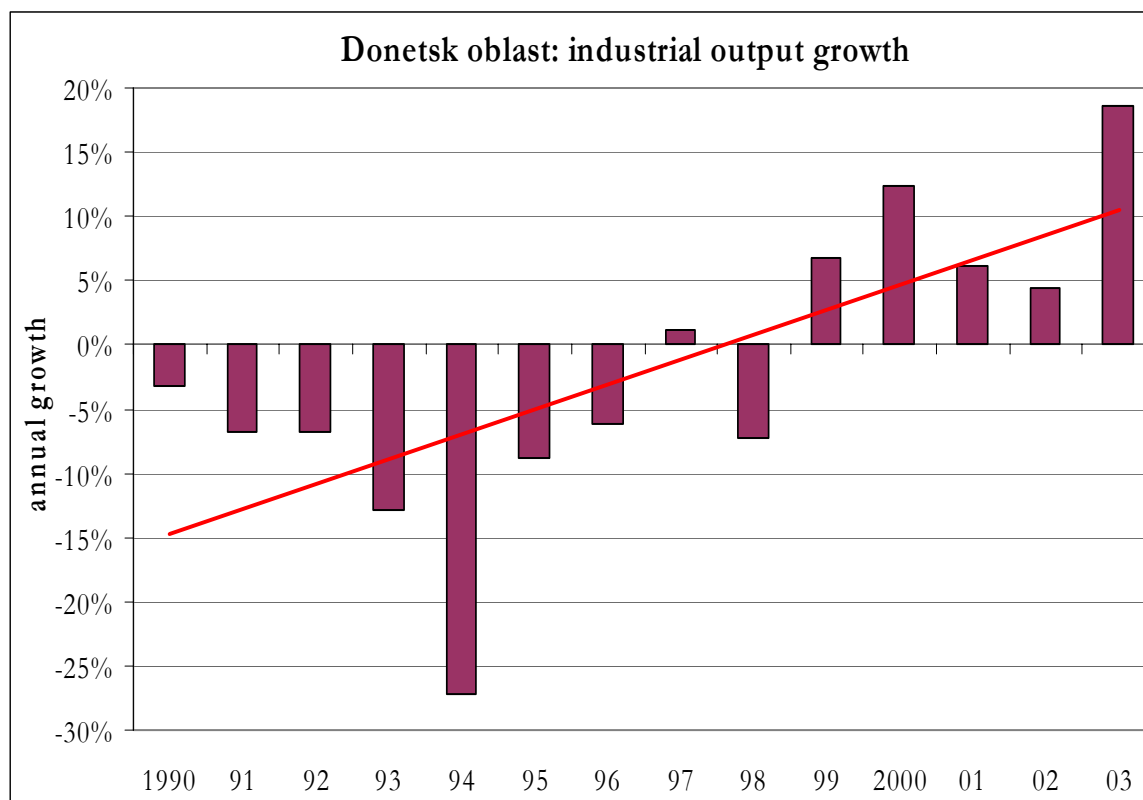


Figure 2. Donetsk oblast: industrial output, annual percentage growth, 1990-2003

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Donetskaia oblast v tsifrakh* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1993, 1994, 1995); *Donetskaia oblast v 1999 godu* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoï oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2002, 2003).

Figure 3 indicates an evident shift from the rent-seeking and rent-taking behaviour towards the capitalist values of profit-making and accumulation of capital through investment. The overall economic collapse suffered by Ukraine, and Donetsk oblast in particular, in the first half of the 1990s resulted in shrinking investment. However, since 1997, the province has been experiencing a steady increase in gross fixed capital investments, growing in total during the last 6 years by 60%.

