

*Elena Lesieur*

*University of Oxford, Russian and East European studies*

### Nationalist Diffusion under Perestroika: the Influence of the Baltic Popular Fronts on Ukrainian Nationalism

After Mikhail Gorbachev came to power and introduced his policies of glasnost and perestroika, independent movements started rising across the USSR. The latter reforms led to the formation of nationally oriented popular fronts in the Baltic republics, later followed by the rise of equivalent organisations in Ukraine. Movements in Ukraine were strongly inspired by developments in the Baltics, and adopted a substantial number of strategies from their Baltic counterparts, learning lessons 'along the way'.

This research project will seek to determine how various informal organisations in Ukraine, including Rukh, learnt from the popular fronts in the Baltics. Answers to the following questions will be sought: What did independent Ukrainian organisations learn from the Baltic popular fronts? Which particular strategies did the organisations adopt? How did they adjust them to fit circumstances particular to Ukraine? How did the latter learning process occur? How was the communication between the Balts and the Ukrainians conducted?

This work has a strong focus on Rukh but also looks at informal groups in Ukraine in the period of 1985-1989. Rukh held its founding congress in September 1989, which is relatively late in comparison to Baltic popular fronts. However, prior to the latter event, numerous non-state organisations in Ukraine had had the chance to emulate the plan of action undertaken in the Baltics. Focusing solely on Rukh would prevent from looking into single-issue movements focused on environmental, religious and cultural issues that were established prior to Rukh

Ukrainian nationalists put strong emphasis on environmental and human rights issues; issues that could also be considered as 'national' in nature. Similarly to the Baltics, they turned to 'blank spots' of their country's history. The Ukrainian popular front Rukh outlined the fact that it was working alongside the Communist Party and, having learnt the lesson from the Balts, it disassociated itself from extremist organisations within the republic. Nationalists in Ukraine avoided the 'mistake' that the Balts made by declaring themselves a nationally oriented organisation and alienating ethnic minorities. Moreover, Ukrainians were inspired by some mobilisational strategies adopted in the Baltics.