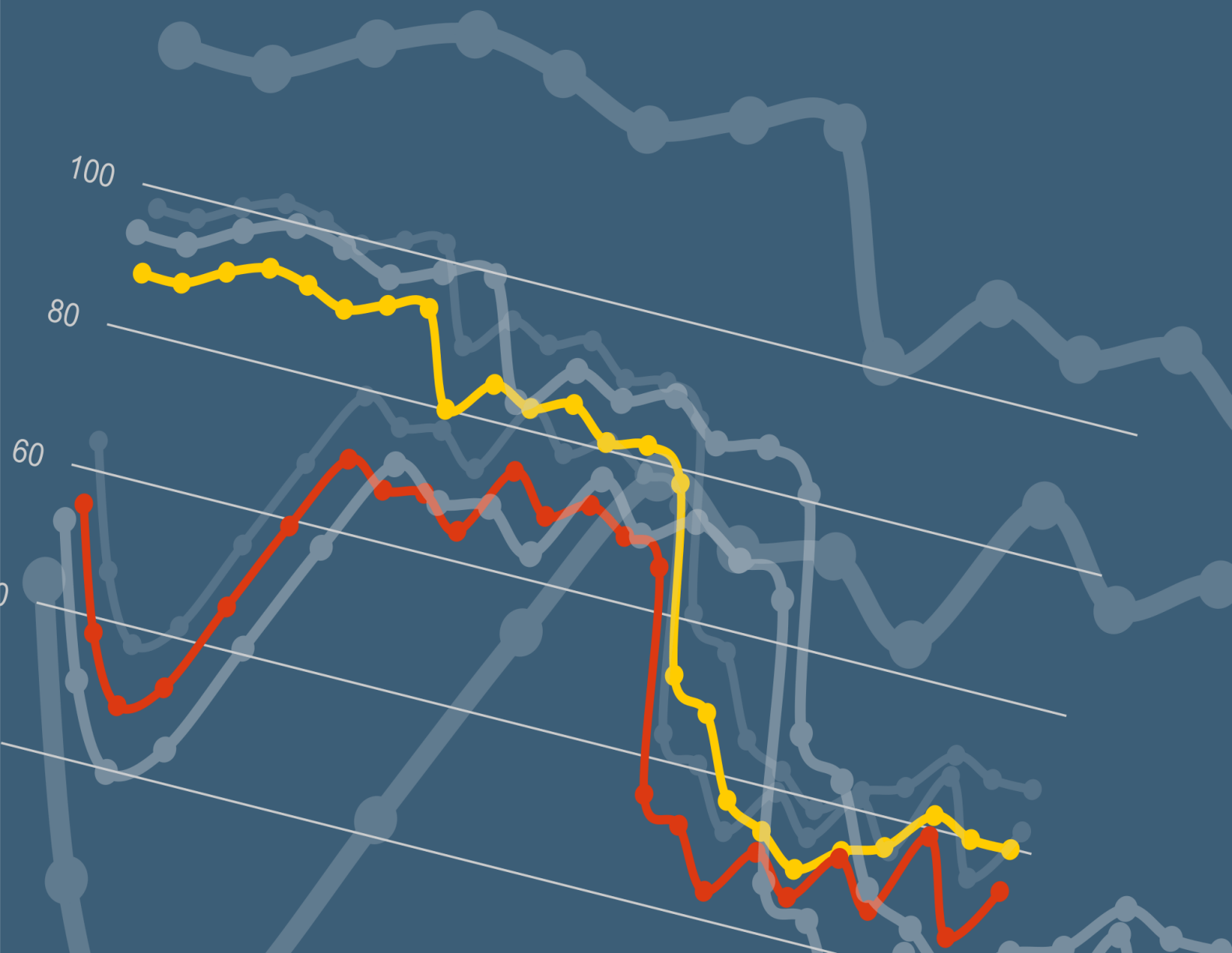


# Attitudes of Ukrainians towards Russia and Russians: dynamics and main trends

Ruslan Kermach



# ATTITUDES OF UKRAINIANS TOWARDS RUSSIA AND RUSSIANS: DYNAMICS AND MAIN TRENDS

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For Ukrainian version, see:

[Трансформації суспільних настроїв в умовах протидії агресії Росії на Донбасі: регіональний вимір](#)

English-language version of the book is expected in fall 2017

One of the important dimensions of bilateral relations is the dynamics of attitudes of citizens of these countries towards one another. Clearly, one can speak about truly “healthy” inter-state relations only when a mutually positive or, at the very least, a neutral attitude is preserved at the level of public opinion in the respective countries.