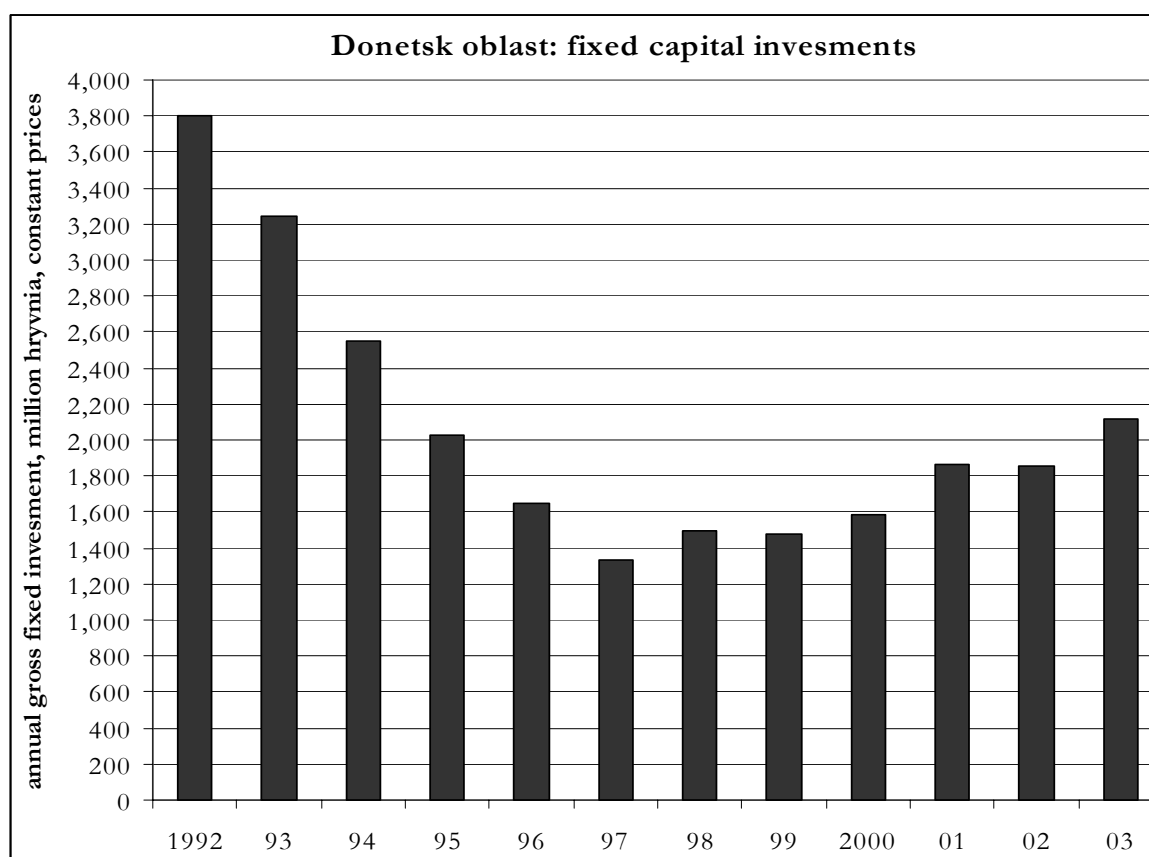


Figure 3. Investment outlays on fixed assets, Donetsk oblast, absolute volume at constant prices, 1992-2003

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Donetskaia oblast v tsifrakh* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1993; 1994; 1995); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoi oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000; 2003); *Osnovnye pokazateli sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Donetskoi oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2004, available at <http://www.donetskstat.gov.ua>).

The gradual 'take-over' of the Donbas economy by the locally-owned conglomerates has resulted in the reversal of the region's fortune vis-à-vis Ukraine. Figure 4 indicates that in 1988, at the end of state socialism, the provincial GDP per capita has been 32.5% lower than the Ukrainian average. By 2002, the GDP per capita in the Donbas was 26.7% higher than the national average, indicating a 60 percentage point positive change within the Ukrainian economy. Figure 4 also shows that the increasing share of the Donbas in the national gross domestic product has been evident since the very beginning of Ukraine's independence; this process was upset, however, during the 1995-1996 period of violent business conflicts.



Figure 4. Donetsk oblast GDP per capita ratio to the national average (=100), 1988-2003

Note: The Donbas GDP data for 1992 could be inflated as some industrial output prices were not liberalised or cross-checked.

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitie Donetskoi oblasti za 1986-1990 gody* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1991); *Donetskaia oblast v tsifrakh* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1993; 1994; 1995); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoi oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000; 2003); *Statistical Yearbook of Ukraine* (Kyiv: Ukrainian State Statistics Committee, 2000; 2002; 2003).

It also appears that the local ownership of the regional means of production has been shared more broadly. Figure 5 illustrates the real wage growth trajectory in the Donbas, indicating an almost constant up-ward slope since the regional community's use of the 'voice option' in 1993.

