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## INTRODUCTION

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Russia and Ukraine are not only neighbours. They are connected by centuries-old common historical past. Both peoples emerged from the same ethnic basis; most of them share a common confession and similar traditions. Most contemporary Ukrainian territories have been parts of Russian Empire. In the 16–17<sup>th</sup> centuries its borders were gradually moved to the South, toward the Black Sea, as far as the Russian state could ensure the security of these lands from the incursions of Crimean Tatars supported by Turks, so the area of Ukrainians' settlement was expanding too. These new lands were also settled by Russians which created the unique culture. The ethnic structure of population became even more mixed in the period of industrialisation, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in cities. In the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second Union Republic by the demographic and economic potential (after the RSFSR). In this period when their territory and other basic geographical have been definitively shaped. In February 1954 Crimea, formerly a part of the RSFSR, was passed to Ukraine by the decision of the Soviet leadership.

Since late 1991, Ukraine is a sovereign state. Both Russia and Ukraine survived a similar transition crisis which involved a deep restructuring of their economy and radical social transformations. Particularly

difficult was the situation of Ukraine because unlike Russia it has no important oil and gas deposits and the main branches of its industry were often incorporated into production chains embracing neighbouring new independent states, particularly Russia, which were broken in the conditions of market economy. Their separation of Russia and Ukraine provoked a number of crises in bilateral relations) and the conflicts of economic and political interests. However, the countries kept human and economic contacts.

In 2014 the annexation of Crimea after the coup in Kyiv and the large-scale military conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the formation of Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics have radically changed the nature of Russian-Ukrainian relations, provoked a significant decline in bilateral trade, transformed the boundaries between the countries into important economic and socio-cultural barriers, and deeply affected people's identity. The situation in Ukraine provoked an unprecedented crisis in the relations between the West (primarily the US and the European Union) and the Russian Federation. It became a major factor of Russia's "turn" to the East and had a big influence on the Eurasian Economic Union which has been recently created under the auspices of Russia. Still,

sociological surveys show that Russian citizens keep a good attitude towards Ukrainians.

We suggest to our readers a special issue of "Journal of Geography, Politics and Society" which includes a collection of articles by Russian scholars from different cities (geographers, economists, sociologists) devoted to the conceptualization of the post-Soviet trends in Russian-Ukrainian relations and current important issues. As Guest Editors, we would like to thank the contributors and to express our gratitude to the distinguished Polish colleague, Dr. Tomasz Michalski, Editor-in-Chief of the journal for the initiative to prepare such issue.

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