The attitudes of Ukrainians to their northeastern neighbor and the attitudes of Russians towards Ukraine and Ukrainians have for quite some time been in the center of attention of sociologists of both countries. In particular, within the framework of the joint project of the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and the non-government research organization “Levada-Center” (Russia) a monitoring of public opinion was regularly conducted in both countries (Ukraine and Russia, respectively), which studied the attitudes of the population of Ukraine towards Russia and the population of Russia towards Ukraine.<sup>1</sup>

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1 We express our thanks to the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and personally thank Volodymyr Paniotto, KIIS Director, Professor of Sociology at the National University of Kyiv Mohyla Academy, for assistance in receiving the necessary data of sociological monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine.

## Dynamics of public opinion in Ukraine in the pre-war period (2008—2013)

From the start of monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine and Russia to the time of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014 sociologists generally noted a relative stability of the dynamics of attitudes of Ukrainians towards Russia. This pre-war period of monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine regarding Russia can schematically be divided into two main stages – (1) *the stage of a stably high level of positive attitudes towards Russia* (2008–2010) and (2) *the stage of a certain decline in the positive attitudes towards Russia* (2011–2013).

### 1. The stage of stably high positive attitudes towards Russia (2008–2010)

As the monitoring data of KIIS shows, the indicators “good attitude” towards Russia<sup>2</sup> among Ukrainian citizens in the first stage (over the period April 2008 to October 2010) were at a very high level and were on average 90%. Nearly 6% of Ukrainian citizens on average had a “bad” attitude towards Russia in the period from 2008 to 2010.

Also noteworthy is that the number of Ukrainians undecided in their sympathies or antipathies towards Russia was very low – on average 3–4% of the citizens polled in Ukraine.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth noting that in this same period the dynamics of public opinion in Russia regarding Ukraine was not characterized by the same permanence and high level of positive attitudes. Instead, less than one year from the start of monitoring of public opinion in April 2008 and right up to May 2009 the percentage of Russians positively inclined towards Ukrainians sharply fell from 55% to 34%.<sup>4</sup> However, already in the second half of 2009 the dynamics similarly began sharply shifting to the opposite and the percentage of Russian citizens positively inclined towards Ukraine reached their peak indicator – (70%) – in October 2010.<sup>5</sup> The acute negative change in public opinion in Russia regarding Ukraine in 2008–2009 could have been dictated, in particular, by a number of significant international political events.

First and foremost, this was the NATO Summit in Bucharest (April 2-4, 2008) during which, among other things, the issue of the possibility of granting Ukraine the Membership Action Plan (MAP) was discussed. The highest ranking officials of the Russian Federation harshly criticized and even made direct threats against Ukraine and Georgia in the event that these countries are granted MAP.<sup>6</sup> In August 2008, the Russian-Georgian war broke out, during the course of which Ukraine came to support of official Tbilisi, which, of course, was negatively perceived in Moscow. Finally, the third significant event was the unfolding of the so-called “gas war” at the turn of 2008–2009, when the Russian side fully shut off the supply of gas to Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Then the Russian mass media (at the time

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2 The indicator “good attitude” is the total number (percentage) of the polled respondents in Ukraine, which have a “very good” and “mainly good” attitude towards Russia.

3 “Dynamics of the Attitudes of Ukraine’s and Russia’s Population Toward Each Other,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, March 2, 2012, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=92&page=35>

4 “Rossiyane ob Ukraine, ukraintsy o Rossii” [“Russians about Ukraine, Ukrainians about Russia”], *Levada-Center*, Feb. 25, 2010, <http://www.levada.ru/2010/02/25/rossiyane-ob-ukraine-ukraintsy-o-rossii/>

5 “Dynamika stavlennya naselennya Ukrayiny i Rosiyi odne do odnoho, zhovten' 2010” [“Dynamics of the Attitudes of Ukraine’s and Russia’s Population Toward Each Other”], *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Nov. 11, 2010, [www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=276&page=36](http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=ukr&cat=reports&id=276&page=36)