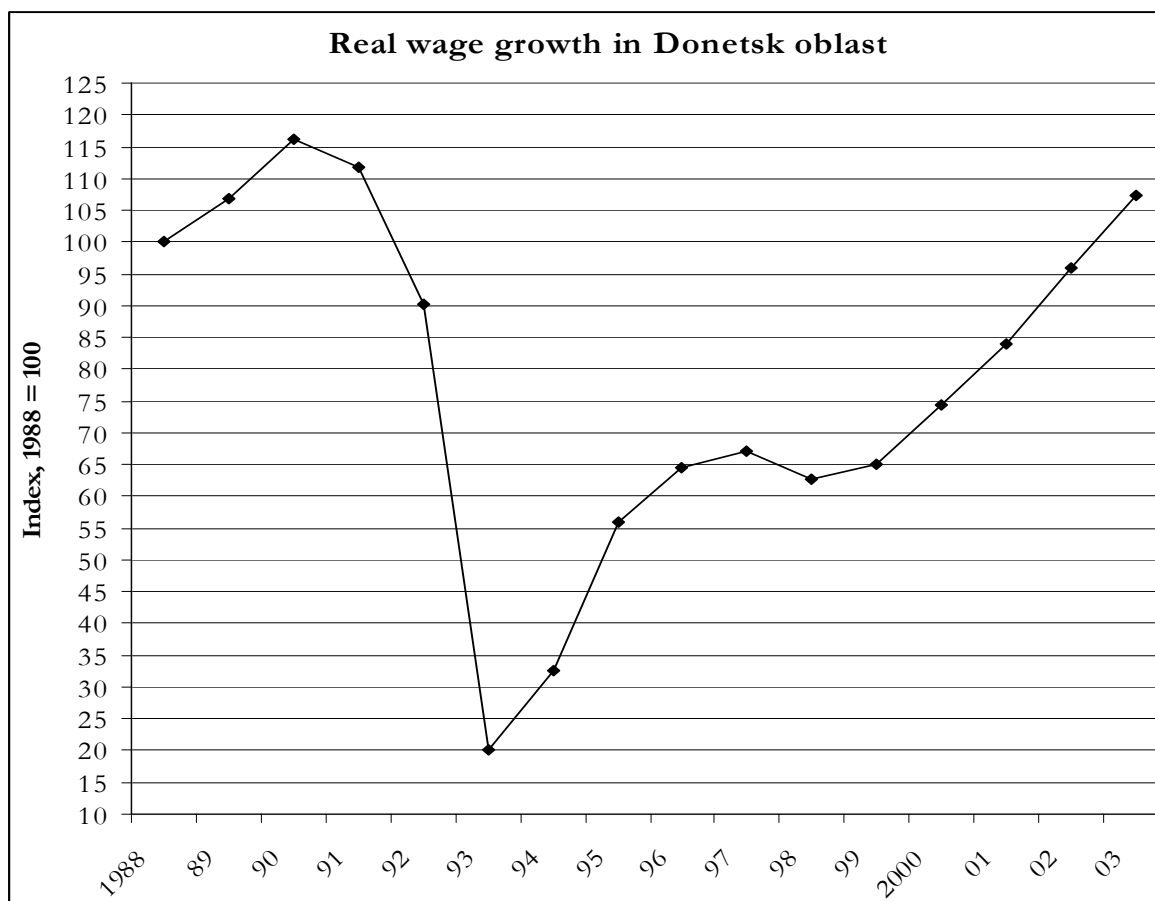


Figure 5. Real wage growth trajectory in Donetsk oblast, 1988-2003

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe razvitiie Donetskoï oblasti za 1986-1990 gody* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1991); *Donetskaia oblast v tsifrakh* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 1992; 1993; 1994; 1995); *Donetskaia oblast v 1999 godu* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoï oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2002; 2003); *Osnovnye pokazateli sotsial'no-ekonomicheskogo razvitiia Donetskoï oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2004, available at <http://www.donetskstat.gov.ua>). The additional RPI figures are taken from: *Indeksy spozhyvchykh tsin* (Kyiv: Ukrainian State Statistics Committee, 2003).

The 'take-over' strategy has also been a mitigating social factor for the wider Donbas regional community. Since the mid-1990s, the real unemployment rate in the Donbas has been constantly far below the nation-wide average. Furthermore, after its peak in 1999, joblessness has been steadily declining in the region.