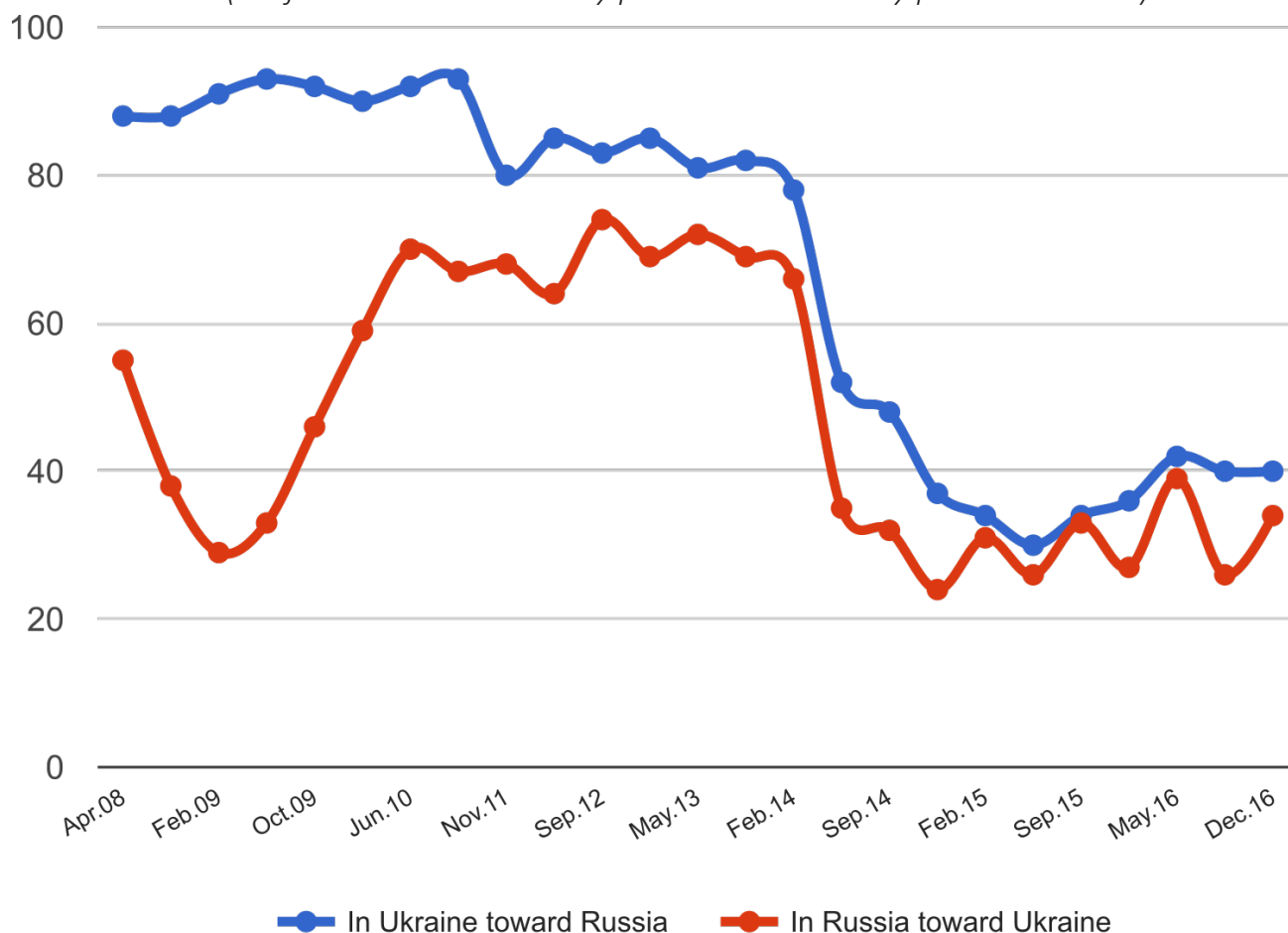
6 “Russia’s Army Vows Steps if Georgia and Ukraine Join NATO,” *Reuters*, Apr. 11, 2008, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-nato-steps-idUSL1143027920080411>. See also, Vladimir Socor, “Moscow Makes Furious but Empty Threats to Georgia and Ukraine,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 70 (2008), Apr. 14, [http://www.james-town.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=33544&no\\_cache=1#.V7MZVIuLSUK](http://www.james-town.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=33544&no_cache=1#.V7MZVIuLSUK)

7 “Russia Shuts Off Gas to Ukraine,” *BBC News*, Jan. 1, 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7806870.stm>

already controlled by the Kremlin<sup>8</sup>) conducted a targeted policy of discrediting Ukraine in the eyes of Russian citizens.

**Graph 1. Dynamics of the positive attitude of the population of Ukraine toward Russia and of the population of Russia toward Ukraine**

(% of those who have a very positive and a mostly positive attitude)



Source: “Changes in the Attitude of the Population of Ukraine toward Russia and in the Attitude of the Population of Russia toward Ukraine,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Feb. 10, 2017, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=680&page=2>

At the same time, the stable dynamics of a positive attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia in the first stage of monitoring (April 2008 – October 2010) were preserved despite the openly unfriendly steps of the Russian leadership.

2. Stage of a certain decline in the positive attitudes towards Russia (2011–2013).

The second stage begins schematically with the fixation by sociologists in November 2011 a 13% decline of Ukrainians positively inclined towards Russia from the maximum indicator of 93% to a slightly more modest 80% (*Graph 1*).

However, already during the next stages of monitoring in 2012 the indicator of “good attitude” towards Russia among Ukrainian citizens somewhat grew (to 85%) and further fluctuated approximately at this benchmark.<sup>9</sup>

This decline can be explained by both the corresponding dynamics of bilateral relations between

8 “Freedom of the Press 2009 – Russia,” *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2009/russia>; See also, “Freedom of the Press 2010 – Russia,” *Freedom House*, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2010/russia>  
 9 “Dynamics of Attitude of Ukraine’s and Russia’s Population Toward Each Other,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, March 2, 2012, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=92&page=35>

Ukraine and Russia over this period and the overall foreign policy orientations of the Ukrainian leadership. Upon the rise to power of Viktor Yanukovich the pro-Russian vector of the foreign policy of Ukraine was notably activated. In particular, this was manifested in the signing of the so-called “Kharkiv Accords” (2010) regarding prolongation of the term of stationing of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol and securing of the “non-bloc status” of Ukraine in the law “On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy”, which the Verkhovna Rada adopted on July 1, 2010.<sup>10</sup> However, such steps did not bring about the expected counter-concessions on the part of Moscow regarding Ukraine. On the contrary, starting from 2011 the Russian side began to resort to such unfriendly measures as launching “product” and “customs” wars against Ukrainian export products.<sup>11</sup>

While the monitoring of public opinion in 2013 to a certain degree demonstrates the declining trend of positive attitudes towards Russia in general, it does not show very sharp fluctuations in both the Ukraine-wide and regional dimensions. The number of Ukrainians citizens that have a positive attitude towards Russia continues to make up the majority in each of the major macro-regions (Western, Central, Southern and Eastern) and all across Ukraine, in general.

**Table 1. Attitude toward Russia in Ukraine (by macroregions),**  
% (May 2013 )

	Macroregions*			
	West	Central	Central	Central
Very good/almost good	<b>65.5</b>	<b>79.8</b>	<b>84.8</b>	<b>92.6</b>
Almost bad/very bad	20.5	9.2	7.5	4.4
Difficult to say	14.0	11.0	7.7	3.0
TOTAL	100	100	100	100

\* **Western macroregion:** Volynska, Rivnenska, Lvivska, Ivano-Frankivska, Ternopiiska, Zakarpatska, Khmelnytska, Chernivetska oblasts; **Central macroregion:** Vinnytska, Zhytomyrska, Sumska, Chernihivska, Poltavska, Kirovohradska, Cherkaska, Kyivska oblasts, Kyiv; **Southern macroregion:** Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizhska, Mykolaivska, Khersonska, Odeska oblasts; **Eastern macroregion:** Donetsk, Luhanska, Kharkivska oblasts.

Source: “Dynamics of Ukraine’s Attitude Toward Russia and Russian Population’s Attitude Toward Ukraine,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, June 27, 2013, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=177&page=25>

The last “pre-war” monitoring of public of opinion in Ukraine regarding the attitude towards Russia conducted on February 8-18, 2014 by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (KIIS) and the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) showed a continuation of the declining trend in the positive attitude towards Russia. Compared with May 2013, when decline was already fixed at 82%, in February 2014 this indicator had already fallen to 78%.<sup>12</sup>

Such a change in public opinion in Ukraine regarding the attitudes towards Russia was dictated by the dissatisfaction with the direct intervention of the Kremlin in the political processes in Ukraine.

<sup>10</sup> Law of Ukraine No. 2411-VI «Pro zasady vnutrishn'oyi i zovnishn'oyi polityky» [“On the Principles of Domestic and Foreign Policy”], *Official web portal of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine*, <http://zakon0.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/2411-17>

<sup>11</sup> “Snova syr. Rossiya vvodit novyye torgovyye ogranicheniya” [“Cheese Again. Russia Is Introducing New Trade Restrictions”], *Liga.net*, Oct. 9, 2012, <http://biz.liga.net/all/prodovolstvie/stati/2326677-opyat-syr-rossiya-vvodit-novye-torgovye-ogranicheniya.htm>

<sup>12</sup> “Ukrayintsi ne khochut' viz i kordoniv z Rosiyeyu, ale y ob'yednuvatsya z Rosiyeyu ne khochut',” [“Ukrainians Do Not Want Visas and Borders with Russia, But At The Same Time Don't Want to Unite with Russia”], *Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation*, Feb. 2014, <http://dif.org.ua/article/ukrainsi-ne-khochut-viz-i-kordoniv-z-rosiyeyu-ale-y-obednuvatsya-z-rosiyeyu-ne-khochut-zagalnonatsionalne-opituvannya>

Then Prime-Minister of Ukraine Mykola Azarov basically admitted the Russian factor as the first and main reason for the decision to postpone the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU:

“It is absolutely obvious that the issues of renewing normal relations with the Russian Federation and regulation of disputed issues were of top priority for the government.”<sup>13</sup>

In the midst of anti-government protests, Moscow showed open support of the regime of Viktor Yanukovich. One of the telling confirmations of this was the sudden decision to grant Kyiv a US \$15 bn loan and a discount on the price of gas imported from Russia (to US \$268.50 per 1,000 cu.m.).<sup>14</sup> On the backdrop of the rising dissatisfaction of Ukrainian citizens with Yanukovich, the overt game of the Russian side in the support of the latter just as the permanent pressure regarding the suspension of Euro-integration aspirations of official Kyiv were perceived by a significant part of Ukrainians as a manifestation of direct intervention in the internal affairs of the country, which had a far-reaching impact on public opinion in Ukraine.