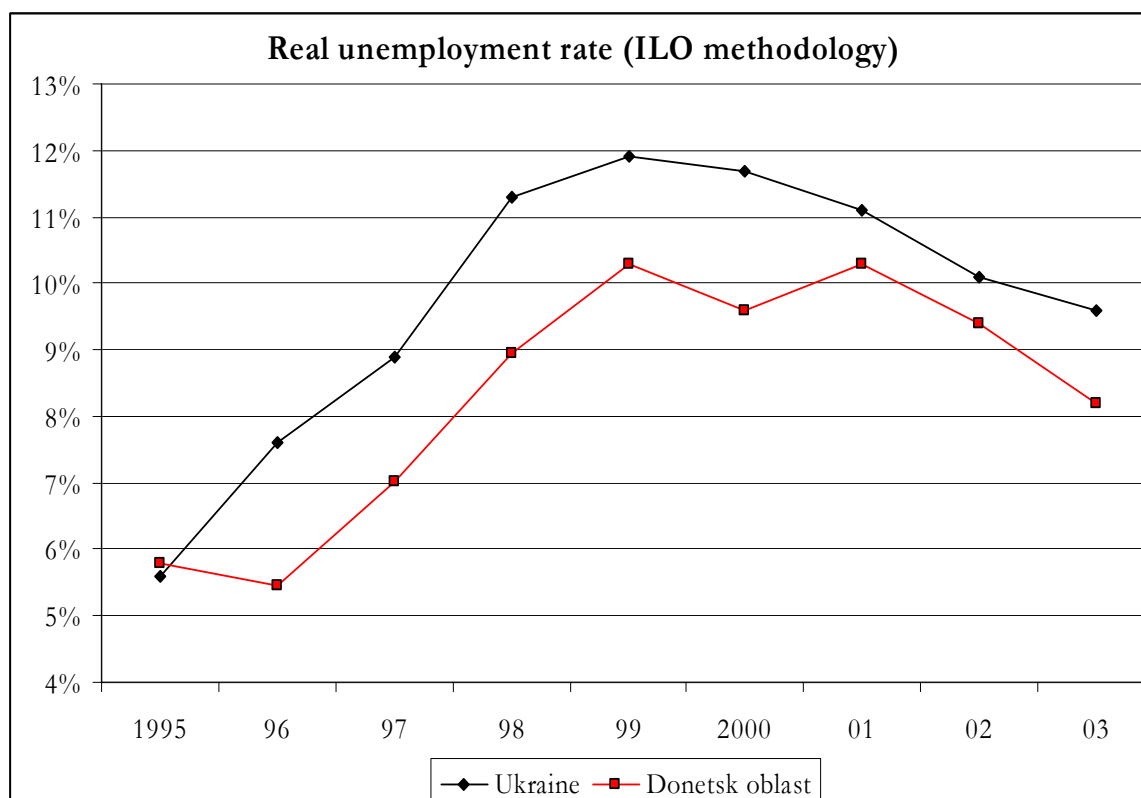


Figure 6. The growth of unemployment in Donetsk oblast and Ukraine, annual percentage rates, end of year, Labour Force Survey method

Source: Author's calculations on the basis of *Donetskaia oblast v 1999 godu* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2000); *Statystychnyi shchorichnyk Donetskoï oblasti* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, 2002; 2003); *Monitorynh sotsial'no-ekonomichnoho stanovyshcha Donets'koi oblasti u 2003 rotsi* (Donetsk: Donetsk Oblast Statistical Office, available at <http://www.stat.donetsk.ua>, 2004); *Statistical Yearbook of Ukraine* (Kyiv: Ukrainian State Statistics Committee, 2000; 2002; 2003); *Osnovni pokaznyky sotsial'no-ekonomichnoho rozvutky Ukrainy* (Kyiv: : Ukrainian State Statistics Committee, 2004; available at <http://www.ukrstat.gov.ua>).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the historical evolution of the Donbas – a large industrial region in the Ukrainian-Russian borderland – as an intentional as well as imagined community. It has followed Albert O. Hirschman's theory of exit, voice, and loyalty to uncover the dynamics of the political development of the Donbas throughout the region's history. This paper has also modified and evaluated the relationship between the Donbas and the Centre (Moscow and Kyiv respectively) by adding the final 'take-over option'. It has been contended that within some one hundred and fifty years of its history, the Donbas – both as a community and a political economy – has followed the evolutionary and

consequential path of ‘exit’, ‘loyalty’, ‘voice’, and ‘take-over’. It has been argued that the four historical junctures are symbolically associated with four Donbas-produced national historical personages. Nestor Makhno, the legendary peasant otaman of the 1918-1921 Civil War, has long been a powerful symbol of the Donbas as an ‘exit’, a refuge from the mainstream ideological battles of the epoch. Aleksey Stakhanov, the long-celebrated Donbas coal-miner and founder of Stakhanovism has appeared to be an example of the region’s subjugation and loyalty to Stalin and his forced industrialisation strategy. A number of vocal labour activists of the late 1980s and early 1990s from the Donetsk city strike committee have been the major representatives of the region’s collective ‘voice’. Finally, this paper has considered the political development of the Donbas under the independent Ukraine. It has been argued that in the case of the Donbas historical evolution, when the Ukrainian leaders in Kyiv eventually surrendered in 1993-94 to the grievances, demands and internal pressures employed by the members of the wide Donbas regional community, the local elites, while still occasionally exercising the ‘voice-option’, embarked on a newly-developed ‘take-over’ programme. It has been maintained that in the second half of the 1990s, when a number of repeated attempts were made by ‘outsiders’ to privatise and buy out the Donbas economy, the successful ‘voice’ strategy against the hostile privatisation bids has given its way to the final friendly take-over of the Donbas political economy from the central authorities by the local elites. This paper has concluded by examining the preliminary outcomes of the fairly successful return of the ownership over the region’s fortune into the local hands – the process most vividly associated with the rise of Viktor Yanukovych, Donbas’ former governor and Ukraine’s current prime-minister.

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