### **Acute transformation of public opinion in Ukraine as a result of Russian military aggression (2014—2016)**

As it was illustrated above, over nearly the entire “pre-war” period the monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine (September 2008 – November 2013) practically no tangible sharp fluctuations in the overall dynamics of a positive attitude towards Russia were noted (with the exception of a certain decline in the respective indicator in the period from the end of 2010 to the end of 2011).

Monitoring conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in April-May 2014 showed genuinely stunning changes in public opinion in Ukraine. In this period, the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol had already been illegally annexed by Russia, while in the Donbas region in April 2014 the Kremlin attempted to realize the scenario of the so-called “Russian Spring”. As a result, compared to polling conducted in February 2014, the indicator of the positive moods of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia immediately fell by 26%: from 78% to 52%.

At the same time, the share of Ukrainians with a more negative attitude towards Russia grew nearly threefold according to data of KIIS: from 13% to 38%. The steepest erosion of a good attitude towards Russia was observed in the Western and Central regions of Ukraine – a decline of 40% and 33%, respectively, while in the South and East of Ukraine there was a decline of 21% and 15% respectively.<sup>15</sup>

However, as data of KIIS shows, the share of Ukrainians with positive moods towards Russia even with the start of Russian aggression continued to be minimal majority (52%). This happened to a great degree thanks to the regions of the South and the East, where the majority of citizens continued to express a positive attitude towards Russia (65% and 77%, respectively), even given the annexation of Crimea and the start of siege of administrative buildings in a number of cities in the Donbas by pro-

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13 “Azarov nazval prichiny priostanovki protsessu assotsiatsii Ukrainy s ES” [“Azarov Named the Reasons for the Suspension of the Process of Ukraine’s EU Association”], *Forbes*, Nov. 22, 2013, [http://www.forbes.ru/news/247760-azarov-nazval-prichiny-priostanovki-protsessu-assotsiatsii-ukrainy-s-es?mobile=1&from\\_alt\\_domain=1](http://www.forbes.ru/news/247760-azarov-nazval-prichiny-priostanovki-protsessu-assotsiatsii-ukrainy-s-es?mobile=1&from_alt_domain=1)

14 “Putin Pledges Billions, Cheaper Gas to Yanukovich,” *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* (RFE/RL), Dec. 17, 2013, <http://www.rferl.org/content/ukraine-protests-yanukovich-moscow/25203138.html>

15 “Changes in the Attitude of Ukrainians Towards Russia and the Attitude of Russians Towards Ukraine,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, June 17, 2014, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=347&page=17>

Russian separatists.<sup>16</sup>

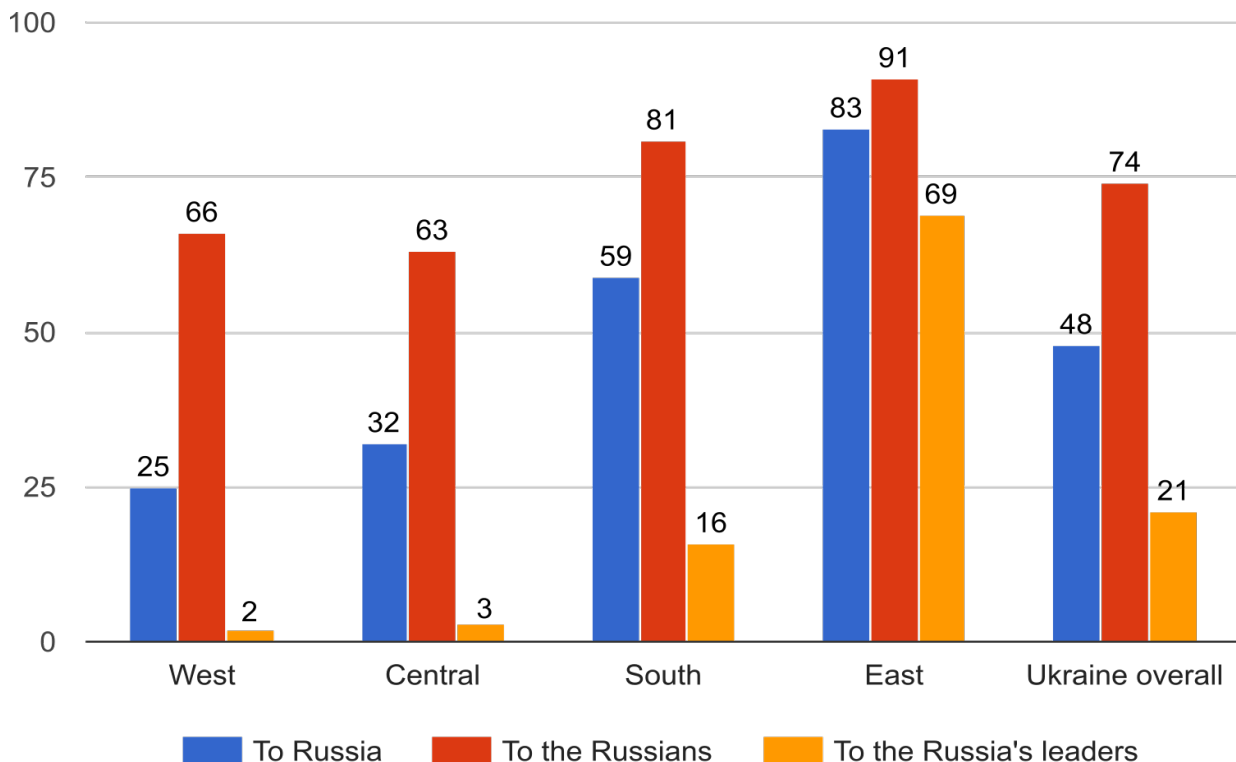
In September 2014, sociologists registered a further decline in the positive attitude of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia. For the first time over the entire period of monitoring it was less than half of the entire population (48%), while the share of Ukrainians that have a negative attitude towards Russia increased to 41%.<sup>17</sup>

During the May and September 2014 polls together with the question regarding the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia, their attitudes towards residents of the country (Russians) and the leadership of Russia were studied. The September 2014 poll revealed that Russian aggression against Ukraine affected, first and foremost, the attitudes towards the leadership of the aggressor state (69% of Ukrainians were generally negative), while the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens towards Russians remained at a sufficiently high level (74% expressed a good attitude on the whole).<sup>18</sup>

In all macroregions of Ukraine without exception (from 63% in the Center to 91% in the East) the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian citizens had a positive attitude towards Russians (Chart 1). At the same time, a positive attitude towards the leadership of Russia was expressed only in the Eastern macroregion (69%), while in all others and in Ukraine in general, this was a minority of citizens.<sup>19</sup>

**Chart 1. Regional differentiation in the attitude of the population of Ukraine to Russia, the Russians and the Russian government – the percentage of those who have a generally good attitude**

*(the sum of percent of the answers 'good' and 'very good')*



Source: "Changes in the Attitude of Ukrainians towards Russia and the Attitude of Russians towards Ukraine," *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Oct. 6, 2014.

16 Ibid.; See also "Vtorzheniye v Ukrainu: khronika za 5–15 aprelya" ["The Invasion of Ukraine: the Chronicle of April 5-15"], Liga.net, [http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/1280196-vtorzhenie\\_v\\_ukrainu\\_-\\_poslednie\\_sobytiya\\_v\\_krymu\\_i\\_na\\_yugo\\_vostoke.htm](http://news.liga.net/articles/politics/1280196-vtorzhenie_v_ukrainu_-_poslednie_sobytiya_v_krymu_i_na_yugo_vostoke.htm).

17 "Changes in the Attitude of Ukrainians Towards Russia and in the Attitude of Russians Towards Ukraine," *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Oct. 6, 2014, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=404>

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.



Finally, in the December 2014 KIIS poll a decline in the share of Ukrainian citizens positively oriented towards Russia was fixed (from 48% to nearly 37%) as well as a parallel growth in the share of Ukrainians negatively oriented towards Russia (from 41% to 48%).<sup>20</sup> Therefore, for the first time over the entire period of monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine (since April 2008) the share of Ukrainians negatively oriented towards Russia exceeded the share of those with a positive attitude to their neighboring country.

The dynamic decline in the positive attitudes towards Russia in Ukrainian society in 2014 was clearly a logical consequence of Russian aggression against Ukraine. Moreover, in the first stages of monitoring after the start of Russian aggression in March-April 2014 the percentage of Ukrainian citizens who were positively inclined towards Russia had drastically fallen (78% to 52%), although it continued to constitute the majority (*see Graph 1*). Seemingly, such a paradoxical situation could have, among other things, been explained by the covert role of Russia in the hybrid intervention.

However, already in the second half of 2014 during the full-scale intervention of regular Russian military forces into the territory of Ukraine (August 23-24, 2014),<sup>21</sup> the fact of Russian aggression in Ukraine became glaringly obvious and convincing for the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian citizens.

In the first half of 2015 the overall declining dynamics of positive attitudes towards Russia were preserved. Already in May 2015, the percentage of Ukrainian citizens with a positive attitude towards Russia reached its absolute minimum (26%), while the percentage of those with a negative attitude began forming the majority – 56%. Only in September 2015 the trend set at the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine slightly changed. Monitoring of public opinion in the second half of 2015 (September) fixed a certain improvement in the attitudes towards Russia among Ukrainians – to 34%.<sup>22</sup>

The next monitoring of public opinion conducted by KIIS also fixed an initial growth in the share of those with a positive attitude towards Russia up to 36% (in February 2016), and later to 42% (in May 2016).<sup>23</sup>

In the regional dimension the greatest dynamics of the increase in positive attitudes towards Russia in May 2016 was observed in the Western (from 21% to 28%), Central (from 29% to 39%) and Southern (from 44% to 55%) regions of Ukraine.

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20 “How the Attitudes of Ukrainians to Russia and Russians to Ukraine Have Changed,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Feb. 6, 2015, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=502&page=11>

21 “Operativna informatsiya Informatsiyno-analitychnoho tsentru RNBOU za 21 lystopada + Karta” [“Operational Information of the Information and Analytical Centre of the NSDCU from November 21 + Map”], *National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine*, Nov. 21, 2014, <http://www.rnbo.gov.ua/news/1878.html>

22 “The Dynamics of the Positive Attitude of the Population of Ukraine to Russia and the Russian Population to Ukraine (‘The End of the Unrequited Love of Ukrainians to Russia’),” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, Oct. 5, 2015, [www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=550&page=8](http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=550&page=8)

23 “Dynamics of Changes in the Attitude of the Population of Ukraine Toward Russia, and in the Attitude of the Population of Russia Toward Ukraine: April 2008 – May 2016,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, June 22, 2016, [www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=632&page=1](http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=632&page=1)

**Table 2. The Attitude toward Russia in Ukraine: Distribution by macroregions of Ukraine, %**  
(May 2016)<sup>24</sup>

	Macro-regions				
	Ukraine overall	Western	Central	Southern	Eastern
Very positive/Mostly positive	<b>42.1</b>	<b>27.8</b>	<b>38.8</b>	<b>54.5</b>	<b>50.5</b>
Mostly negative/ very negative	43.0	61.4	46.5	31.9	28.2
Difficult to say	15.0	10.7	14.7	13.7	21.3
Total	100	100	100	100	100

\* **Western macroregion** – Volynska, Zakarpatska, Ivano-Frankivska, Lvivska, Rivnenska, Ternopil'ska, Khmelnytska, Chernivets'ka oblasts (oblast' = region); **Central macroregion** – Kyiv city, Kyivs'ka, Vinnytska, Zhytomyrska, Kirovohradska, Poltav'ska, Sumska, Cherkaska, Chernihiv'ska oblasts; **Southern macroregion** – Dnipropetrovska, Zaporizka, Mykolaiv'ska, Odeska, Kherson'ska oblasts; **Eastern macroregion** – Kharkiv'ska, Donetsk'ska, Luhansk'ska oblasts (only territories controlled by Ukraine).

However, the results of both polls conducted by KIIS in September and December 2016 once again fixed a decrease in this indicator and its stabilization at the level of 40%.<sup>25</sup> But the appearance of this trend after the dynamic decline over 2014–2015 requires additional explanation and research. As Volodymyr Paniotto, Director of KIIS, notes, the new trend in public opinion appeared only after the end of the active phase of confrontation (in the Donbas – Auth.), and it can be associated with a certain “routinization of the conflict in the East of Ukraine” and, in particular, with the “minimization of information in the Ukrainian mass media about the presence of Russian military forces in the Donbas”<sup>26</sup>. One way or another, the improvement in the attitudes towards Russia, as the data of sociological monitoring indicates, is associated with the change in attitudes towards the citizens of Russia, but in no way towards its leadership.

## Public opinion in Ukraine in the context of the annexation of Crimea

Transformation in the attitudes of Ukrainian citizens towards Russia and Russian citizens logically began immediately after the military aggression of Russia on the territory of Crimea.

In this context it would be expedient to also pay attention to how Ukrainian citizens see the future of Crimea. For this purpose, in May 2016 the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation (DIF) jointly with the Razumkov Center's sociological service conducted a nationwide polling in all regions of Ukraine, with the exception of Crimea and the occupied parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts.

The results of the polling demonstrate a firm conviction of the absolute majority of Ukrainian citizens (69%) in the fact that Crimea should be a part of Ukraine. Moreover, the absolute majority of respondents in all the major macro-regions of the country with the exception of the South of Ukraine (where the residents account for the relative majority-49%), share this opinion. In the South, as well as in the Donbas, 16% of the polled believe that Crimea should be a part of Russia.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> “Changes in the Attitude of the Population of Ukraine Toward Russia, and in the Attitude of the Population of Russia Toward Ukraine” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, February*. 10, 2017, <http://kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=680&page=2>.

<sup>26</sup> Dmytro Shurkhalo, “Ukrayintsi staly krashche stavtytsya do rosiyan, ale ne do Kremlya – Paniotto,” [“Ukrainians Began to Treat Russians Better But Not the Kremlin – Paniotto”], *Radio Svoboda*, June 24, 2016, <http://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/27817038.html>; See also, “Dynamics of Changes in the Attitude of the Population of Ukraine Toward Russia and in the Attitude of the Population of Russia Toward Ukraine: April 2008 – May 2016,” *Kyiv International Institute of Sociology*, June 22, 2016, <http://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=632&page=1>

**Table 3. Do you think that Crimea should be a part of Russia, Ukraine, or do you think it would be better for Crimea to be an independent quasi-state (such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia or Transnistria)?,%<sup>27</sup>**

	Ukraine in general	West	Center	South	East	Donbas
Should be a part of Russia	7.2	0.9	3.8	16.4	8.1	15.6
Should be a part of Ukraine	68.6	84.4	79.2	49.4	56.5	51.8
Should be an independent quasi-state	12.4	8.6	8.2	13.8	19.4	17.5
Difficult to say	11.8	6.1	8.8	20.3	16.0	15.1

At the same time, rather optimistic expectations regarding the prospects of this territory being returned to Ukraine prevail (54%), though the majority of these optimists (34%) are inclined to the opinion about a long-term period of realization of such a scenario.<sup>28</sup>

This vision sharply contrasts with the vision of Russian citizens. After the annexation of Crimea one can speak about the formation in Russian public opinion of a so-called “post-Crimea consensus”: a nearly unanimous support of the idea that the territory of the occupied peninsula belongs to Russia (87%). Moreover, 79% of Russians are inclined to feel that Russia by way of “annexing” Crimea is returning to its traditional role as a great state and affirms its interests in the post-Soviet space<sup>29</sup>. On the contrary, in Ukraine the relative majority (45%) of respondents are inclined to see in the act of the annexation of Crimea the “growth of adventurism of the Russian authorities, which in this way is trying to distract the Russian population from real social and economic problems, rampant corruption and dissatisfaction of the people in the ruling power in Russia”.<sup>30</sup>

These diametrically opposed moods testify that the annexation of Crimea by Russia will probably remain a bone of contention in the context of public opinion of Ukraine and Russia for a long time.

27 “Dumka naselennya Ukrayiny shchodo maybutn'oho Krymu” [“Opinion of the Ukrainian population on the Future of Crimea”], *Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation*, May 2016, <http://dif.org.ua/article/maybutne-krimu-chi-mozhliva-reintegratsiya-yak-i-koli-zagalnonatsionalne-i-ekspertne-opituvannya>

28 Ibid.

29 “Crimea: Two Years Later,” *Levada -Center*, Apr. 7, 2016, <http://www.levada.ru/en/2016/06/10/crimea-two-years-later/>

30 “Dumka naselennya Ukrayiny shchodo maybutn'oho Krymu.”

## Conclusions

The overviewed data of regular monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine during the “pre-war” period (2008-2013) confirm a fairly high level of positive attitudes towards Russia. And this is notwithstanding the existence in this period of different conflicting situations, “product” and “gas” wars and the openly unfriendly steps taken by the Russian authorities. In the period from 2008 to 2013 the indicator “good attitude” towards Russia in Ukraine slightly fell only once on the cusp of 2010 and 2011.

Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, initially hybrid and later open, became the determining factor in the collapse of the percentage of Ukrainian citizens who were positively inclined towards Russia. Herewith, the decline was observed among residents of all regions of Ukraine without exception.

At the same time, this decline was associated with the sharp exacerbation of attitudes first and foremost towards the Russian leadership, while the overwhelming majority of Ukrainian citizens continued to show rather positive than negative attitudes towards Russians, even after the start of Russian aggression.

Since September 2015, the attitude towards Russia saw a certain improvement, while in the second half of 2016 it somewhat fell and stabilized at the level of 40%. It is clear that the factor of military aggression of Russia cannot be quickly negated due to the logical transformations in Ukrainian socio-political discourse of the very paradigm of perception of the neighboring country.

The results of monitoring of public opinion in Ukraine and Russia regarding the future Crimea also point to the profound and, as it seems today, unsurpassed contradictions in the interpretation by citizens of both countries of one of the determinant issues for the future of Russian-Ukrainian bilateral relations.